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Re-Examining China's Charm Offensive Toward Asia: How Much Reshaping of Regional Order?

Michael A. Glosny*

Drawing mostly on Chinese-language sources, this article examines Chinese assessments of the effectiveness of China's earlier "charm offensive" in increasing China's regional influence and reshaping the regional order according to its preferences. The main argument is that China achieved mixed success. China was successful in preventing others from adopting hostile anti-China balancing postures, and especially before 2005, successful in attaining support and momentum for its preferred vision of East Asian regional cooperation and regional trade liberalization. China was less successful, however, in shaping the regional security order, although experts recognized the incremental improvements in what would be a gradual process in minimizing the dominance of U.S. alliances. Around 2005, however, Chinese experts noted increased resistance to China's preferred vision for regionalism and regional economic cooperation. The article concludes by examining analytical themes that enabled China to successfully exert regional influence or represented challenges to its efforts to reshape the region.

本文绝大部分取材于中文资源,研究了中国对其早期"魅力攻势"的有效性的评价。此前,中国采取魅力攻势以期提高区域影响力,并依照其意愿重塑区域秩序。本文的主要论点则是,中国所做的努力成败参半。成功在于,中国预防别国对其采用恶意反华制衡措施,尤其在2005年之前,中国在其东亚区域合作及区域贸易自由化的展望上获得了支持和动力。失败在于,中国未能成功重塑区域安全秩序,尽管专家认可其在尽可能减少美国联盟主导性上做出的逐步努力。中国专家在2005年左右发现,中国期望的区域化和区域经济合作受到越来越多的阻力。本文的结论重新审视了帮助中国成功发挥区域影响力的分析计划,并呈现了在努力重塑该区域上所面临的挑战。

Key words: China's rise, charm offensive, East Asian regional cooperation, power and influence, regional order

关键词 中国的崛起,魅力攻势,区域秩序,东亚区域合作,权利与影响

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Introduction

fter the Cold War, China tried to improve its relations with its neighbors, A but its growing power and signs of aggressive behavior led to concerns in the region in the mid-1990s that a rising China would threaten regional peace and stability. Chinese leaders learned from the Cold War experience that hostile neighbors and a complicated regional environment would make it difficult to focus its efforts and resources on the huge tasks of sustaining economic growth and maintaining domestic stability. In the mid-to-late 1990s, China implemented a grand strategy of reassurance, or what others have called a "charm offensive." In an effort to address concerns about the "China threat," China's reassurance included cooperating with major powers and regional powers to demonstrate China's benign intentions and to show that as China gets more powerful it will not threaten the interests of these countries, but will use its increased power to help protect those interests (Goldstein, 2005; Kurlantzick, 2007; State Council Information Office, 2005). Experts agree that China's "charm offensive" was on full display toward China's neighbors and in China's "surrounding area" or "periphery" (zhoubian), where China's proactive engagement, restraint, and cooperation dramatically improved relations with its neighbors (Shambaugh, 2004/2005; Zhao, 1999). China's active participation in regional institutions, restraint in the South China Sea, and economic and political initiatives especially improved China's relations with the countries in Southeast Asia (Ba, 2003; Glosny, 2006).

After the financial crisis broke out in 2008, many international experts detected a shift in China's strategic approach to its neighbors away from reassurance and toward assertiveness and coercion. China's assertiveness, especially in maritime disputes with many of its neighbors, heightened tensions with its neighbors and sacrificed most of the gains in improved relations during the period of China's "charm offensive" (Fravel, 2015; Glosserman, 2014). Chinese officials and scholars have downplayed this notion of a dramatic shift in China's strategic approach. According to this view, China has continued to uphold its "peaceful development" road, but in addition to continuing important efforts to "maintain stability" (weiwen), China has also taken more active responses when challenged by its neighbors as part of its simultaneous efforts to "protect rights and interests" (weiquan), especially in its relations with its neighbors (State Council Information Office, 2011, 2015; Zhang, 2015). Although there has been greater increased focus on the degree and direction of recent changes in Chinese grand strategy, this article will focus on using Chineselanguage sources to examine the degree to which China increased its regional influence and reshaped the regional order during this earlier "charm offensive" period.

During the second term of the Bush administration and before the onset of the financial crisis, the dominant view among Asia analysts was that China's "charm offensive" was a great success in increasing its influence in the region. According to one senior Singaporean diplomat in a 2004 interview, "The United States may still dominate the [regional] balance of power, but not the balance of influence" (cited in Shambaugh, 2004/2005, p. 66; for a similar quote from a diplomat, Kang, 2007, p. 127). Several other experts heard similar sentiments

from diplomats and experts in Asia and many analysts agreed with Ellen Frost's (2008, p. 245) claim that "China has clearly gained in the regional balance of influence" (Frost, Przystup, & Saunders, 2008; Keller & Rawski, 2007; Kurlantzick, 2007). Major newspapers were also full of stories detailing Chinese successful economic and political initiatives in the region, often juxtaposing them with American and Japanese ineffectiveness and passivity (Marquand, 2003; Perlez, 2004).

