China’s Role in East Asia

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Globalization and Rising Powers:
China and India as Global actors
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Introduction

East Asia is one of the most complex and politically controversial regions in the world. Several protracted conflicts threaten to undermine stability and security in the area. The issue of Taiwan has been a major focus of tension for many years. North Korea is the scenario of continuous nuclear crises and has a high potential to create instability in the near future. Other minor, but still key, conflicts are those of disputed territorial interests in North China Sea and especially South China Sea. In its rising process to world power, Chinese leaders face the challenge of defining a coherent and calculated Foreign and Security Policy, particularly in their most immediate regions. The road to establish a sphere of political, economic and security influence in East Asia might be long and difficult for China.

The paper analyses the main causes, implications and characteristics of China’s relations with its closest borders, focusing on one research question: Is China’s Foreign and Security Policy directed towards hegemony in East Asia? The question is relevant to see how China’s rise is affecting relations with third countries and changing geopolitics in a key strategic region. It also shows a picture of China’s political, economic and military might.

The academic debate around this topic is abundant: China’s rise is one of the main concerns of modern international relations. Avery Goldstein has one interesting approach to China’s East Asian policy (Goldstein, 2007). The contributions of Ikenberry, Buzan and Wæver –the latter from an English School perspective– are also worth mentioning (Ikenberry, 2005) (Buzan & Wæver, 2007). On this paper, two distinct International Relations theories will be used and compared to provide a thoroughly analysis: structural realism –mainly represented by John Mearsheimer– and neoliberal institutionalism.

The paper starts with an analysis of the main causes and interests that define China’s East Asian policy, both domestically and in a more global perspective. Secondly, the strategies and means by which China implements its regional policy, including its increasing participation in regional and global international organizations. Then follow the consequences of that policy, focusing on China’s relations with the other major powers in the region: Japan, South Korea and particularly the United States. After the analysis, there is a theoretical discussion of the two theories, to critically
assess their pros and cons in relation to the case. A final conclusion briefly summarizes the main points found in the research.

The methodology I follow consists on applying and comparing both theoretical approaches in each of the three mentioned aspects of China’s East Asian policy (politics, economy and military), to provide a broader answer to the initial research question. The analysis is focused on China’s involvement in the four main international conflicts of the region: Cross-Taiwan-Strait relations, North Korea nuclear crisis, and disputes in North China Sea and South China Sea. China’s relations with the other regional powers are also considered. The research does not intend to be a case-study, but only a broad analysis of China’s Foreign Policy taking into account all the major East Asian conflicts in which it takes part. What is important here is not the analytical deepness of the cases but the overall idea of China’s role in East Asia.

The two theories used are clearly opposed to each other. Structural realism would argue that China’s natural foreign policy would be focused on seeking expansion and hegemony over its own region by all means, and this is likely to increase or restart regional conflicts, mainly territorial and border disputes. On the contrary, neo-liberal institutionalism would state nearly the opposite: that China’s policy will not promote conflicts because relations with third countries are institutionalised in a way that it is a common interest to promote regional and global cooperation. The main premises of each theory are stated in the discussion. The contrasts between these parallel analyses may give a clearer image of the current academic debate on the rise of China. Other theories would also have suited the case, particularly constructivist theories and other variants of realism and neoliberalism, which might have produced totally different results.

Causes and interests behind China’s policy in East Asia

During the last 30 years, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has embraced globalization at an unpredictably fast pace. From being a marginalized, underdeveloped and in-looking country, it evolved to be an export-oriented economy, fully integrated
into international community. The changes proved its usefulness, and today China is probably the most dynamic country in the world in economic, political and military terms. But being a globalized country also has domestic implications. In the case of Foreign and Security Policy (FSP), China faces the challenges of being part of a more global system which may limit its capabilities and affect its actions. In the domestic area, China’s society in one of the most complex in the world; not only for demographic reasons but also for the wide variety of actors – both institutionalized and not – that seek to influence its policy, in spite of officially being a centralized, one-party system. At the end of the day, Chinese leaders have to take into account a number of factors when deciding China’s FSP in its nearer area (Kim, 2006: 300). What does it mean in relation to China’s sovereignty? Does globalization restrict or increase China’s range of maneuver? The two theories provide different explanations to these fundamental questions. Both coincide in the assumption of rationality of the State and neglecting the role of internal politics. It does not matter at all if we speak about an autocratic State (like the PRC) or a democratic one. The ultimate driving forces of China’s FSP are to be found solely on its domestic national interests, as interpreted by the political leadership. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, more important, the Party’s Committee of Foreign Affairs are the main bodies who design the main directions of FSP (Manion, 2010: 410).

