

Chinese Tidings of Role Conception in Southeast Asia

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Abstract: This article is aimed at providing a thorough analysis about the way in which China constructs an impersonation of its presence in Southeast Asian affairs. The Southeast Asian region is particularly important for Chinese foreign policy, as it was usually portrayed of being adjacent to Chinese backyard-type of influence. With the same task of character and of function, China was able to maintain a specific closeness to Southeast Asian affairs, much like in the way it was able to do to the Northeast Asian affairs – the sub-region to which it forebode an act of belonging. The incipit part of the article is directed to pinpointing the glaring contemporary effect of Southeast Asian Affairs in Security Studies. We will be referring here to the arguments tapped into, that make the region a focus of attention, from the perspective of economic development, and also from the perspective of strategic bearing. The last and the most turgid part of the article is directed to the desultory portraiture of China's presence in Southeast Asian affairs. A historic overture will be in-played by the arguments presented, as well as security ratiocinations regarding the posture, that China understands to insert in the bi- and multilateral frameworks of engagement with the regional actors.

Keywords: Southeast Asian Affairs; Security Studies; Role-Playing; Auto-Conceived Role; Middle Kingdom

1. Southeast Asian Affairs – The Glaring Contemporary Effect in Security Studies

The *Southeast Asian region* has almost always been interstitial for regional security studies. The *Southeast Asian* region has never been the site of particular research interests, especially in the past century. References about *Southeast Asia* have always been very thoughtful to the studying of other Asian analytical inquests.

The research conducted on *Southeast Asia*, especially during the past century, has been prodding and revealing other in-using analysis. *Southeast Asia* was not singularly searched upon as a region, but with couplets and dyads of examination¹.

References of *Southeast Asia* were usually made in a twosome pitch: Chinese, Indian or Japanese politics on *Southeast Asia*. *Southeast Asian* politics in *China*, *India*, *Japan* were somewhat lower-skilled on analytical partners. Even the academic research did not consider the subject as a self-governing likelihood in regional studies.

The 20th century history of *Southeast Asia* has been quite eventful, self-reliant in quantity and rate of variation. Of course, a white-collar reviewing² of the region mattered, as long as the extra-regional influences in the region were tempered intensely.

It could have been that the research class word-widely was very conservative, even to the point, externally-induced, that grass-roots initiation of *regional orders*³ and autonomous regional management in *Southeast Asia* did not prove proportionate sufficiency in order to be studied as such, and in the refactoring of extra-regional foreign policies in *Southeast Asia*.

To the end of the 20th century, the study of *Southeast Asia* has been dilated as a point of interest in international research. The revivification of interest came from the fact that the economic growth rhythms have been positive, despite the economic meltdown of the *Asian Financial Crisis*⁴.

¹ Usually, *Southeast Asia* was a parallel axis of investigation, acting along the lines of the researchers' mindedness for the Asian continent at large.

² We utilized the term - *white-collar reviewing* - with the meaning of *first-class* and *first-rate-reviewing* of the region;

³ We utilized here this term – *regional order* - with the meaning of regional customary ways of operation that produce a legal and constraining design in which the regional actors can exchange interactions, under the advisement that in these interactions they will resort to a conduct rule-based and rule-conformed.

⁴ Until *the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-1998*, *Southeast Asia* hosted countries that were regional specimens of what was described to be: *The Asian Miracle* – an expression utilized to describe the way in which certain Asian economies, achieved the status of being affluent economies in world economics, by experiencing manifold increases in their per capita income and technological complex headway.

In *Southeast Asia*, especially Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia were fitted in the pattern of *the Asian Miracle* for having applied export-led strategies with the tenets of corporate management for instrumental purposes. *The Asian Financial Crisis* proved that their strategy did not

This revivification was also set ahead by the fact that regional ware of security utilities, embodied by *ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations*, successfully transmuted the Cold War period, not only presenting actuality in the post-Cold War period, but also presenting continuance, a continuance that leaped and bounded from the poll of accord and unanimity of its member states. No matter how hard one can try to find a common progenitor, that was an underlying motive in the formation of *ASEAN*, it is very hard to find one.