The success of rising China's "charm offensive" in Asia led Kang (2007, p. 55) to conclude that "China is reshaping foreign relations in the region" and Shambaugh (2004/2005, p. 64) to suggest that this engagement is "reshaping the regional order." Given China's massive scale and dramatic growth, China's rise and its foreign policy is unquestionably reshaping the region. However, this article draws on the distinction in the social science literature between power as capabilities and power as influence to re-examine China's rising influence in the region and reshaping of the international order (Baldwin, 2002; Dahl, 1957). According to this distinction, power as influence (hereafter influence) only exists if other actors alter their preferences or behavior or if the regional order evolves in the direction that China prefers. Or more succinctly, China only has influence if it gets its way and others defer to it. This article will examine how effective China was at reshaping the regional order in ways consistent with its preferences, as well as the issue areas in which China had more or less influence in shaping behavior, relations, agendas, and regional order. This approach is consistent with and draws on other research that effectively uses this analytical approach to assess how China's rise is affecting the world (Foot & Inboden, 2014; Goh 2014, 2016).

Drawing mostly on Chinese-language sources, this article examines Chinese assessments of the effectiveness of the "charm offensive" in increasing China's regional influence and reshaping the regional order according to its preferences. Many other scholars have addressed this issue from a Western or regional viewpoint, but the main contribution of this article is to thoroughly examine the perceptions and assessments in Chinese language sources that have not yet been examined in great detail in the English language body of scholarship. The main argument is that China's earlier efforts to reshape the regional order and exert influence in East Asia achieved mixed success. China was particularly successful in preventing others from adopting hostile anti-China balancing postures, and especially before 2005, successful in attaining support and momentum for its preferred vision of East Asian regional cooperation and regional trade liberalization. China was less successful, however, in shaping the regional security order, although experts recognized the incremental improvements in what would be a gradual process in minimizing the dominance of U.S. regional alliances. Around 2005, Chinese experts noted increased resistance to China's preferred vision for regionalism and regional economic cooperation. To support this assessment, this article reviews many Chinese-language articles and books from government think-tank experts and scholars, supplemented with interviews with Chinese experts, official Chinese policy statements, and Englishlanguage articles from Chinese experts.¹

This article proceeds as follows. The first section examines the areas of China's success in shaping regional order and increasing China's influence in the

region. It addresses the areas of economics, security, East Asian regionalism, and managing overall relations. The next section analyzes the limits of China's influence and the emerging resistance to China's efforts to reshape regional order. It covers East Asian regionalism, economics, and security. Last, I conclude by highlighting some analytical themes that point to current and future challenges for China in increasing its regional influence.

Areas of Success in Developing and Exerting Regional Influence

Most Chinese experts agree that China's improved regional strategy has increased China's overall influence in the region. After summarizing how China's approach has led to closer cooperation with its neighbors, Zhang (2013a, p. 75), former director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies suggested: "in the middle of this transition, China has much greater initiative and influence in its peripheral relations and environment." Most other government think tank experts and scholars in China's relations with its neighbors share this assessment. Several Chinese experts also repeat a claim, attributed to a senior Singaporean diplomat, that the balance of power in Asia had not changed, but the balance of influence in Asia was shifting in China's favor (Chen & Guan, 2014; Pang, 2004). The rest of this section will examine China's increasing influence in the areas of economics, security, East Asian regionalism, and managing overall relations with neighbors.

Economics

Chinese experts argue that the dramatic increase in trade and investment flows with its neighbors have led to a fundamental change in their relations and have become an important source of international influence. Chinese scholars routinely cite data that China has become the most important trade partner and export market for most of its neighbors, including most U.S. allies. They argue that China has become the main source of economic growth for the region and countries increasingly rely on China economically, even as they continue to rely on the United States for security (Liu, 2011; Sun & Huang, 2011; Zhou, 2012). Although Chinese experts are rarely clear and concrete about how and through what exact mechanisms, most suggest that this growing economic dependence on China increases its international influence and influence over its regional neighbors. Two scholars from Tsinghua University note generally that as a result of closer economic links, "China's influence in its peripheral region markedly increased" (Chen & Guan, p. 5). Some Chinese interlocutors refer to the possibility of manipulating this interdependence, if needed, to threaten or coerce neighbors, whereas others make the broader argument that such dependence on China will convince its neighbors to adopt policies more in line with China's preferences (Interviews, Shanghai, Summer, 2006; Interviews, Beijing, Spring, 2009, Summer, 2014.) Interlocutors also note that these changed bilateral economic interactions are also reshaping the regional economic order in East Asia, making China the center of regional production and trade networks (Interviews, Beijing Spring-Summer, 2006, Spring, 2009).

China improved its image in the late 1990s, especially with its decision not to further devalue its currency during the Asian financial crisis, but its effective influence in shaping regional economic cooperation did not really emerge until

early in the new century. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries were very concerned that after China's accession to the World Trade Organization it would become a greater economic challenge and divert investment and trade away from Southeast Asia. In 1999, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji tried to assuage these concerns at regional summits and in 2000, Zhu formally proposed a China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). There was a strong political component to this initiative as well, as China made concessions to reassure neighbors such as excluding many sensitive sectors, allowing developing countries to liberalize at a later date, and reaching "early harvest" agreements that included trade liberalization favorable to the ASEAN countries. In addition to the political benefits of CAFTA, it would strengthen economic linkages between China and Southeast Asia and demonstrate the benefits to the region of a rising China.