Nevertheless, realism and neoliberalism have an opposite idea of what is globalization and which are its consequences for the role of States. For realism, globalization has increased the risk of conflict worldwide and created a more insecure international system (Mearsheimer, 2007: 86). As policy-makers seek to maximize their power, Chinese goal will be to establish a sphere of influence and eventually become the hegemon in its natural region: East Asia. And that makes conflict with other regional powers unavoidable (Saich, 2004: 306). China’s priority in Korea is the continuation of the North regime, which acts as a “buffer State” next to the threatening US forces (Saich, 2004: 313, 321) (Goldstein, 2007: 661). North’s denuclearization and economic reforms based on the “Chinese model” could be seen from China as a guaranty that stability would be secured. In Taiwan, the main goal is to prevent the government of the Republic of China (ROC) to declare independence by any means, including the use of force (Goldstein, 2007: 661) (Manion, 2010: 416). The territorial disputes in East China Sea between China and Japan concern sovereignty over Senkaku
Islands and the oil resources of its continental shelf, and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) rights over Cunxi gas field (Peterson, 2009). China wants to secure access to the gas and oil resources it needs to sustain its huge economic growth. Finally, in the South China Sea, PRC demands sovereignty over the whole Spratly archipelago and the maximum territorial and maritime claims for geostrategic and economic purposes (Odgaard, 1999). In both East and South China Sea, PRC bases its claims on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Zou, 2008: 147).

Neoliberal institutionalist globalization theory, on the other side, tends to be hyperglobalist, in the sense that it emphasizes the impact of globalization, not only on States but also on every societal actor, like enterprises, organized groups and individuals. The more radical academics herald the emergence of a new era in world history in which the Nation State would lose its central position as the sole tenant of political authority, thus effectively undermining the very bases of the modern Weberian State (Kim, 2006: 278). A moderate version, nonetheless, argues that the State may continue to exist although they will have to share power with a myriad new actors, both supra and subnational, public and private. This is the basis of multilevel governance theories.

From this point of view, China’s FSP is the result of the aggregation of multiple interests coming from the domestic, regional and global level. Chinese leaders have nothing but to transform these interests into political actions in spite that they do not have as much independence as one could think. If we look at the domestic level, we see how China’s development has brought a mass of new actors who want to participate in the policy-making of FSP (Kim, 2006: 299). Bankers, investors, exporters and middle-classes have eroded government’s authority while mass population are now able to exercise a lot of pressure (Johnston & Ross, 2006: 8) (Kleine-Ahlbrandt & Small, 2008). Being a regional power in East Asia would provide Chinese government with enormous legitimacy (Kim, 2006: 300). By the contrary, a war with Taiwan or a Fourth Strait Crisis could endanger internal stability and give arguments to an already organized middle-class opposition (Kim, 2006: 299). The regional factor also influences. Unlike what could seem at first glance, East Asia has common identity feelings based on culture and values and it is on this base that regional cooperation is increasing. Some have even put into discussion if an East Asian Community, modeled after the European Community and based on Sino-Japanese economic cooperation,
would be a feasible project (Minohara, 2010). The influence of regional and global
dynamics in Chinese East Asian policy is not questioned among neoliberal theorists.
And there are many political and economic reasons by which China’s rise may be an
opportunity rather than a threat for the region. (Kim, 2006: 290). All this would make
China extremely interested in peace and stability. In fact, neoliberalism founds no
indications that China wants hegemony in East Asia (Kim, 2006: 290).

Means and strategies of China’s regional policy

China exercises its political, economic and military influence in multiple forms.
In fact, these three elements cannot be strictly separated, and are usually combined in
China’s policy towards each specific country. Multilateral organizations can also be a
useful tool for China to pursue its regional goals. That could explain the interest it has
taken for regional fora like ASEAN+3, Six Party Talks or Asia Pacific Economic
Community, among others (Saich, 2004: 318). Structural realism and neoliberal
institutionalism differ strongly about China’s use of its capabilities to meet its goals.