In *Southeast Asia*, no common language, no common administrative system, no common political regime, no common religion, no common resemblance in political structures, no analogy in the measurement of the performance of the political domestic structures, no common economic decrement trends, no common ontogenetic means and instruments of statecraft – are causes enough for connectedness in unity and harmony. Such arrant diversity has been the cause of many inter-state temperance during *Southeast Asian history*.

With diversity so thoroughgoing in the hearts and minds of the *Southeast Asian* people and of the political elites, it was very hard for a succession of according to be produced and actually exert strength and faculties of unanimity.

The regional states had to find a common descriptor that would best underwrite the source of common interests, in way that would not make their participation into such a venture unskillful. We could not disregard the fact that the amount of motion along this direction has been phenomenal.

As we mentioned above, *Southeast Asian* studies have been a suburban frontier of area studies. One of the reasons for this consideration is the fact that *Southeast Asian* studies were considered too context-dependent participles.

This dependence on context was also due to the extra-regional involvement in the region: at first, during the Cold War, *the bi-polar anchor-casters*¹ impeded the theoretical sophistication that *Southeast Asia* could have gained and then, in the post- Cold War Era, American *uni-polar involvement*² in the developing world.

present an honest measurement of the status of their domestic economies and the fact that they were unprepared to face the unpredictability and unfamiliarity of true economic globalization.

¹ This term – *bi-polar anchor-casters* – was used within an indirect testimonial of *the bi-polar antagonist competition* for world dominance between *US* and the Soviet Union.

² With reference to *the uni-polar moment* celebrated by the *US* as the winning camp of the Cold War.

These factors held back the disciplinary specialization of *Southeast Asian Studies*. Nowadays, the causal agency for the new-empowered emanation of *Southeast Asian Studies* and for the global focus on *Southeast Asia* can be explained through a double impairment of factors: *regional* and *extra-regional*¹.

Regionally speaking, according to the estimates released by the OECD, *Southeast Asia* will experience a growth of 5.5% over the next five years². These estimations mean that *Southeast Asian* economy will return to the levels of development that *Southeast Asia* had before *the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-1998*³.

It appears that the investments made in science and education, in the health system and in the remuneration system have yielded profit.

More than that, the regional states` ambition to align regional standards to international standards, through the creation of *an ASEAN Community*, based on three pillars: *ASEAN Political Security Community*, *ASEAN Economic Community* and *ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community*, has, indeed paid off. From an extra-regional standpoint, the regional – by the offices of *ASEAN* – has been plastering external relations with important extra-regional actors: *China*, *US*, *EU* standing on the empyrean.

With the resurged attention that these actors have been giving the region, *Southeast Asia* has taken seizure of the world`s vigilance. This combined with the important geostrategic position of *Southeast Asia*- being located at the overlap road between the most important maritime lanes in world sea-fare and at the interweaving of the communication passageways between important hot spots⁴ - make the casting of plenty of limelight upon the region a natural fact.

¹ In this way, the symmetry with *the binomial nomenclature* of the thesis – *the regional/extra-regional variables* was ensured.

² The data was contrived from the *OECD Southeast Asian Economic Outlook 2013 – with perspectives on China and India (Executive Summary)*, electronic documentation in informatics system, made by accessing: <http://www.oecd.org/dev/asiaandpacific/SAEO2013%20E-Executive%20summary.pdf>, *date of accession: 24th of November 2013, accession time: 14:56 p.m.*

³ According to the UK Guardian, electronic documentation in informatics system, made by accessing: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/datablog/2012/nov/18/oecd-south-East-asia-economic-outlook#data>, *date of accession: 24th of November 2013, accession time: 12:23 p.m.*

⁴ With reference to the communication passageways between Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

2. China`s Auto-conceived Role in Southeast Asian Affairs

When considering *China`s role* in global affairs, we are *usually* stuck with a sense of consternation: How do we *China`s* strategic potential globally? How is this potential circumvented regionally, especially in *Southeast Asia*? How much is *China`s* reluctance to engage in some areas of the *Southeast Asian* regional affairs a possibility of incurring loss and misfortune for *ASEAN*, in general, and for every *Southeast Asian* state, in particular? Is *China`s* potential of making mischiefs scary or just a sign of loss of maturity?

Answers to such questions cannot be properly occupied in an agreeable fashion by the presentation of Chinese role in Southeast Asian affairs. Yet, this could become a very interesting analytical point of departing further evaluations.