Chinese experts observe that promoting CAFTA had an even greater influence in reshaping trade cooperation and the regional order in East Asia according to China's preferences. In his assessment of regional cooperation, then-Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who was in charge of Asian affairs, suggested: "China taking the lead in establishing an FTA with ASEAN drove other countries to adopt a more positive attitude towards free trade arrangements" (Wang Y., 2004, p. 20). Zhang Yunling, who was a member of the experts group that conducted the CAFTA feasibility study, noted that after China proposed the FTA with ASEAN, FTAs became a "hot topic" in the region, and CAFTA encouraged Japan, South Korea, and others to develop their own ASEAN + 1 FTAs (Zhang, 2011, p. 7). China became a "catalyst" (cuihuaji) and the construction of CAFTA "triggered an upsurge in regional FTAs" as Japan and South Korea both "tried hard to catch up" (yingtouganshang) in exploring FTAs and deepening economic cooperation with the ASEAN countries (Yang, Xi, & Shang, 2002, p. 20). Zhang Yunling also argued that China's active economic efforts "forcefully promoted East Asian cooperation. Under the encouragement of China constructing an FTA, Japan and South Korea both actively promoted establishing an FTA with ASEAN" (Zhang, 2013b, p. 88).

After China's efforts stimulated and inspired others to form FTAs with ASEAN, further lowering regional trade barriers, Chinese leaders also led the effort to reshape the regional economic order by integrating these FTAs into a regional arrangement. Establishment of an East Asian Free Trade Area (EAFTA) was an objective listed in the 2001 East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) report, but Chinese leaders took the lead in proposing and promoting it. After some discussions in earlier years, in 2004 Premier Wen Jiabao formally proposed that these ASEAN + 1 FTAs should be integrated into an EAFTA. China's preferred vision was that this EAFTA should initially only include the ASEAN plus Three (APT) countries as the foundation, and then could eventually expand to include others. Although Japan showed some discomfort with the China-led initiative, the APT members agreed to establish a Joint Experts Group to conduct feasibility studies, which was to be chaired by CASS' Zhang Yunling. Initial regional support for exploring this EAFTA showed that China had not only improved its relations with ASEAN, but was also able to influence the direction of regional integration toward its preferred vision of East Asian integration as opposed to Asia-Pacific integration (Men, 2008, p. 77; Zhang &

Zhou, 2003, pp. 10–14). According to Chinese experts, this was both the "ideal" regional framework for China, and the one that would allow it to "maximize its influence in the region" (Interviews, Beijing, Spring-Summer, 2006). As regional cooperation and efforts to build an East Asian Community would likely draw on the success of EAFTA, this forward momentum also made it more likely that China could successfully shape the regional political and security order based on APT as the foundation, which would more reflect China's interests and give it a greater ability to exert influence (Gu, 2005, pp. 1–11; Zhang, 2011, pp. 7–8).

Chinese experts recognize that China played a much larger role in shaping relations in trade than in finance, but they note that China played an important role in promoting regional financial cooperation. During the Asian financial crisis, especially after the proposed Asian Monetary Fund was abandoned, Japan played a much greater role in providing financial assistance to the region. The Asian financial crisis spurred closer economic cooperation, especially through the establishment of the APT mechanism. In 2000, APT finance ministers reached an agreement on regional bilateral currency swaps that could be used in a future crisis. Chinese experts recognize that Japan was the driving force for the financial cooperation that became known as the Chiang Mai Initiative, but they emphasized that Premier Zhu was very involved in the negotiations and Chinese support played an important role in expanding regional economic cooperation and furthered support for the APT process (Wang, 2010, p. 75).

Security

Although less successful in the security realm than in economics, China achieved some progress in strengthening momentum for multilateral security cooperation, exploring new areas of cooperation, and gradually reducing the dominance of the U.S. alliance system. Chinese leaders oppose U.S. alliances in Asia because they consider such alliances to be exclusive, aimed at specific countries (including China), too focused on military threats, and a major threat to regional stability. In 1996-1997, Chinese leaders proposed that countries should abandon the "Cold War mentality" and instead adopt a model of cooperative security China called the New Security Concept (NSC). Rather than strengthening exclusive alliances, Chinese leaders urged countries to form "strategic partnerships" that would not threaten third parties, and it became "strategic partners" with most of its neighbors. Chinese experts recognized that support for an NSC would only emerge gradually, but the vision was that an emphasis on dialogue, confidence-building measures (CBMs), and cooperation in areas of shared interest would shape a regional security environment that ensured the security of all countries and would also make it easier to manage areas of tension and dispute.

China was most successful in shaping security relations with Central Asia, and to some extent through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). In the mid-1990s, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan reached bilateral and multilateral agreements on military CBMs, mutual reduction of military forces, as well as limitations and notification for military exercises carried out near shared borders. These initial agreements were further expanded with the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001, including the addition of Uzbekistan, through which the members deepened

cooperation against threats from terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism, and continued military exchanges to build trust and confidence. Chinese experts often characterized security cooperation in Central Asia and in the SCO as a perfect model of the NSC in practice. It is an example of security cooperation that is a partnership and not an alliance, and one that gradually deepened through CBMs and dialogues (Yuan, 2010; Zhao, 2012).