For realists, China’s regional influence is mainly based on its increasingly large
military capabilities. Since the mid-80’s, the People’s Liberation Army is developing a
modernization program (Manion, 2010: 416). These improvements in hard power are a
clear indication that Beijing is able to put pressure in the tension points where it has
some interests. In the issue of Taiwan, the PRC has several dozens of strategic ballistic
missiles and even the threat of blockade to reach unification by force if it was necessary
(Ross, 2006: 22). The three Strait crises showed how China is strongly determined to
use force if peaceful resolution is not possible and how China’s military was an
effective deterrent for both the ROC government and the US. For realism, there might
be a time in which these crises will enable China to challenge the status quo and impose
a solution that fits its objective of “one China policy” (Goldstein, 2007: 668). In the
Korean theatre, China has privileged access to North Korean leadership because of the
“special relationship” and because it is its main supplier of goods and raw materials as
well as valuable diplomatic support (Ross, 2006: 37). Notwithstanding, deterrence also
plays a role in the peninsula. The region is the most highly militarized in the world
(Ross, 2006: 38), which decreases the possibility of dialogue and mutual cooperation and increases the risk of open confrontation, as in the crises of March 2003 and October 2006. China knows an armed conflict could end in the collapse of Kim Jong-il regime, forced reunification, and the presence of US troops at Chinese borders (Ross, 2006: 26). China fears this and, if it was the case, it would probably intervene as it intervened in 1950 (Ross, 2006: 29). In East China Sea, PRC has never threatened with use of force, but cooperation with Japan to reach a diplomatic solution to territorial disputes is far from being granted. Several incidents with Japanese military and strong popular anti-Japanese sentiments in China act as impediments for a negotiated agreement. In the South China Sea, PRC is confronted with ROC, Vietnam, Phillipines, Malaysia and Brunei in a vital are for its supply routes. Despite the agreement with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), signed in November 2002, naval skirmishes are still common and use of force not impossible (Zou, 2008: 152). In general terms, realism depicts an image of an aggressive China, with high potential to be a threat for peacekeeping in East Asia. While acknowledging the multilateral efforts China has made in Korea and South China Sea, some realists point out this can be a diversion strategy from the main priority: reunification with Taiwan (Goldstein, 2007: 658, 665).

Neoliberalism shows a completely different picture, based on China’s economic interests in the region and use of soft power tools. China’s growing economy basically depends on its integration in the East Asian system (Bijian, 2005) (Saich, 2004: 319) and this raises the costs of armed conflict and creates incentives for China to involve in peaceful conflict resolution. Furthermore, institutionalists point out that China’s crescent involvement in international organizations is an unequivocal sign that it wants to be seen as a “responsible great power” and to cooperate with the international community (Kim, 2006: 292) (Kleine-Ahlbrandt & Small, 2008). The fact that Taiwan is becoming more integrated with mainland, with mutual investments, trade and joint ventures increases the likelihood of a diplomatic solution (Ross, 2006: 22) (Saich, 2004: 316). The recent Chiang-Chen Agreements of June 2008 to December 2009, establishing direct flights, trade, economic and financial cooperation among others, widely support this vision (Straits Exchange Foundation, 2010). China’s reputation as a responsible power would also be affected if it was to use force against Taiwanese independence movement (Goldstein, 2007: 668). Korea is another example of how China acts as a “responsible great power”. In this case, China is committed to—and is in
fact the first promoter of multilateral dialogue to meet the objective of denuclearization (Goldstein, 2007: 660, 663), a goal shared with the US (Saich, 2004: 320). Before its (definitive) failure in 2009, the Six Party Talks were a useful forum for high-level discussion of the North Korean nuclear problem (Yinhong, 2008: 92). In 2004, China and Japan started several negotiating rounds to agree on the limits between their respective Special Economic Zones in the East China Sea. They ended in the June 2008 Arrangement to jointly develop the disputed areas (Peterson, 2009: 458, 462). Although the agreement is far from being complete—as it does not solve the dispute—and is not legally binding, there are hopes of mutual cooperation. In the South China Sea, China accepted to participate in multilateral discussions since 1995, when ASEAN (which has four members involved in the dispute) made a joint declaration against use of force in the Spratly Islands (Goldstein, 2007. 655) (Odgaard, 1999: 212). China-ASEAN negotiations ended in a Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, signed in November 2002, that banished use of force and established cooperation in some areas between China and the four ASEAN contenders (Moore, 2008: 36) (Zou, 2008: 153).