Compared to other regions in the world, for *Southeast Asia*, *China* has always been there!¹ Even from the times of Imperial *China*, based on the tributary relations between *China* and the *Southeast Asian* states, *China* regarded *Southeast Asia* as a place of special sensitivity where norms, beliefs and values are shared among the different actors of the region.

Tributary relations were part of *the sino-centric vision* upon the world and represented for the regional states a first indication of the concept of *the regional order*. In a way, *China* was fulfilling a special mission of socializing/sinicizing the states close to its periphery. *China* was *the Middle Kingdom*, a kingdom surrounded from four cardinal points by people on a smaller pedestal as far as culture and civilization was concerned.

It was *China`s* duty to protect those people and to integrate them into the boundaries of its civilization and culture. Ideas and conceptions were the master

¹ According to the scholar Fairbank John, there are three areas that characterize *China`s* relations with the rest of the world: *The Sinic Zone* – which includes the peoples and the countries closest to *China`s* geographical premises like Vietnam (*mainland Southeast Asia*) and North Korea. *The Inner Asia Zone* – which includes the non-Chinese people whose territorial cultural areas are very close to *China`s* cultural area, in terms of geographical proximity, and *the Outer Zone* – which includes the nations and people that nurture an attachment to *China* and are willing to keep close contacts with *China*, but, at the same time, that are separated by waters and land from the Chinese territory – in this category, the states of maritime *Southeast Asia* are the most likely to be included. The references to John Fairbank`s work have been made by: Mondejar Reuben and Chu Lung Wai – *ASEAN-China Relations: Legacies and Future Directions*, in: Leong Khai Ho, C.Y. Ku Samuel (edt.)(2005), *China and Southeast Asia: Global Changes and Regional Challenges*, Institute of *Southeast Asian Studies*, Singapore.

builders of *China's role* in regional and global affairs. The majority of these ideas were effectuated, with *harmony restoration* in mind¹.

Imperial rulers take on battles to preserve the purity of the Chinese cultural area – that was represented by the central area of the Chinese Empire. It was there that all Chinese power came from. The peripheries were not considered sources of power, of culture of civilization.

Once taken into the Chinese cultural area, there was no independent life allowed for the elements situated in the periphery of the Chinese Empire. *The Imperial order* was emancipated on two important concepts: *de*² and *dao*³. One of the most important principles of global order was *the lesser value* attributed to *legalism*. The *legalist doctrine* – of enforcing and putting into effect legal norms and rules – was given a lower status in the imperial view on the world order, as it was seen as a mechanical artifact, whose use was improper in *Imperial China* and in its peripheries.

To blame was the fact that imperial rulers saw *legalism* as improper and impersonal. *China* and *Southeast Asia* did not use jointly the same principles of

¹ When harmony and balance were spoiled, political order had to be rectified from the top and the spoilers had to be eliminated. The restoration of balance and harmony was a moral mission of those who were located in the highest ranks of the political hierarchy. The same rules applied for inter-state relations: hierarchy in inter-state relations was to be accepted like some sort of a datum. It was the preoccupation for the one that was situated on a smaller ladder that drove *the missions of restoration* in *Southeast Asia*. *The missions of restoration* – or warfare – were presented like missions of liberation from perpetual chaos; Only in this way were these missions allowed, even if the arrogation of order restoration was frequent; These ideas of *world order* – which were also applied to the regional order for the vassal *Southeast Asian states* – had a deep Confucian root. Confucius urged for a moral conduct in political leadership and management. Confucius saw the flattening of hierarchies as something very malign for society, in narrow and broad terms; Confucius thought that hierarchies had to be respected as much as possible. *The disrespect for hierarchies was the major source for conflict and for chaos to emerge*; Of course, the Chinese political leaders saw that alterations of the Confucian principles were in order for the purposes of transferring Chinese ideas into the tributary states. The transfer of Chinese ideas into the tributary states happened usually by war – a behavior that *Confucianism* did not approve or condone. Also, streamlining the *Confucian way of thinking*, a leader must represent an inspiration, that can usually be achieved, by observational learning. But, in the *Confucianist view*, a leader must possess in-born qualities to be that inspiration and must treat his subjects with kindness and in a good-natured way; *Confucianism* did not encourage the expansionism of the Chinese Imperial Era; *Confucianist ideas* were truncated and interpreted by false mutilation and addition. However, the settled determination of the Chinese imperial leaders was careful to pick on the elements needed to build *the exceptionalist view* upon the world of the *Chinese Imperial Era*.