China's active participation in ARF and other regional institutions was aimed at reassuring the region that China was not a threat, as well as trying to gradually build a more inclusive and cooperative regional security order. According to many Chinese experts, participation in ARF helped countries build confidence and trust in each other through dialogue, military CBMs, and military exchanges. The preferred vision is to develop cooperation in less sensitive areas of mutual threats, such as nontraditional security, and gradually expand into more sensitive areas of traditional security. Experts recognized that this will be a long and gradual process, but they point to expanding cooperation through these institutions and increasing support for common security and an inclusive regional order as developments that are favorable to China (Ding, 1998; Zhou S., 2011).

Experts point to a few areas in the security realm in which China has been especially successful in exerting influence and shaping the regional order. In 2003, China became the first non-ASEAN country to accede to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). This political commitment is said to have demonstrated China's peaceful intentions and improved relations with the ASEAN countries. In terms of shaping the regional order, similar to the regional response to CAFTA, the other powers in East Asia followed suit in signing TAC, which greatly improved the overall security situation in East Asia (Ruan, 2007, p. 307).

Chinese officials and experts emphasize China's role in driving cooperation in nontraditional security among East Asian countries and strengthening the role of APT in dealing with political and security issues. According to then-Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi, "China, taking the lead in proposing the development of nontraditional security cooperation, expanded the scope and content of East Asian cooperation" (Ruan, 2007, p. 307; Wang J., 2004, p. 20). Other experts emphasize that China was successful in expanding cooperation through the APT mechanism to also include political and security issues, starting with nontraditional security. At the 2001 APT summit, Premier Zhu Rongji proposed greater cooperation on issues such as terrorism, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration. Although such nontraditional security cooperation also occurred in institutions involving the United States, China was successful in expanding the APT agenda to build trust and deepen cooperation on security issues without the United States (Hu, 2002; Wu, 2012, p. 100).

Although continuing to emphasize its limited influence over North Korea, Chinese experts point to its positive role in helping to manage the nuclear crisis and promoting multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia. Although reluctant at first, China used its influence and leverage to bring the powers together, first through tripartite talks in 2003 and then through multiple rounds of the Six-Party Talks. China played a role in persuading and pressuring North Korea to participate in talks, and played an active role in setting the agenda,

serving as a mediator, and forging consensus between all sides. The joint statements in 2005 and 2007 seemed to successfully manage the problem and slowly move North Korea in the direction of denuclearization and Northeast Asia toward greater stability (Wang, 2012a). The 2007 joint statement supported the establishment of a "Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism Working Group." Chinese experts were hopeful that such positive developments in multilateral security cooperation would lead to a more inclusive regional order with a diminished role for alliances, which is exactly what China had been advocating (Wang, 2012b).

East Asian Regionalism

China demonstrated its regional influence by shaping East Asian regionalism through its successful efforts to promote regional cooperation with the APT members and mechanism as the foundation. Although other powers were more responsible for establishing the APT mechanism during and after the Asian financial crisis, as APT developed and expanded, China grew more active in promoting APT cooperation. In the words of one CASS researcher, APT was viewed as "a more favorable framework for cooperation." China realized that, as opposed to larger institutions involving the United States and other nonregional countries, China would have more bargaining power in smaller regional groupings like APT and it would put China in a "more favorable position for raising agenda items and establishing rules" (Wang, 2010, p. 87).

At the 2005 APT summit, which also marked the establishment of the East Asia Summit (EAS), the communique declared that APT would be the "main vehicle" for promoting regional cooperation and forming the East Asian Community. China actively lobbied ASEAN and was successful in driving East Asian cooperation to continue to be centered on the APT process which both reflected China's preferences and would give China more influence over the process going forward. China's preferred vision of regionalism was "open," but it preferred to start from the APT members, and then eventually expand to potentially include other countries. Similar to the experience with the EAFTA, Chinese leaders and experts were especially satisfied that East Asian countries supported an East Asian vision for regional cooperation, as opposed to a trans-Pacific or Asia-Pacific vision, and planned to deepen political cooperation and build an East Asian Community including the 13 APT countries (Mei, 2010).

Chinese experts also point to China's desire to strengthen its "agenda-setting" power (yicheng shezhi) and its ability to influence the "rules of the game" (youxi guize) in international and regional institutions (Kuik, 2005; Ruan, 2007, p. 289). China was successful in promoting the APT membership and mechanism as the foundation of East Asian regional cooperation, but it was also interested in shaping the content of discussion at these regional summits. Although China's restraint and cooperative policies made this easier, China was also able to keep territorial disputes in the South China Sea and East China Sea off formal agendas of regional institutions and there was minimal discussion of these issues in these venues. Regional summits rarely included criticism and pressure on China on human rights or domestic political issues, but China and many of

the ASEAN countries had a common position in trying to keep interference in domestic affairs off of the agenda and out of the discussion (Wu, 2009, p. 57).

Managing Overall Relations with the Region

In the first two decades after the end of the Cold War, China was relatively successful in managing relations with its neighbors, as Chinese experts emphasized that none of its neighbors had adopted a fundamentally hostile or adversarial policy toward China, even as its power increased. China was not really successful in weakening U.S. alliances in the region, but it was quite successful in preventing the formation of an anti-China balancing coalition. A generally stable international environment minimized the external pressure on China and allowed the leadership to focus more of its effort and resources on addressing the immense domestic political and economic challenges facing China.