Global impact

In spite of international perception and rhetoric, China’s FSP is by far oriented towards its closest region (Saich, 2004: 318). Nonetheless, East Asian region is of great strategic value for all the great powers and in such terms, it is an excellent playground for global politics. Both main theories accept—though at different extent—the vision of a rising China as a great regional power in the form of increasing economic weigh, political involvement in multilateral fora or strategic military deployments since the end of Cold War—as a powerful Navy in Western Pacific—. The question then, is how will the rest of traditional powers react to and manage this new rising actor. If it is to become a regional power, does China need to reconsider its relations with the US, Japan or South Korea? Again, realism and neoliberalism provide much divergent explanations.

The former argues that China has a potential to be the regional hegemon by means of developing a more aggressive FSP. If it does so, conflict with the rest of great
powers would be unavoidable at the long term. China’s increasing presence in regional and global economy, trade, finance, and its role in security issues would change the regional order and, consequently, that of the world. In security matters, PLA modernization, relations with People’s Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Taiwan and presence in multilateral security organizations such as ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Council for Security and Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) or Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (Shulong, 2007: 160) have made China a powerful and key actor in every initiative on regional security (Swaine, 2008: 77). The US, the present regional hegemon, is becoming more and more concerned about China’s rise in the economic, political and security areas (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 179) (Swaine, 2008: 71). The US will seek to prevent the emergence of any other power in East Asia that can represent a threat to its economic interests, to the security of its trade and supplies and to the maintenance of peace and stability (Swaine, 2008: 73). As a consequence, US-PRC relations are and will be based on continuous threats to the status quo by the former and deterrence by the latter. For its contention policy and to keep its position in the Asia Pacific, the US depend on its huge forces stationed in the Korea peninsula, strategic bases in Japan, a more informal but efficient defense commitment with Taiwan and bilateral treaties with most of ASEAN Member States (Ikenberry, 2005: 134). An American retrenchment would have severe consequences for regional peace and would be a significant moral defeat (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 178). Actually, US policy since the end of Cold War has been to reassure its military presence in East Asia and to protect Taiwan, even with arm sells (Swaine, 2008: 84). The late crisis regarding these sells supports realist arguments. Indeed, the Taiwan issue has been the main obstacle to fluid relations between Beijing and Washington (Saich, 2004: 314).

Neoliberalism has the basic premise that conflict between China and the US is not unavoidable (Baum, 2008) (Swaine, 2008: 95). Common economic interests, global challenges and profound commitment to stability and peace-keeping in East Asia create a situation in which an open conflict would be extremely harmful for both China and the US. So, despite the differences between the two countries, they are being forced to cooperate. Another incentive for China to cooperate further may be its international image, something Chinese leaders really concern. China wants to be seen as a “responsible great power” and makes considerable efforts to develop a policy of cooperation and accommodation to the international system (Kleine-Ahlbrandt & Small,
It is said that the former Six Party Talks made some of the most important steps towards closer Sino-American relations (Kleine-Ahlbrandt & Small, 2008). In fact, the official Chinese position accepts US preponderant presence in East Asia, if not hegemony (Bijian, 2005). Relations with Japan and South Korea have also improved since 1989 (Yahuda, 2008: 86). The general perception in countries surrounding China is that it does not represent a threat or a challenge to their sovereignty. For instance, contrary to what realists predicted, there has surged no alliance of surrounding rivals in East Asia (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 180). In sum, there are no indications that China hosts expansionist intentions and the same idea that it will become the next hegemon in East Asia looks completely out of order for neoliberals (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 172). Neoliberal approach gives a general positive view over East Asian future. Dialogue between the main actors will create a security regime in which stability will be preserved.

