

China's Grand Strategy for Asia-Pacific: an analysis of the regional and global actors' perspectives

Saima Manzoor*^{1, 2} | Abdul Rauf^{3, 4} | Zunaira Majeed¹

1. Area Study Centre, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, Pakistan.
2. Fairbank Centre for Chinese Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States.
3. Department of Pakistani Languages, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.
4. Faculty of Arts, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

*Corresponding Author Email: saimamanzoor7@hotmail.com

Abstract:

The regional order of Asia-Pacific is changing dramatically; it attracted the world's attention, especially after China's rise as a significant emerging global power and one of the influential regional powers in Asia-Pacific. China announced its Grand Strategy (GS) in 2013 for the Asia-Pacific region. It aims to convert China into a prosperous society, establish good relations with neighbouring countries and make the region more prosperous and developed. This paper deals with how regional and global actors behave towards China's rise and its GS in the Asia-Pacific region. What regional order is China proposing for the stability and peace of the region? Moreover, what is the expected regional order in the coming years? This article overviews the proposed Chinese GS, focusing on the goals to be achieved in the Asia-Pacific region and the regional states' reaction towards China's rise, its GS, and the New Regional Order while using qualitative research methods. China attempts to coordinate with the regional states through bilateral and international mechanisms as they express strategic and security concerns. Despite their worries, all the regional states are backing Chinese GS because they believe Chinese projects can satisfy their infrastructure demands and other security and economic requirements.

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1. Introduction

The world has become increasingly aware of the enormous changes in the Asia-Pacific regional order, especially in the wake of China's emergence as one of the region's most significant and powerful developing powers. China made progress not only economically but militarily and diplomatically too; in terms of economy, China overtook the Japanese economy and became the second largest economy on the world stage after the US. China is not the only power which is making progress in the Asia-Pacific region. Rather, the region is getting more attention because of the active role of other regional states, too. Asia-Pacific is facing a transitional period, as the politics in the region is facing dramatic change, so it raises concerns and questions about how regional actors will behave towards China's rise and its Grand Strategy (GS) in the Asia-Pacific region. What regional order is China proposing for the stability and peace of the region? Moreover, what is the expected regional order in the coming years? To answer this question, this article gives an overview of the proposed Chinese GS with its focus on the goals to be achieved in the Asia-Pacific region along with the regional state's reaction towards China's rise, its GS, and New Regional Order.

Different techniques can be used to carry out China's GS for the Asia-Pacific states, but it is not as simple as it might seem given the regional governments' misgivings about Chinese objectives. Through Chinese GS, it is also difficult to coordinate with regional nations and China. Despite their worries, all the states in the region are backing Chinese GS because they believe Chinese projects can satisfy their infrastructure demands as well as other security and economic requirements. China is attempting to coordinate with the regional states through bilateral and international mechanisms. States are expressing strategic and security concerns despite having fewer reservations about OBOR. China is attempting to downplay the strategic ramifications of its economic efforts, but most Asia-Pacific nations see them as a weapon to increase China's influence in the region. As a result, they must be prepared to act if China threatens their regional interests. On the other hand, countries that share a dispute in the South China Sea with China are wary of relying too much on Chinese-proposed economic initiatives. The US, India, and Japan are expressing their reservations about China's grand plan, which has not only caused conflict among regional governments but also among the region's main powers. Other powerful nations, like the US, are providing alternative options to the regional states so they may meet their needs and avoid falling under Chinese hegemony.

2. Overview of Chinese Grand Strategy

There are two main objectives of the Chinese GS: to become a well-moderate society and a completely developed nation by 1949. Even though China is the world's second-largest economy, it is still considered a developing nation, not a developed one, because of its low GDP per capita. So, the economy is the top priority of the Chinese GS, and to achieve this strategy, a peaceful Asia-Pacific along with international markets is in China's interests. For a peaceful regional order, China's relations with neighbouring countries play an important role.

China, on the other hand, is committed to working to maintain a peaceful regional order by collaborating with the regional states. To achieve this goal, China is even managing its regional disputes with neighbouring states by using diplomacy and economy as tools to resolve the bilateral and multilateral issues between them. China is also interested in replacing the existing regional order with cooperation and friendly relations between the major actors.

2.1. National rejuvenation

The resurgence of China, when viewed in its true historical context, spans millennia, yet it now centres on contemporary principles such as sovereignty and progress. The aspiration to reunify and reinvigorate China can be traced back to the Qin Dynasty (221-206 B.C.) and the Kuomintang (KMT), who aimed to bring China together. Today, the Communist Party of China (CPC) bears the responsibility for this mission, including the reunification of mainland China with Taiwan, which had become separate when the KMT retreated to the island after its defeat in the Chinese Civil War (1946-49). It's important to note that the concept of the modern competitive nation-state system, often attributed to England in the 1500s, did not originate in China. Nevertheless, China, due to the imperialism it faced, including the British-initiated Opium Wars in the 1840s and the subsequent "century of humiliation," was compelled not only to endure severe transgressions but also to redefine what it meant to be Chinese in a perilous global environment.

The establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 marked the end of the "century of humiliation." National recovery, with a strong emphasis on reunification and safeguarding sovereignty, has been a cornerstone of political legitimacy for the CPC across various eras, including the present, often referred to as the "new era." In the new era under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the primary focus of national rejuvenation initially centred on achieving the first centenary goal—establishing a moderately prosperous society, known as a "Xiaokang society," as envisioned by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979. As progress in this area became increasingly evident, especially with the eradication of extreme poverty, attention shifted towards the second centenary goal: to transform into a "great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful," to be realised within a century of the PRC's founding. Although these goals were initially introduced by Jiang Zemin during the 15th CPC National Congress in 1997, they have been more enthusiastically embraced and extended by Xi Jinping following the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012. They are now seen as providing the fundamental purpose for both the Party and the nation's development.

It's important to emphasise that the concept of national rejuvenation does not promote narrow nationalism. Instead, it places a strong emphasis on multiethnicity and strategies for reunification, such as the "One Country, Two Systems" approach. Furthermore, rejuvenation signifies a forward-looking approach aimed at revitalising and making the nation youthful again rather than merely reviving an old conception of China. Since the modernisation of

China, China has had a dream of national rejuvenation. Especially the success of the Chinese Open-Door Policies. Deng made the dream of China (national rejuvenation) more achievable. Chinese President Xi Jinping attended the foreign delegates meeting at the New Economy Forum and said that achieving the Chinese dream of rejuvenation does not mean that China wants to be a hegemonic power (Arase, 2016).

2.2. Peaceful development

China's rise and its military modernisation created anxiety in the regional states. They were not sure about the Chinese intentions, but China, with the other regional states, worked hard to manage their disputes peacefully. They are still negotiating the code of conduct for developing their economic cooperation (Beeson, 2016). As in history, powerful states were used to settle their disputes and divergent issues aggressively, so after China's rise as a great power, regional states perceived the same in the case of China as well and considered China's rise a great threat to their interests in the region. China, on the other hand, is committed to maintaining a peaceful and stable regional order and claims that it doesn't have any such intentions to dominate the region or resolve regional issues aggressively. China gave the policy of "Peaceful Rise" under its GS for Asia-Pacific. Peaceful rise means China will not challenge the U.S. dominance or current regional order. China will not adopt the process of power transition as it has been adopted by other great powers in the past.

China is undoubtedly getting more benefits from the policy of peaceful rise, but the biggest hurdle China is facing while adopting this policy is China's relations with neighbouring and great powers in the Asia-Pacific region. So, it is a clear crystal that China's rise as a great power in the region will ultimately bring changes in the regional order even if it is peaceful, so Chinese relations with the other regional actors, especially how China will handle its relations with the US, is of great importance. To avoid confrontation and manage the regional order peacefully, China proposed a new model of relationship that is different from the historical model of clashes and confrontations. China, on the one hand, is proposing the new model, but mutual trust between the states is playing an important role on the other, so only policies like peaceful rise can't manage the regional issues, but narrowing the trust gap can. To build trust between the states, economic, diplomatic, political, cultural and military relations have been established and play an important role in managing their relations and conflicts (Zhao, 2015). China's economic position in the region plays the most important role in managing disputes and establishing the most harmonious and peaceful regional order. China is the largest economic market in the region and is an important source of FDI for its neighbouring countries. China signed different free trade agreements with its neighbouring countries like the China-Japan-Korea FTA, China-Australia FTA, China-Pakistan FTA, China-New-Zealand FTA, etc. For a peaceful, harmonious regional order, China is not only engaging the region through economic agreements rather; it is using the other forums as well, like SCO, but also the also-Japan-Korea summit, etc., along with good diplomacy to resolve the conflicts with the neighbouring countries (He, 2013).

2.3. China's constructive role

World politics is changing rapidly, and economic relations and active conflict among nations demand new institutions or reforms in the existing international institutions according to the current scenario. China, as a great emerging power, should also have a great say and active role in establishing the new norms or institutions at the world stage in general and at the regional level in particular. As a regional power, China doesn't have any intention to disturb the current regional order, but it assumes its responsibility to come up with a new model of cooperation and make more contributions to making the region more peaceful and harmonious. BRI is one of the best examples of understanding the Chinese model of cooperation and connectivity. Silk Road Fund and the foundation of the Asian Infrastructure Bank are other examples of the Chinese awareness of making BRI more active and beneficial for the regional states. BRI is one of the Chinese models of a win-win situation for all the states, not only in the region but also in the world at large. But BRI is not the only initiative taken by China to narrow the gap and promote connectivity on the world stage. Rather, it also plays an important role in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the G20, and the association of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) to promote the harmonious regional order and narrow the trust gap between the states. China is working hard to defend the positive trends and keep its economy on the right track to make the region more stable (Garrett, 2010).