Although general concerns about China remained, and there were specific areas of tension with certain neighbors, Chinese experts observed that deepening cooperation with China had become the consensus of all of its neighbors. According to the conclusions of one comprehensive CASS study on the China policy of its neighbors, "the vast majority of countries in the region have chosen friendly coexistence with China" (Tang, Zhang, & Cao, 2005, p. 6). All countries in the study had chosen policies of engagement or cooperation toward China, and none had opted for confrontation. Another thorough study of the perceptions of periphery countries argued that no countries had defined their relations with China as "competitive adversaries" and most had either defined them as "cooperative partners" or a mix of cooperation and competition (Qian, 2010). According to Wang Jisi (2004, p. 16), dean of Peking University's School of International Studies, "Most Chinese policy advisors...point to greatly improved bilateral ties with China's neighbors, contending that few, if any, Asian powers would join a U.S.-led coalition to contain China."

Chinese experts observed that no country had defined China as an enemy or adversary, no "Asian NATO" or anti-China balancing coalition had emerged, and neighbors rarely challenged Chinese interests. By the mid-2000s, China's strategy of reassurance and shaping regional perceptions helped lead to dramatic improvements in relations with Southeast Asia, Russia, Central Asia, South Korea, and even India. For relations with more problems and tension, such as Sino-Japanese relations, Chinese experts noted that these countries adopted hedging strategies as opposed to undertaking adversarial balancing and containment actions. Although concerns and issues remained in many relationships, the possibility of China as an opportunity helped shape the regional environment in a more positive direction (Zhou, 2010, p. 47).

Limits and Resistance to Chinese Influence

There were many areas in which China exerted influence over its neighbors and shaped regional order during this period, but China also faced considerable resistance from Japan, ASEAN, and the United States. This resistance demonstrated the limits of China's ability to shape regional order, and the challenges China faced in gaining support for its preferred vision of regional order. This section will examine the limits of and resistance to China's influence in the areas of East Asian regionalism, economics, and security.

East Asian Regionalism

China's preferred vision of regional cooperation included only East Asian countries as the foundation, with the possibility of gradually expanding and drawing in other countries. Chinese experts argued that a regional cooperation process that started with the 13 countries of APT and then expanded would produce greater cooperation and more efficient results, and would also provide China with more influence and bargaining power (Wang, 2010, p. 87; Yang, Dao, Lin, Liu, & Yang, 2005). Contrary to China's preferences, Japan and several Southeast Asian countries agreed in 2005 that the EAS would be dominated by ASEAN and expand its membership to include non-APT countries. China's preferred vision of APT-centered regionalism seemed to have support, but other regional countries increased their resistance to this vision and supported a broader vision for regional cooperation. This expanded EAS and broader vision for regionalism served to limit and dilute China's influence, and from China's perspective, distorted the process of East Asian cooperation.

As discussed earlier, the regional cooperation that emerged after the Asian financial crisis seemed to be moving in China's preferred direction, with the endorsement of APT as the "main vehicle" for achieving an East Asian Community and support for an EAFTA with APT members. When the EAS was initially proposed, China expected it to only include the 13 countries of APT and continue to be an "Asian mechanism" (Ren, 2008, p. 17). Experts noted that the 2001 EAVG recommended the evolution of the APT leaders' meeting into the EAS. As a result, Chinese experts not only expected that the EAS would include the APT members, but also hoped that the 13 countries would participate as "equal individual members." Rather than continuing to be the "guest of the group of lesser states," as they were in the APT summits, China wanted and expected that the three Northeast Asian countries would be able to host EAS summits. According to two experts on Asian regionalism at the Chinese Foreign Affairs University, a more equal arrangement that allowed China to host summits would enable it to "take part in agenda-setting and norm developing as a major power" (Qin & Wei, 2008, p. 134). China cautiously offered to host the first EAS, and when it was determined that Malaysia would host the first summit in 2005, China offered to host the second one (Ren, 2009, p. 312). Chinese leaders and experts were optimistic that the establishment of the EAS would mark the next step in deepening regional cooperation along the narrow lines China preferred, and would provide China with an opportunity to have even greater voice and exert more influence over regional dynamics.

When ASEAN announced the membership criteria and arrangements for the EAS, they fell far short of China's hopes, expectations, and desires. These criteria enabled non-APT countries to participate, and India, Australia, and New Zealand met the criteria and participated in the first EAS. ASEAN also decided that instead of the members being equal and allowing all members to host the summit on a rotating basis, the EAS would be dominated by ASEAN and only ASEAN members could serve as host and set the agenda for meetings.

According to Fudan University Professor Ren (2009, pp. 312–13), "the membership idea that ASEAN outlined differed from what China assumed or desired" and bringing in non-East Asian countries "was not what Beijing

would like to see." In response, China proposed a two-tier structure of "APT \pm 3," in which APT would be the core and the other non-East Asian countries would be the periphery, ensuring that "the newly admitted three would have less influence" (Qin & Wei, 2008, p. 135). ASEAN did not endorse this proposal, so China's status in the EAS would not be equal to ASEAN members, and it would even have the same lower status as other non-East Asian countries like Australia and India.