Returning to the initial question, with which the paper started, we can reach the following answer. If we apply realistic theory to the case, the answer is definitely yes. China has the goal of achieving regional hegemony because it is vital to keep its enormous economic growth, and pursues this goal in a number of ways: by reinforcing its political, economic and military strength, and by exercising more pressure in all the main regional issues of conflict. These pressures may damage regional stability and possibly end in open conflict. By contrast, as seen from a neoliberal approach, China is not willing or capable to have hegemonic ambitions in its near borders. In fact, China’s rise might be helpful to East Asian security order because China’s embrace of economic, political and security globalization (although not by any means cultural) makes it more integrated into the international community and less likely to engage in hegemonic wars. China’s choose for multilateral solutions to its interest conflicts may be sufficient proof of its cooperative and peace-building intentions. That said, now it is time to have a more thoroughly comparison of the two theoretical approaches used in the analysis.
Theoretical discussion

Structural realism departs from three basic theses: great powers operate in an anarchical system (in which there is no ultimate arbiter), all powers have offensive military capabilities that can potentially infringe harm to others, and the actual intentions of each power (being them revisionist or status quo defenders) remain unknown to the rest. This combination of factors makes conflict among great powers very likely (Mearsheimer, 2006, 2007: 73). Applied to our case, if China is a rational actor it will try to maximize its power, and doing so at the expenses of the US, who has a strong presence in a region considered by China to be its own backyard. A key point in realist arguments is how they explain China’s apparent preference for multilateralism in international relations –both at the global and regional levels–, a policy that seems to support neoliberal arguments. Realism answers that Chinese multilateralism is not aimed at cooperation among third parts but to establish a sphere of influence in smaller States in order to counterbalance US power (Moore, 2008: 37, 44). China-ASEAN relations, for instance, would follow that pattern. Among structural realists, Mearsheimer leads a particularly hard version he calls offensive realism. For him, the future of China’s relations with East Asia will be increasingly tense. China would seek to acquire the status of regional hegemon as the only way to secure its huge economic growth (Mearsheimer, 2006). China’s number one priorities will be to expel US troops from East Asia and reunification with Taiwan (Mearsheimer, 2006). The US will seek alliances with all the smaller powers in the region to content China (Mearsheimer, 2006, 2007: 83).

In general, structural realism offers a very negative portrait of the international situation that may take place after the rise of China; not only in East Asia but worldwide. Its claims are based on historical analysis of similar situations that took place in the past. Actually, if we base the analysis only on historical data, this new Cold War between China and the US, focused on the Asia-Pacific theatre, may very well happen. Nevertheless, the international context is not the same in the 21st century than during Cold War or during First and Second World Wars. The main drawback of structural realist theories is that they do not fit properly with the process of globalization and its consequences. Globalization means that China depends on the US market, investments and bonds to keep its economic growth. Open conflict with them is simply
not an option for Chinese leaders. As we have seen, even on security matters, China depends on the US to avoid undesirable conflicts as close from its borders as Taiwan and Korea peninsula. And of course, political cooperation is a necessary means to avoid undesirable conflicts. The two powers are bound to cooperate. This is not to say that structural realist assertions are wrong or misleading. Nonetheless, they may need to incorporate this new context of international relations.

Neoliberal institutionalism, on the other side, departs from a completely distant assumption: that world policy, economy and even security are highly institutionalized (Martin, 2007: 124). Institutions can take the form of international organizations, international regimes and multilateralism (Martin, 2007: 111). The first are formalized agreements which create good conditions for bargaining between States and include some enforcement mechanisms to be sure that all the members respect the agreements and avoid free-riding. The second are a set of non-formalized principles, norms, rules and procedures. The latter takes the form of cooperation between three or more States (Martin, 2007: 111, 115). Still, neoliberal institutionalism, like structural realism, believes the main actors in the international system are the States. Even the most formalized organizations do not possess self-interests. Their creation is based on a principal-agent relationship (Martin, 2007: 111). Since 1989, China makes extensive use of the possibilities given by institutionalization of economy, policy and security. Economy has been China’s number one priority and so it has promoted Free Trade Agreements with many other countries, the most important being the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which entered into force last January and covers 4.5 trillion dollars annual trade (Yang, 2010). It has also promoted economic cooperation in the framework of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, ASEAN+3 or East Asian Summit. All these links have contributed to the creation and reinforcement of common interests throughout the region, something often emphasized by neoliberals (Moore, 2008: 35, 37). Contrary to realists, neoliberals argue that China’s multilateralism has the goal of reaching pacific integration respecting common interests and not to dominate foreign countries or economies. This positive and mutual-benefit situation would make further integration desirable and most possible (Moore, 2008: 48).