3. Research methodology

This research is qualitative. The qualitative method is used to discover the meaning of phenomena given by people based on their experiences. So, the purpose of this research is to explore the tools of the Chinese GS through which they are creating their dominance and containing the US in the Asia-Pacific region, analyse the whole situation, and use the findings of this study to devise future policies. Questions used in the qualitative approach require descriptive and exploratory and thus start with what and how. Questions with what and how directed the study towards an in-depth understanding of what GS China is adopting and how it is affecting and reshaping the current regional order. This study explores how China is pursuing its economic, diplomatic and military means of GS to establish its dominance and contain the US in the Asia-Pacific region while safeguarding its own interests and steering the US and China towards the aversion of military conflict along with this; this study mainly focuses on how the conflict or cooperation between the powers is reshaping the regional order.

4. Regional and global perspectives and response to Chinese Grand Strategy

4.1. US response to Chinese Grand Strategy in Asia-Pacific

China emerged as a great economic power at the stage of the Asia-Pacific region, which, on the one side, helped the regional states to improve their economic conditions and to make the region more peaceful and stable, but on the other side, regional states showed their concerns

regarding Chinese intentions, so China's progress is threatening the regional states including the great powers in the region. Asia-Pacific powers/states respond differently and adopt different policies to counter China in the Asia-Pacific region, especially after the Chinese announcement of CPEC/OBOR and defence policies. Powers in Asia-Pacific try to make their defence stronger along with the diplomatic approach to balance China and secure their national interests. The US is also one of the biggest stakeholders in the region and enjoys the status of hegemonic power on the world stage, so Chinese GS also created anxiety in the US as well. US policymakers and officials are very concerned about China's intentions in the region.

The US responded to Chinese GS in the Asia-Pacific region by adopting diplomatic means, strengthening its military capabilities and making the relations with its allies stronger. These US policies for the region ignored the geo-economic condition of the region, and US policy to encounter security threats in the region through military means enhanced them. To maintain its dominant position in the world in general and Asia-Pacific in particular, the US will have to focus more on the economy, the way China is doing through OBOR to connect the region and world, which ultimately helps China to become more powerful and status of rising power in the Asia-Pacific region. China's aim is to connect Eurasia via BRI, and as a result, expects to stabilise the Western periphery, gain more influence in the region, propose a new model of connectivity different from the Western proposed model and link its economy with other regional states. How successful China's GS would be is the question of investigation, but the most important question here is how the US will respond to Chinese GS and what strategies the US is adopting to maintain its dominant status in the region (Khatoon & Sakeena, 2022).

China's naval spending is one of the most important factors that has attracted the world's attention, especially from the US. China's naval spending increased the geostrategic value of the region as, in response to such policies, the US is spending more on defence to secure its national and the alliance's interests in the Asia-Pacific region. China is spending more in East Asia to secure its interests in the South China Sea, which is another factor which got the world's attention. China changed its maritime strategy just to counter or in response to US interests in the South China Sea. China is spending either on military or developing peaceful diplomatic relations with the regional states to secure its economic interests and gain more influence in the region through economic strategies. China is posing a threat to the US's hegemonic status (Cavanna, 2018). China is challenging the US status in Eurasia and appears as a new competitor in the Asia-Pacific region. The biggest challenge for US policymakers is to handle this situation peacefully and turn the benefits towards the US and its alliances.

The US established military-to-military relations with the regional states on the one hand and built strategic partnerships with India and other regional alliances on the other. To create its hegemony and increase its influence in the South Asian region, the US tried to build the Silk Road between South Asia, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The US was adopting such policies to counter China and other competitors in the South Asian region. In response to such policies, China adopted the GS to extend its influence in the region.

Such policies of China threatened the US's dominant status in the region, which alarmed the situation in Washington and US in response, upgraded its relations with regional powers like Australia, Japan, and India with the strategy of "helping the South Asian states to maintain their freedom against the Chinese sphere of influence" at the top priority (Cavanna, 2018). US policies are mainly focused on the military, while China is focusing more economically, and they are increasing their influence on Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and other regional states by utilising the economy as a means to achieve their national interests. Both the US and its allies think that China's GS is posing threats to US interests in the Asia-Pacific region, and to counter the Chinese policies, the US will have to play a more active role and should utilise the economic means as compared to the spending more on military.