Chinese experts were happy that APT would be the main vehicle for the promotion of an East Asian Community, but the establishment of EAS had blocked China's preferred direction of regional cooperation and demonstrated considerable resistance to China's ability to shape the region. According to one scholar, Beijing felt "frustrated" that non-East Asian countries were invited to participate and "what dismayed it even more was the decision that the EAS would be hosted only by ASEAN countries, thus not including China" (Wu, 2009, p. 60). Hoping that the EAS would deepen cooperation between the APT countries, one Chinese expert on regionalism suggests that including the other countries marked "a step away from (*tuoli*) the objective of the summit" (Ren, 2008, p. 17). Another scholar argues that the EAS was challenged by "great power interference" and it became a "non-East Asian" meeting that had "lost the original meaning for convening the summit" (Pang, 2012, p. 67).

Chinese experts mostly blamed Japan and the United States for obstructing the progress of East Asian cooperation. They argued that rather than continuing the healthy development of APT cooperation, Japan pressured ASEAN to pull in outsiders to contain China, constrain its influence, prevent the emergence of China-centered regionalism, and seize the initiative in the competition for regional leadership. Others argue that when the United States saw the progress of APT regional cooperation as a challenge to its interests, it pressured Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN to bring in other members to balance China and prevent Chinese domination (Ren, 2008, p. 17; Zhou, 2014, p. 14).

Although Japan and the United States were the convenient scapegoats, and some resistance to Chinese initiatives was expected, Chinese interlocutors revealed that some concerns among ASEAN countries were an important factor behind the expansion of the EAS. These concerns among ASEAN countries, moreover, might present new challenges to China's desires to shape the direction of regionalism. Beijing was especially disappointed in the form that EAS took because it had very active lobbied ASEAN to support its vision of equal participation by East Asian countries. Japan had also lobbied ASEAN for an enlarged EAS, and at least Singapore and Indonesia supported this vision. Some ASEAN states worried that China was becoming too powerful and supported an enlarged EAS to prevent Chinese domination of the region. Another concern among ASEAN states, which would become more prominent over time among Chinese experts, was that regional cooperation with all APT members as equals would undermine "ASEAN centrality" and force ASEAN to cede influence to Northeast Asia. Chinese leaders and experts openly supported "ASEAN centrality" in regional institutions to avoid being perceived as a threat, even as more experts noted how unnatural it was to have the weaker powers of ASEAN driving cooperation and setting the agenda. Especially after the 2003 ASEAN summit in Bali, Chinese experts also increasingly observed

that the ASEAN countries seemed more interested in developing and strengthening the ASEAN Community and less interested in an East Asian Community (Pang, 2012, p. 67; Zhai, 2009).

The establishment of an expanded EAS demonstrated resistance in Japan and ASEAN to China's preferred direction of regional cooperation and constrained China's ability to shape East Asian regionalism. In response to the expanded EAS, especially as it was designed as the supplement to APT as the "main vehicle" for establishing an EAC, China tried to minimize the importance of EAS and put more emphasis on APT and other regional institutions. However, even though earlier support had generated momentum for deepening APT-centered regional cooperation, the resistance that emerged to this vision significantly delayed progress in East Asian regionalism. According to Renmin University Professor Pang (2011, p. 52), "In recent years, leaders from both Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia decreasingly talked about the future of 'ASEAN + 3' as the base of EAC. Since 2005, the East Asia Summit (EAS) has made EAC more impossible rather than possible."

Economics

China's preferred form of regional FTA, an EAFTA involving the APT countries, also met resistance when Japan and the United States both proposed competing regional FTA frameworks that gained some support in the region. Although feasibility studies for the narrow EAFTA had already started, Japan proposed a different vision for a regional FTA in 2006. The Japan-led FTA, called the Comprehensive Economic Partnership in East Asia (CEPEA), differed from the EAFTA in both membership and content. Drawing on the example of an enlarged EAS, Japan argued that there would be greater economic gains from a larger FTA and proposed that the CEPEA also include Australia, New Zealand, and India. Whereas the EAFTA was a "low-quality" FTA, only covering trade and allowing many carve-outs to protect sensitive sectors, the CEPEA was a broader economic agreement that also covered investment, environment, energy, and institutions. When a similar CEPEA Joint Experts Group was established to conduct feasibility studies, China was disappointed that these two competing visions were both supported and seemingly accorded equal status to develop along parallel tracks.

Although they remained hopeful that the EAFTA would be implemented, Chinese experts objected to an enlarged membership which would reduce China's bargaining advantages and influence and were concerned that a more comprehensive approach would put pressure on China to implement domestic reforms sooner than they were ready. Japan made an economic argument for the CEPEA, but Chinese experts emphasized Japan's political motivations and its desire to contain China's influence and prevent its leadership in regional affairs. According to CASS' Zhang Yunling, who was the chair of the EAFTA Joint Experts Group and a member of the CEPEA Joint Experts Group, "the differences in FTA integration emerged, at its root, from the political differences over establishing East Asian cooperation mechanisms" (Tang & Wang, 2014; Zhang, 2011, p. 8). In a thorough analysis of the different mechanisms for regional cooperation, another scholar argues that Japan did not think it could balance China by itself, so it has tried to pull other non-East Asian powers into

regional cooperation arrangements to balance China's influence (Su, 2008, p. 33).

As these regional FTAs were developing, the United States also proposed its preferred vision of a regional FTA. The United States proposed a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP), which would cover all 21 economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and, therefore, produce much greater economic gains. As trade liberalization through APEC had slowed based on earlier disagreements and regional FTAs became more popular after the Asian financial crisis, this was also an attempt to revitalize APEC. At the 2006 APEC summit, the members agreed to explore the possible creation of a broader FTAAP, and feasibility studies followed.