These situations seem to leave neoliberal institutionalism in a preeminent position compared to other theories when studying the Chinese case. And, generally speaking, it is so, since neoliberalism is widely accepted among the academic
community. Nonetheless, no theory is completely exhaustive and neoliberal institutionalism is no exception. It takes for granted that the present context and conditions would continue indefinitely, and this is not granted at all. The last economic crisis has showed the world, and China in particular, how a globalized economy is not a guaranty for indefinite economic growth. A new wave of protectionism and nationalism has raised, and makes pressure to change the course of events. It is known that there is a faction in China that rejects globalization and World Trade Organization membership and advocates for a harder line to create a system of alliances against the US (Kleine-Ahlbrandt & Small, 2008). Whether this option has possibilities to prevail in the midterm or not, it is impossible to know. What is clear is that neoliberal institutionalist hegemony in the academic field, although strongly rooted, is far from being granted in the coming years. The theory should develop and adapt to new and possibly challenging environments. Time will show if future events in China’s Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia will support them or not.

These two theories only represent one of the multiple ways to look at and discuss the problem of China’s East Asian hegemony. In fact, one could argue that both theories have more in common than what could be thought at first glance. Both theories have strong “Western” influences, as they are created and distributed in the same academic institutions. I will only make a few remarks on the topic of “Western” theories. In recent years, a new debate has rose among international relations scholars about the possibility of developing new theories from Asia and based on Asian context and values. The debate was opened less than three years ago by Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (Acharya & Buzan, 2007a,b) and in the near future, it will probably develop into new ideas and approaches. The topic is particularly interesting in relation to China, which has ever wanted to develop a theory with “Chinese characteristics” to explain its own raise and implications for the world order, in particular for East Asian order (Acharya & Buzan, 2007b: 429). For the moment, some Chinese international relations theories try to emphasize the benefits of a Chinese dominated East Asia relating them, through one way or another, to the old tributary system of the Ming dynasty that, for centuries, granted Chinese preeminence in a peaceful and stable East Asia (Acharya & Buzan, 2007b: 429). Others emphasize the common Confucian values, such as honor, loyalty and identity, often in contrast to “Western” approaches, which
study interstate relations exclusively on rational calculations (Acharya & Buzan, 2007a: 194).

These efforts to complement, and at some point to challenge, traditional international relations theories are positive in general: the broader the tools to approach the rising of China the deeper our understanding of the problem. In this paper, two of the classical theories, structural realism and neoliberal institutionalism, have been used. An interesting challenge for future investigations would be to study the China case using and comparing “Western” and Asian theoretical tools.

Conclusion

This paper finishes with the same question it started with: Is China rising to a hegemonic position in East Asia? The answer remains open to further discussion. This analysis has been far from exhaustive and only provided some theoretical arguments to support one or another position. Notwithstanding, two general ideas can be extracted from this work. First, any theory that wants to clear the way in this complex theater needs to take into account the context of the 21st century and globalization in particular. Globalization has changed international relations in a very radical way and has created new challenges for traditional international relations theories. The second aspect concerns rising powers and their behavior. There is also plenty of literature –mainly based on historical sources– about this topic. Does a rising power like China (or India) invariably pursue its goals using the way of conflict? Or are we dealing with a new and more positive phenomenon, the version of a “peaceful rise”? It is impossible to know exactly which intentions a State has, particularly when, as shown in part one, these intentions are diffused and only partially aggregated by the political elites. Even though, it is clear that since the end of Cold War, China has taken a more active role in the region and has spread its influence over Taiwan, Korea and East and South China Sea.

The rise of China and India is perhaps the most salient issue of modern international relations and some even see a tendency to a shift of the center of power from North America and Europe toward Asia, particularly East Asia (British Ministry of
Defense, 2010). The China-ASEAN FTA of last January is a good example of how important is for these two rising powers to secure its interests in its own region before going abroad. China’s increasing role in East Asia could be only the first step towards a new international system.
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