4.2. China's Grand Strategy in Asia-Pacific: Japanese perspective

Japan is one of the most important actors in the Asia-Pacific region. In recent years, observers noticed two big developments in Japanese foreign policy: first, they are fighting with the challenges posed by the rise of China, and second, they are continuously changing their security policies according to the regional order. Despite the dispute over Senkaku Island, Japan has managed to balance its relations with China. What diplomacy Japan is having and how they perceived the Chinese influence in the region can only be analysed by exploring the historical relations between Japan and China and the way Japan managed the balance between both the US and China (Sahashi, 2020).

After the end of the Cold War, Japan's position in Asia-Pacific changed dramatically, but now China's economy and military spending are more than Japan's, and it has become second to the US in economic progress. Japan is one of the most important states in the region, enjoying good relations with the US and China as well, despite the presence of conflicts. Japan's resources are quite less than it was used to as compared to the regional countries but found itself crucial for stabilising the regional order. At the end of the Cold War, Japan's military spending was two times of China's, but now China is too ahead in its military spending and economic growth as compared to Japan. China's economic growth is two and half times larger, and military spending is more than five times larger than Japan's; after this development, Japan has the status of the world's third-largest economy. But China, on the other hand, has appeared as the biggest competitor to the US in the Asia Pacific region. Now, the competition between both is not only about geopolitical nature, but it knows it is more about trade and technological advancement.

Japan, on the one hand, is the biggest ally of the US in the Asia-Pacific region and has conflict with China over the islands, but at the same time, China provides the biggest market for Japanese import/export goods. All such moves by Japan show how Japan's foreign and security policies are changing according to the current scenario because, for Japan, securing the national interests and stabilising the regional order is much more important. Japan is very aware of China's rise and its intentions and policies for the Asia-Pacific region along with the US (a sole

superpower) presence in the region, so it's just securing its national interests through balancing between both great powers. In 2013, Japan established the National Securing Secretariat, and their first security strategy focused more on Japan's proactive role in maintaining peace and spent more on enhancing the Japanese alliance system with other regional allies like India, Australia, the US, etc. Japan is maintaining peaceful relations with China just to get more for their mutual benefit and to play a constructive role in the peaceful regional order (Shiraishi, 2020).

Japan's official government and policymakers issued new policies to enhance Japanese national security and act as a deterrence against China in the Asia Pacific region. Japan's Prime Minister issued a new defence policy in 2013 and revised it in 2018, respectively, in which Japan emphasised the defensive posture in the southwest along with the new strategies to shift the defence and technological equipment and establishment of a new agency for weapons development. In 2015, a new security law was passed by the Japanese parliament, under which they allowed Japan's security forces to exercise collective self-defence but in limited circumstances. Was it the sovereign right, and can states use it in favour of their national security and to deter other states from resolving international disputes? It is also mentioned in Article 9 of Japan's constitution (Shiraishi, 2020). Following the Chinese GS for the Asia-Pacific rather than Asia, Japan has shifted its focus and started to pay attention towards the Indo-Pacific as well, where they felt that China is increasing its influence and trying to achieve China's dream of becoming a more powerful and regional hegemon. Japan, along with its allies in the region like Australia, the US, India and ASEAN countries, is working hard to abundant China to create its sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific region and to keep the region free and open for all the regional states (Satake & Sahashi, 2020; Pant, 2018, January 26).

This move of Abe shows Japanese intentions towards China's influence or rise in the Asia-Pacific region; before 2012, Sino-Japanese relations were not friendly because of the tension at Senkaku Island, but the Abe administration changed the status and brought the relations back to an even keel. Abe administration restored friendly relations between both Japan and China; a Japanese senior politician, along with Abe's secretary, participated in China's summit on the Belt and Road Initiative; in response to such a positive step, Chinese Prime Minister Li also visited Japan in 2018, and Abe visited China in 2018 as well. Japan is utilising its foreign policy as a tool to make itself strong enough to counter any regional threat, including the threats posed by China's rise. Abe also concluded the free trade agreement with TPP and Australia; even after Trump's announcement of withdrawal from the Transpacific Partnership, Japan and Australia were the powers to save it. Japan concluded not only the TPP but also the US-Japan FTA and EU-Japan FTA. As far as China is concerned, Japan decided not to be a part of AIIB, but they would definitely fund BRI projects with certain conditions (Schneider et al., 2021; Yu, 2017).

All of these policy initiatives by Japan show Japan's concerns, intentions and behaviour towards China, a rising great power in the Asia-Pacific region. Abe's security, diplomatic, economic, and foreign policy moves show that Japan is changing its policies to meet the

challenges posed by China's rise and changing balance of power order in the region. On the one hand, Japan is strengthening its security alliance and expanding its regional policy from Asia to Indo-Pacific on the other. Japan and its allies are very well aware of the reality that China can't be contained via military means only; that's why they are trying their best to engage China in the multi-forum organisations so that China itself could not be able to change the regional order unilaterally.