Chinese experts remained open to this broader approach, but raised many concerns. They argued that it would be too difficult to reach agreement with so many economies at different levels of development, and suggested that the Chinese approach of starting from APT and gradually expanding to include other countries would be easier to achieve. Similar to concerns about the Japan-led CEPEA, Chinese experts worried that it would force China to reform domestic sectors before they were prepared, especially in terms of opening to investment, which could produce political and social instability. The FTAAP would also include Taiwan, and China preferred a vision for regional cooperation that excluded Taiwan and reduced its international space. Chinese scholars noted that the United States had an economic motivation and did want to be excluded from the economic gains of liberalization (Sheng, 2007). But experts put more emphasis on political factors and argued that the United States was unhappy with the development of East Asian cooperation, and needed to interfere to ensure its dominant position in the region and to constrain Chinese regional influence (Zhai, 2009, p. 14). These American and Japan-led FTA initiatives, and regional support for them, complicated China's preferred vision for economic cooperation and slowed the momentum for APT-led integration over which China would have greater influence.

Security

In regional security affairs, China expanded bilateral and multilateral security regional cooperation, but the United States further strengthened its regional alliances during this period and even developed security cooperation with new regional partners. Although Chinese experts try to suggest that the NSC was not an attack on U.S. alliances and was not an attempt to force the United States out of the region, they recognize that more aggressive lobbying by defense officials in the late 1990s was not well-received by countries in East Asia (Interviews, Beijing, Summer, 2006; Interviews, Shanghai, Fall, 2009).

If China hoped that its reassurance efforts and support for multilateral security cooperation would weaken American alliances in the region, these hopes were dashed. In the mid-to-late 1990s, the United States strengthened and redefined its alliances with Japan and Australia, reached a Visiting Forces Agreement with the Philippines, and reached new military agreements with security partners like Singapore (Ma, 2000). After the terrorist attacks on 9/11, the United States strengthened anti-terror and nonproliferation cooperation with all of its allies and several countries in Southeast Asia, expanded the APEC agenda to

also include security issues, and rather than moving out of the region, the U.S. military moved into bases in Central Asia on China's borders in support of the war in Afghanistan.

Chinese experts observed that under the Bush administration, the United States strengthened its alliance with Japan, and it appeared even more concerned with China. In 2005, the United States and Japan not only issued a joint statement that mentioned Taiwan as an area of concern, but also held a military exercise in defense of a small Japanese island, with China as the undeclared opponent. The United States expanded its military exercises with regional partners and invited additional parties to participate, which enhanced multilateral cooperation and coordination. Although multilateral regional security cooperation progressed, new multilateral security arrangements also emerged, including groupings such as U.S.-Japan-South Korea, U.S.-Japan-Australia, and the short-lived U.S.-Japan-Australia-India quad. In addition to expanding cooperation with traditional allies, the United States developed new security cooperation with India through civilian nuclear assistance and a new defense agreement (Sun, 2011). During this period, no countries in the region defined China as an enemy or adversary, but the continued strength of U.S. alliances and security partners severely limited China's influence in regional security affairs. China was successful in reassuring others that it was not a threat, but it achieved little success in weakening U.S. alliances or cooperation with regional partners.

Conclusion: Analytical Themes and Challenges for China's Effort to Expand Influence

The main finding of this article is that Chinese experts' perception of China's efforts before the financial crisis to reshape the regional order and exert influence in East Asia achieved mixed success. China was especially successful in preventing others from adopting hostile anti-China balancing postures, and before 2005, successful in attaining support and momentum for its preferred vision of East Asian regional cooperation and regional trade liberalization. China was less successful, however, in shaping the regional security order, although experts recognized the incremental improvements in what would be a gradual process in minimizing the dominance of U.S. regional alliances. Around 2005, however, Chinese experts noted increased resistance to China's preferred vision for regionalism and regional economic cooperation. Although a comparison of Chinese assessments and international assessments is beyond the scope of this article, the main contribution has been to introduce these perceptions and assessments in the Chinese-language sources. Further research can and should examine the areas of agreement and divergence between Chinese, Asian, and Western assessments and attempt to explain the areas of divergence.

Chinese observations and analysis of this earlier "charm offensive" reveal several themes with implications for China's ability to successfully wield and increase its influence in the region. These analytical themes highlight conditions that enabled successful exercise of influence and shaping of regional order, as well as factors that have presented challenges and constraints on the exercise of influence and have become more prominent as China's rise continues.

First, although U.S. officials and many U.S. experts would disagree with this characterization, Chinese experts point to the low levels of American attention and focus on East Asia as a key factor that helped China build influence in the region and drive regional cooperation in its preferred direction. Experts point to the slow American response to the Asian financial crisis and focus on terrorism and the Middle East as part of the global war on terror after 9/11. Although the United States deepened security cooperation with several of its East Asian allies and partners, Chinese experts argue that the United States was not very interested in or involved in regional cooperation or regional institutions. They cite Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's skipping the ARF summit in 2005 and 2007 and note that when American officials participated in regional meetings, they usually focused on terrorism and security, and spent little time discussing economic cooperation and economic benefits.

