

China's Participation in Regional Organizations

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Introduction

China is a country that does not harbor a global strategy, however, has a very strong interest in maintaining a regional presence. In order to protect its regional interests, China actively practices bilateral and multilateral mechanisms within the region. The recent governing elite led by Xi Jinping is taking steps further in its foreign policy with objectives to not only actively participate in global international organizations, such as the UN and G-20, but also to be more proactive in the regional organizations, such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This article aims to analyze and explore the three aspects of China's political, economic and security implementation in the regional organizations. Through the existing regional multilateral mechanisms, China is working to strengthen the political trust with surrounding regional states, to seek stable economic development and to establish a cohesive unanimity on ensuring security. Hence, by using multilateral regional cooperation China aims to diffuse any kind of problematic factors that may occur in China's neighboring region.

1. Regarding China's participation in regional organizations

1.1 China's objectives in participating in regional organizations: China's foreign policy's principal objective is to create a benevolent external environment for peaceful and stable domestic development. From the early XXI century, the guiding principles of China's foreign policy have been identified as: "to hold relations with major powers as the primary focus, to hold primacy in relations with its neighbors and to hold relations with developing countries as cornerstone" of its multilateral foreign policy objectives.

There are two main external and internal factors for China's active partaking in international organizations. The internal factor is concerned with validating China's place in the world along with implementing its reformed policies, while the external factors such as rapid globalization and intense regional integration have greatly influenced China to take more proactive stance.

1.2 China's progress and involvement within the regional organizations: China started to actively partake in the activities of regional organizations beginning from as early as the 1990s. In 1997, China had proclaimed that: "The country was the most responsible great power within the international community". In 2004, China established total of 267 multidimensional international agreements 124 of which were established since the 1990s.¹

Inasmuch as China's economic strength grew, its interest and capacity in participating in international organizations had also risen in the XXI century: in 2001, an organization named after a Chinese city the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was established and the

same year Boao Forum for Asia was created, initiating two substantial global scale regional organizations.

Looking at China's participation in regional organizations, one can observe that in the beginning China carefully participated in the multilateral economic mechanisms and eventually began to partake in all aspects, and furthermore, began to take more proactive stance. For instance, the SCO, the Six Party Talks regarding the Korean peninsula issue, the Boao Forum, the free trade zone between the PRC and ASEAN, the APEC and Summits to strengthen confidence building in Asia are demonstration of China's active involvement in the region.

1.3 The context of China's participation in regional organizations: During the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in 2002, it was declared that "the PRC will actively participate in multilateral activities of the world and increase its responsibility within the UN and other international organizations" while during the 17th Congress held in 2007, it was declared that "the PRC shall take a more active role in the international community through active participation and bearing responsibilities in the world and shall commit to promoting fair and just international law and order"² which indicated a more proactive stance.

During China's 18th National Congress, where Xi Jinping assumed the new leadership, it was declared that "the PRC shall take even more proactive role in multilateral activities, while actively supporting the executive duties of the UN, G-20, SCO and BRICS and promote international stability and order in a just manner", which was the first time international organizations were pointed out in particular. It is clear from Xi Jinping's ruling policies that China is trying to actively assume its responsibilities especially within the G-20, SCO and BRICS. For instance, during the G-20 Summit in May, 2013, China urged to improve the multilateral trade mechanism and oppose the trade protection policies. Moreover, during the September and November SCO summits China's "Shanghai Spirit" embodying mutual trust, equal concession, mutual respect for different civilizations and common prosperity was considered as successful depiction of China's involvement in international relations by setting a new and successful norm and standard for the world.³ Furthermore, during the BRICS summit held in July of 2014, China's role in initiating the "Reserve Fund" and establishment of the BRICS bank indicates its aim to establish a prominent structure within the international financial system.

2. China's participation and integration within the regional organizations

China, as mentioned earlier, is a country that does not harbor a global strategy, however, has a very strong interest in maintaining a regional presence. Hence, in order to maintain its interests in the region, it employs not only

bilateral mechanisms but also multilateral mechanisms actively as well.

2.1 China on political confidence building: Not only is China trying to promote its policies towards its neighbors using regional multilateral organizations, but also it aims to strengthen political trust with its neighbors. China actively participates in ministerial summits of the regional organizations. For instance, China participates in summits such as the SCO Summits and Ministerial Summits, ASEAN 10+1, 10+3, 10+6 conferences, all high level meetings, Shangri-La dialogue, Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), East Asia Summit (EAS), and using multilateral dialogues promotes political confidence building in the region. The majority of the participating states in these regional multilateral dialogue mechanisms are China's neighbors and in the past ten years China realized a "friendly neighbor, partner neighbor" and "friendly neighbor, peaceful neighbor and prosperous neighbor" policy along with Xi Jinping's proposal for a "close, reliable, generous and tolerant" neighbor policy that is being promoted through the international mechanisms in order to promote regional political confidence building.

2.2 China seeks stable economic growth: China puts economic cooperation as the core of its foreign policy. This is mainly due to China's external leverage for a successful implementation of its new and reformed policies. China joined the APEC in 1989, which was the very first international economic organization and by joining the WTO in 2001, China began a more active participation in the global economic multilateral cooperation. China has participated in regional economic cooperation projects such as: the North East Asian joint economic Tumen River project, the South East Asian Mekong River project, the Yellow Sea free economic zone, Bohai Bay economic rim, Japan's exclusive economic zone and when 10+3 mechanism was created since the 1997s, China began to shift regional economic cooperation towards the East Asia.⁴

After Xi Jinping assumed the leadership, China has become more assertive and rather than a passive player, emerged as a leader in the regional economic cooperation in order to enhance its economic influence. For instance, China proposed an initiative to develop the Eurasian economic integration "One road, one belt" (the New Silk Road Economic Belt and maritime Silk Road). Moreover, in the framework of ASEAN cooperation, China is also advancing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) cooperation. In addition, China aspires not only to use the existing multilateral mechanisms but also establish new regional organizations in order to increase its economic influence in the region. The creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and owning 50% of the bank is an apparent illustration of China's aspirations. Additionally, a BRICS bank was

established with the headquarters in Shanghai, China.

2.3 China's aspiration to establish a joint security union in the region: China first advocated the "New Security Concept for Asia during the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), held in May of 2014, in Shanghai. Xi Jinping proposed that "The New Security Concept for secure Asia should be collaborative, cohesive, stable and open" and the proposition was issued in the "Shanghai Declaration" of the conference. Hence, using the CICA as a foundation for joint security cooperation in the region and by establishing an international regional security organization, it is apparent that China would like to assume leadership and fill the gap in Asia's multilateral security mechanism where Asian issues would be resolved by Asian people themselves.⁵

Conclusion

China's rapid growth and power have enabled China to emerge as a prominent and an influential player in the regional organizations bearing more responsibilities and duties. In other words, for China, it is a historically significant change where it is becoming one of the active initiators in the international system.⁶

Nowadays, China is implementing an external strategy to "stabilize in the East and make a way into the West", aspiring to become the epicenter that links Eurasia. Moreover, using the regional multilateral mechanism, China aims to create a political confidence building, promote stable economic development and establish security integration in the region. Hence, China would like to decrease and diffuse any existing negative factors near its proximity using the multilateral cooperation mechanism, to create interdependence among the regional states and to establish favorable external environment.

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