4.3. ASEAN's response to Chinese Grand Strategy

ASEAN countries are showing their concerns about China's rise as they are not clear about China's intentions and their policies about its rise in the Asia-Pacific region. They are even showing concerns about Xi as a leader of China; they are very closely observing Xi's personality and want to get the answer to the question of what China actually wants to be. Regional states have become the sandwich between the great powers like the US and China, and they are trying their level best to create a balance of power between the great powers to maintain order and stability in the region. They are equally trying to understand the Chinese intentions or policies towards the region along with the US commitments and capabilities to remain a regional leader. ASEAN leaders calculate China's policies differently, but there are some common factors that drive all of them along the same lines.

A common factor about Xi Jinping in ASEAN countries is that he was one of the most influential leaders in Chinese history after Deng Xiaoping. They argued that the way Xi changed its foreign policies and adopted new economic and military policies and his diplomatic approach is evidence of his ability to take action and then put effort into proving them right. They also believed that Jinping was a nationalist and that, for him, China's sovereignty and security were above all. He can't compromise on such issues, not even ignore them or put them at the second level. Jinping adopted the policy of friendly neighbours for ASEAN nations, but they are not sure about China's future intentions, especially for ASEAN; China can behave aggressively to secure its interests in the South China Sea. ASEAN leaders consider Xi as a threat in the ASIA-Pacific region as they believe that to secure their national interests and to counter the US in the ASIA-Pacific region, Xi can go to any level, and if in any case, the US and China meet with any conflict, that would be a worst scenario even especially for the ASEAN states as it will destabilise the region and force the ASEAN states to be at one side.

But despite all the above-mentioned concerns, ASEAN states are unable to resist the benefits of joining AIIB or OBOR. For security reasons, they can't ignore China again; China is managing security issues through bilateral agreements and using ASEAN as a regional forum. China has adopted the "pull and push strategy" by utilising all its economic, diplomatic, and military means to attract the ASEAN states and secure its own national interests in the Asia-Pacific region. The Chinese premier also announced in his speech that China is looking to strengthen its business relations with the Southeast Asian nations and will try to increase our people-to-people contacts as well. China's growing influence is not only seen by Chinese allies

in the region, but US partners also acknowledge China's increasing influence in Southeast Asia, so they are enhancing their military, economic and diplomatic ties with China. For instance, Thailand is boosting its defence relations with China, and even it has agreed to purchase China's submarine (Parameswaran, 2015, February).

The other regional states also want to settle the South-China Sea dispute, just like the Philippines president's stance over this issue. He wants to downplay the South China Sea issue within the ASEAN structure and start a new phase in Sino-Philippines relations. Regional states are well aware of the importance of the South-China Sea dispute, but they are reluctant to let this dispute undermine the regional order. Myanmar and Laos both admit good relations with China; as far as Laos is concerned, not a dramatic change in Laos could have been observed about China's rise or relations/shift towards China except a few. Malaysia is China's largest economic partner in Southeast Asia, and even still, good economic relations with China are the top priority of Malaysian policies. Despite the good relations, China's rise also raised concerns in Malaysia; some the officials, people from the opposition, scholars, and policymakers are not sure about the Chinese intention; they are worried that the Chinese rise can disturb Malaysian sovereignty and peaceful regional order (Parameswaran, 2015, February).

China's strategy of "push" sometimes proved to be a negative move for China, as in response to such policies, states in South Asia sometimes pushed themselves away from the Chinese sphere of influence and had to take the balance of power measures to counter China. Just like a clash between China and Vietnam in Hanoi Waters played a negative role, and the Vietnamese still refer to it back as a "loss of Strategic Trust" because of such policies, Vietnam has shifted its policies more towards the US and signed security agreements with the US (Parameswaran, 2015, February). Indonesia is the largest country in Southeast Asia; it also feels the effect of the rise of the Chinese in the region, especially its growing influence on the South China Sea. They are aware of the Chinese policies and influence in the South China Sea but are still reluctant to say anything against Chinese policies because of China's economic rise and Indonesia's dependency on the Chinese market. Indonesian presence in the Natuna Islands and showing cool reaction to the Chinese proposed defence showing clearly how Indonesia is resisting China's policies.