According to one CASS scholar, "since the 1990s, the U.S. neglected (hushi) Asia-Pacific regional cooperation policies for a long time" and its "passive" attitude toward the region, except for issues of terrorism, helped China deepen cooperation with its neighbors (Zhou F., 2011, p. 69). Zhang (2013a, p. 78) argues that "without U.S. participation, regional relations had a great transformation, regional cooperation had great success, including an enormous increase in China's power and influence as a prominent change." As U.S. neglect of regional affairs and regional cooperation greatly assisted China in increasing its regional influence, the Obama administration's increased emphasis on the region as part of the "rebalance" has presented a new challenge for China's efforts to shape the region according to its preferences.

Second, even before the shift in U.S. policy in the region that has become known as the "rebalance" or "pivot," China was already beginning to face resistance to its regional vision and Chinese experts noted that China may be reaching its limits in terms of China's preferred path for regional cooperation. China's neighbors were excited and reassured that China was deepening its engagement with the region through bilateral cooperation and participation in multilateral institutions. Especially with the Asian financial crisis having strengthened the need for narrow East Asian cooperation, China's neighbors responded to its initiatives (such as proposing CAFTA, promoting APT-centered regionalism, and acceding to TAC) in ways that strengthened China's preferred path to regionalism. Around 2004–2005, however, rather than Chinese actions and success serving as the "catalyst" to push its neighbors to take actions supporting its vision, they began to respond in ways that resisted and complicated China's preferred vision for regional cooperation. Japan and several ASEAN countries proposed and supported broader regional FTAs, expanded regional institutions such as the EAS to draw in external powers, and grew increasingly concerned about Chinese domination of regional order. Many Chinese analysts were beginning to see the new challenges in further deepening regional cooperation and would likely agree broadly with Rozman's (2010, p. 221) suggestion that "by 2009 the limits of China's approach to regionalism were unmistakable." As this resistance to narrow regionalism developed, even though China continued to promote deepening cooperation through the APT process, after the global financial crisis, China was forced to shift from supporting its "ideal" frameworks for regional cooperation to supporting those that were the "least bad," but a long way from its preferred vision for regional cooperation.

The third theme is the tension between China's reassurance approach and its ability to shape the region. As part of China's reassurance efforts, it must support "ASEAN centrality" in regional institutions to communicate its restraint and cooperative spirit. As many Chinese experts noted during this period, if China is "too active" in its involvement in regional affairs and attempts to shape regional agendas, it will be perceived as overbearing, threatening, and trying to challenge the United States in East Asia by creating its own sphere of influence under Chinese dominance. However, this reassurance approach also limits the degree to which China can shape the regional order and agenda of regional institutions, and limits the degree to which it can make demands on its neighbors and exert its influence (Ruan, 2007, p. 318). Zhao (2011, pp. 64-67) notes that what he calls China's "soft approach" to regional cooperation is effective in many areas such as defending sovereignty, but also limits the degree to which China can influence regional dynamics. This tension continues to be a challenge for China's approach to its neighbors. As it has maintained strong economic growth during and after the global financial crisis, the power gap between China and the ASEAN countries has expanded even more dramatically, and it has become even more "unnatural" to Chinese experts to have ASEAN dominate the regional agenda. This has led to a policy challenge in China of trying to be more active in shaping its relations with its neighbors and the region, but trying to avoid being seen as too active or too threatening.

The fourth theme, which has also become more prominent, is that China has been successful in improving relations with its neighbors, but has not been able to develop many close relations or dependable security partners in the region. According to CASS' Zhou (2010, p. 47), the attitude toward China among countries in its periphery had transformed from "fearful" and "not willing to accept" to "fundamentally acceptable" and from "not like" to "no dislike or antipathy." This is an important success for China, but Zhou (2010, p. 47) notes that this transition is relatively easy, and the next stage from "no antipathy" to "like" is much more difficult. He notes that China has been successful in reducing the number of countries that are balancing against China, but has not had much success in making its neighbors be willing to "follow" (zhuisui) or bandwagon with China. Although China has improved its relations with many of its neighbors, with the possible exception of Pakistan, none of them would support China reliably and unconditionally. As a result of this continued weakness in security affairs, some Chinese scholars have proposed more active efforts to develop deeper security relations with "strategic fulcrum" (zhanlüe zhidian) countries or "quasi-allies" to make up for China's shortcomings in regional security affairs (Hu, 2014). Yan Xuetong, the director of the Institute of International Relations at Tsinghua University, has gone so far as to call for abandoning China's long-standing official policy of nonalignment, arguing that forming alliances and providing security guarantees is the only way to improve China's weak position in regional security affairs (Yan, 2013).

Note

¹The procedure for selecting Chinese sources was as follows. I used the China Academic Journals database from the widely available China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database, or CNKI. I

searched several of the main journals from government think tanks that include articles published by think-tank researchers and academic scholars. These journals were: Dangdai Yatai, Xiandai Guoji Guanxi, Guoji Wenti Yanjiu, Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi, Waijiao Xueyuan Xuebao (later Waijiao Pinglun), Shijie Zhishi, Dongnanya Zongheng. For these journals, I used title and keyword searches of "East Asia" (Dongya) and "periphery" (zhoubian) from 1994 to the present, to populate the list of most relevant articles. I supplemented these articles with several Chinese-language books published by well-known government think tank researchers and scholars who are experts on China's relations with its neighbors.

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