Singapore is known for its ability to balance between great powers; Singapore is not spared from Chinese influence as well. Government officials, including policymakers and diplomats from Singapore, are playing an important role in creating balance and maintaining the regional order in the Asia-Pacific region. They are trying hard to preserve unity in Southeast Asia on the South China Sea dispute. On the other hand, they are strengthening their relations with the US in the Asia-Pacific region to balance the Chinese influence in Asia-Pacific (Parameswaran, 2015, February). Thailand is one of the most important countries in Southeast Asia, which has signed the BRI to cooperate with China on different projects, including the transportation networks and driving the Thailand economy (Punyaratabandhu & Swaspitchayaskun, 2021). Thailand and China signed agreements for the construction of the Nong-Khai-Veitiane railway

project and cooperation with actions against corruption. They also met with a mutual consensus to cooperate in the field of scientific research, etc., but unfortunately, they somehow could not meet their target, which increased the negative perception of China in Thailand. Scholars, observers, policymakers and even politicians started to talk against China and showed a lack of confidence in Chinese promises and intentions.

They considered Chinese GS/OBOR just to dominate Thailand and to create its influence in the region as well. Scholars with a background in international relations and Chinese studies are also not sure about the Chinese intentions and future of the Asia-Pacific region; they stated that Thailand must be careful in signing the agreements under BRI as China is a great power, so it is difficult for the small countries like Thailand to balance them and negotiate with such a great economic power. In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, they added that BRI is a part of the Chinese GS, which may change the existing regional order not only economically and military dominance but also disturb the cultural order of the region as Chinese workers are migrating into different countries which may cause the conflict between Chinese and local people and such type of conflict in Thailand will disturb the internal security of Thailand. However, private sector businessmen consider it beneficial; they consider it as an opportunity to get more benefits and opportunities to interact with the other economies of the region. They argue that a private businessman will get more benefits from direct investment and being a part of different projects, as they added that BRI will expand the industry and, as a result, will create consumption and then jobs for the layman. They believe that such strategies will ultimately strengthen the trade relations between China and Thailand. As BRI will enhance regional integrity and bring prosperity, Thailand must welcome it.

On the other hand, government officials from Thailand reviewed the Chinese OBOR strategy time and again and considered it beneficial for both China and Thailand and even for the stability of the regional order. Officials from Thailand hope that cooperating with Chinese strategy will upgrade its industry, promote infrastructure development, develop the Thai industry, support in utilising and managing digital data, and last but not least it will promote cultural exchange programs, including the exchange of students (Punyaratabandhu & Swaspitchayaskun, 2021). Officials from Thailand calculated the benefits of the Chinese strategy very carefully so that it should result in a positive-sum or win-win game. Thailand's officials negotiated the agreements with great care, which can be witnessed during the progress and signature of the Thai-Chinese railway agreement.

Despite all the responses mentioned above and concerns, no sector suggested that the government should not be a part of BRI. All of them agree that Thailand can't ignore the benefits of BRI and that cooperation with China will undoubtedly bring prosperity to the country. China and Thailand have enjoyed very close and smooth relations for a long. So, Thailand must pay attention towards a clear status between both countries as their size of economic and other progress are not equal, so it may cause tension in future. Thailand must

consider other great powers as well, as in case of any tension between China and Thailand, it can negotiate with other countries.

India is an important player in Southeast Asia, but it's not an economic power as China is. Its economic integration is progressing well as India is continuously making efforts to establish good relations and resolve the issues with Southeast Asian countries so that they can counter China through connectivity in the region (Gong, 2018). China's increasing power in the region alarmed India and pushed it to take a more active part in regional activities. India is very well known for Chinese military and economic rise in the region, and to face China's economic and military rise in the region, India even has moved from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) (Pant, 2018). To counter the Chinese hegemonic status in the Asia-Pacific region, India has joined other projects as well. For instance, the Asian Highway Network is sponsored by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) along with the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (IMTTH).

To connect the Indian ports to the Sittwe port in Myanmar, India has also initiated the Mekong-India Economic Corridor. India did not stop here. Rather, they do have policies to connect Northeast India to Sittwe via inland waterways and roads. Despite the attractive projects of BRI, India doesn't want to be fully dependent on China by joining the BRI as they have a fear that after becoming more powerful, China will influence India (Yu, 2017). The lack of trust between India and China is playing a negative role, and because of the trust-building issue, India is reluctant to join BRI and has different perceptions about China's rise as compared to the other countries in the region. Somehow, India also considers the Chinese Maritime Silk Road as its strategy to increase its influence in the South China Sea and especially in the Indo-Pacific. India openly refused to be a part of BRI after the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Chinese naval activities in South Asia. The most recent military standoff between both increased the tension and made it even more difficult for China to get support from India.

4.4. China's Grand Strategy: A View from South Korea

After China's rise as an economic power and its military modernisation in the Asia-Pacific region, the world attention has shifted from Europe, the Middle East, and other regions to the Asia-Pacific. This situation increased tension in the regional states of Asia-Pacific as they were not sure about the upcoming regional order, especially when two or more great powers were confronting each other to save their interests in the region. This situation increased the burden on the shoulders of the regional states; they were confused about balancing their relations with two great powers (the US and China). The same is the case with the South Korea. Both the US and China put great pressure on SK to choose between them as the United States is the guarantor of Chinese security in the Asia-Pacific region, while economically, it is dependent heavily on China.

China's announcement of OBOR and MSR strategies has raised anxiety in the regional states as they are not sure about the Chinese intentions; the US has also shown its concerns regarding China's increasing influence in the region. So, the escalation of conflict between China and the US would ultimately harm South Korean national security as well. By keeping all the scenarios in mind, South Korea is suffering most from the ongoing conflicts in the region, as it considers China as the second most favoured nation after the US, but at the same time, it perceived threats from China's rise, and it is posing threats to South Korean interests in the region. The argument regarding South Korea's view of China seems contradictory as, on the one hand, it is the second most favoured nation, but on the other, they perceive it as a threat to their national security as well. But this is what has not only been observed in Korean people's behaviour towards China but also mirrored in Korean official policies towards China. Park's administration worked hard to strengthen South Korean trade relations with China; the Seoul administration also did the same, but on the other hand, even though it is not balanced against the rise of China, it is hedging. South Korea is one of the most important players in the Asia-Pacific, so understanding South Korea's policy towards the great powers is of much importance, too, because any policy shift in Korea's foreign policy can disturb the regional order and balance of power in Asia-Pacific.

Seoul attended the summit in Washington in 2013, in which they reassured that South Korea's foreign policy must remain US-centric. This policy shift ended the honeymoon period between South Korea and China. Regional states, including China, are not sure about South Korean strategies towards China, and to understand Seoul's policies for China, one must understand Seoul's perception of Chinese Strategies in the Asia-Pacific region. China is an emerging great power which is posing threats to its neighbouring countries. South Korea Shares an 880-mile border with China, and China overshadows South Korea in all aspects, which contributes to enhancing Korea's national power. China's power in the region and strategic competition between both countries are the reasons behind Seoul's worry about China's rise. Such threats are driving Korea's security strategies. Korea is spending more of its GDP on the defence budget, but it is far from the Chinese military spending. The other factor which is affecting South Korea's relations with China is the political system of the government. South Korea has been practising the democratic form of government for a long and is known as one of the most successful democratic countries in the world, but China, on the other hand, is a communist country; Seoul also feels threatened by the rise of a communist state in the neighbourhood which can disturb their governmental system too. After the Korean War, people from South Korea considers China as the second greatest threat to their national security after North Korea. Although South Korea is enjoying deep trade and economic relations with China, the majority of the Korean public still shares the lack of trust towards Chinese intentions.

China and South Korea established their diplomatic relations in 1992, and since then, their trade has been increasing day by day; it has increased even more than 35 times (Johnson, 2014). As a result, China became South Korea's largest trading partner in 2004, and in 2013, trade with China was about 26% of its total exports. Korea is heavily dependent on the Chinese

economy, and this factor is forcing Korea to strengthen its economic ties with China. They are both negotiating different trade agreements, including the FTA between them. They are both negotiating different agreements, including China-led free trade agreements between ASEAN and its FTA partners and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Despite the close economic relations, they both met with trade disputes frequently; even though they did not complain against each other in WTO or any other organisation, it often disturbed their bilateral relations. South Korea is very aware of its economic dependence on China, but it still perceives threats from China's rise. There is a consensus that cooperation with China is the basis for resolving the security issues with North Korea. The majority of Korean people have a perception that cooperation with China would ultimately result in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue along with the Korean reunification (Khan et al., 2022).

But on the other hand, it is clear crystal that even though China supports denuclearisation, it will never stop North Korea from nuclearization. Both North Korea and China have enjoyed good relations for a long time, not only economically but politically, as they are both communist countries. Even during the Korean War, China provided economic and military assistance to North Korea against South Korea. A reunited Korea is not in China's interest as if the Korean Peninsula gets reunited; China will have to share the borders with democratic plus US allies in the region. So, China can only prevent the US and its allies from its neighbour, North Korea. To secure its national security, China is providing political and economic assistance to the current North Korean regime. Between 2007 and 2013, China's trade with North Korea reached a record; it almost tripled in 2007. China wants to stabilise it; it wants peace and priority, but it would not take any punitive action against the current regime in North Korea. North Korea and China share security and strategic interests, and they have been witnessing such partnerships for a long, so breaking their ties is not an easy task. Strategically, North Korea is very important to China, so despite the growing strain in both countries, China is trying to manage the relations with North Korea, which is increasing anxiety in the regional states, especially South Korea. However, cracks between North Korea and China are providing an opportunity for South Korea to become more engaged and closer to China.

Historically, South Korea's foreign policy revolved around the balancing between the US and China for both economic and security reasons. But now the situation has been complexed for South Korea as, on the one hand, they consider China to be the biggest threat to their security, but at the same time, China is their largest trade partner. China's growth or tension in the Chinese periphery directly affects South Korea. South Korea can't avoid China in any case. Even despite being an ally of the US and having anxiety about Chinese intentions and relations with North Korea, South Korea can't resist China or balance against her. South Korea hopes that OBOR will bring economic prosperity to the region. However, the North Korean nuclear test is increasing anxiety and escalating conflict between both countries and affecting the Chinese OBOR project in the region, too. Both South Korea and China are optimistic about cooperating with each other in many other ways under OBOR, in which they can avoid the North Korean factor. Construction of the Trans-Korea railway is not the only project. Rather,

they can cooperate in the development of new industries and build infrastructure in developing countries, too. Ultimately, cooperative relations between China and South Korea will bring peace and prosperity to the region and help make Northeast Asia an economic zone.

4.5. Taiwan's Perspective on China's Strategies in the region

This section of the dissertation will deal with Taiwan's perception of China's rise and adoption of new strategies in the Asia Pacific region. This part will analyse Taiwan's behaviour towards Chinese strategies in the Asia-Pacific region, how they perceive Chinese rise and regional order, and the policy options for their country to maximise their interests in the region. People of any country play an important role in formalising the country's foreign policy. People, scholars, and policymakers in Taiwan consider China to be the biggest threat to their security and national interests in the region; they believe that historical relations between Taiwan and China are playing a negative role in maintaining peace and prosperity between them. People from Taiwan show distrust of Chinese intentions and believe that through OBOR, China wants to build its own financial structure and doesn't want to be dominated by the existing economic system of the region (Hsueh, 2016). Despite being the second largest economy on the world stage, China couldn't enjoy financial power because of the US veto power in organisations like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and its influence on the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

So, China wants to establish its influence in the financial organisation, which can result in conflict with the US in the Asia Pacific. To avoid conflict with the US and to create its dominance, China introduced its own financial organisation. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. As China is the 30 per cent shareholder of AIIB, it has veto power, too, and it's the first time China has enjoyed veto power in any financial organisation. Taiwan's scholars also added that the first intention of China was to be the regional hegemon economically, but they adopted OBOR as a part of their GS just to avoid the West because if they did not adopt this policy, China was having the only option to become a part of the western model and being a part of that model, the confrontation between China and Taiwan was inevitable. US announcement of its Rebalancing Strategy towards Asia-Pacific is also a factor behind the Chinese adoption of the GS as they don't want to have a political, economic or military conflict with the US, so they adopted this policies to avoid conflicts in the region. They further add that China adopted the GS to compensate for the Chinese losses as a result of not being a part of TPP. China did not join TPP as it was demanding more liberalisation of the economy, a fairer tax system, a private economy, freedom of information, human especially labour rights, etc., and to avoid such demands, China was reluctant to join TPP. In a nutshell, China would never agree to accept the demands of TPP, as these are totally opposite from the CPP's manifesto. For Taiwan, China wants to dominate the developing countries via the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and Chinese allies in the region tend to vote against the US in UNO (Stahler, 2014). So, they think that Chinese OBOR/GS will have a negative impact on the regional order; it will disturb the current regional order and peace in Asia-Pacific. These scholars are divided into two groups.

The first group argues that China adopted this policy to avoid a direct confrontation with the US and save Chinese interests in the Asia-Pacific region without the escalation of conflict, but the other group thinks that this policy would destabilise the current regional order. So, for them, China adopted a complicated GS, which is not easy to analyse.

5. Conclusion

China's GS for the Asia-Pacific states can be implemented through different strategies. However, it is not as straightforward as it seems because of the regional state's reservation over the Chinese intentions. Coordination between regional states and China is also difficult to achieve through Chinese GS. Despite the concerns, all the regional states support Chinese GS as they consider that Chinese projects can meet their infrastructure and other security and economic needs. China is trying bilateral and multilateral mechanisms to coordinate with the regional states. Although states have fewer reservations about OBOR, they are showing strategic and security concerns. China is trying to downplay the strategic implications of the economic initiatives, but most of the states in Asia-Pacific states consider such development as a tool to enhance Chinese influence in the region, and in response, they must have some policy options to counter China if it threatens their interests in the region. On the other hand, states sharing the South China Sea Disputes with China are also worried about relying too much on Chinese proposed economic projects. China's GS has sparked tension not only in regional states but also among the significant powers in the Asia-Pacific region. For instance, the US, India and Japan also show their reservation. Other major powers, like the US, offered alternative options to the regional states so that they could fulfil their needs and keep themselves out of Chinese influence.

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ORCID iD

Saima Manzoor <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3811-9667>

Abdul Rauf <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1404-2681>

Zunaira Majeed <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8217-4706>

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