²*De* – meaning *virtuous power*.

³*Dao* – meaning *natural order*.

governance, nor the same political philosophy. *Southeast Asian* kingdoms were based on *the mandala system* of state-craft. Power centralization was not that important for the *Southeast Asian* states, as it was for Imperial *China*.

The mandala system did not awaken in the *Southeast Asian* kingdoms an assiduous striving to control the peripheries, or to specifically define the peripheries. The *Southeast Asian* kingdoms were mounted together by the easiness of state-description. Territorial boundaries were not drawn by the *Southeast Asian* rulers, as they did not have the power to sanction their bending by other kingdoms or empires.

One can imagine *the mandala system* - as a dense crowd of concentric circles one contained in the inner edge of the other – with no enclosed link to circle standing in the center. Despite the fragmentation of the political power of the *Southeast Asian* kingdoms, they had an inner desire to manipulate resources, at their own liking and to gather as many resources as possible to make the vaning of power a distant prospect.

As compared to *Imperial China*, the *Southeast Asian* states¹ seemed not interested in the continuance of power holding. According to Indian precepts (with a double lineage – Buddhist and Hindu), those who held power, would only exercise it in a limited, temporary fashion.

Power was not a grant by Divinity that had to be cherished as a life-long possession. In this respect, the *Southeast Asian* states were more flexible towards the constancy of leaders in their political life. In general, laxity was an important characteristic of the *Southeast Asian* states. This tells a lot of the structure of expectations of the extra-regional actors the *Southeast Asian* states interacted with.

When *Imperial China* talked about the spiritual fulfillment that the tributary relations would bring to the *Southeast Asian* kingdoms, the *Southeast Asian* states believed that power and the political configurations, from which power evolved,

¹ We will be using the association of terms: *Southeast Asian* states, not in the modern way, but to show the fact that the different tributary missions that *Imperial China* financed in the region that today has come to be known as *Southeast Asia*, found some sort of political organizations, in which leadership was fully translated into a structured design. These form of political organization, in order to survive, accepted the conditions imposed by *Imperial China*; The Chinese rulers exposed concern and solicitude in interacting closely with the leaders of the *Southeast Asian* kingdoms; Usually, the tributary missions were sent to the Chinese Emperor. They would be received as a sign of undue respect from the sender's side; Only the Vietnamese rulers, out of all the *Southeast Asian* states, chose and were accepted to pay tribute personally to the Chinese Emperor.

were dependent on *karma*. Before reaching the karmic point, power had a life-cycle of its own on Earth. *Karma* gave the lack of regularity of the exercise of power. This is why, for the *Southeast Asian* kingdoms, provisional power was a relief while permanent power was an abstract manufacturing.

The Chinese Emperor represented a colligation between the celestial power and the Earth. The Chinese Emperor reigned, by will of Divinity and with a mandate endorsed by Heaven. The person of the Chinese Emperor had an exceptional aura upon him, as he could have made settlements and verdicts on Earth that would reconstitute order, without fear of being wrong. If he failed and other dynasties succeeded, then, this meant that the Chinese Emperor had lost the divine mandate to rule, so another person had to take on the job of ruling and replace him.

Curiously, the *Southeast Asian* kingdoms had, in comparison with the Chinese view upon statecraft, a more secular approach, although not less spiritual. It was, as a matter of fact, a view that was not so devotional to Divine observances. The *Southeast Asian* kingdoms professed a policy of adaptation and accommodation towards the Chinese worldview, given the high esteem of tolerance and acceptance their political culture took on. Specificities of their own political culture remained, whether the contacts with Imperial *China* were ablazed or infrequent. The end of *Imperial China* in 1911¹ did not mean that the old, Sino-centric view upon the world died also.

If, during the days of *Imperial China*, *China* saw itself as stellar in the inter-state relations taking place on the Asian continent, the same idea of centrality in Asia was propelled by *China*'s further actions.

After 1911, *China* underwent many years of domestic upheaval, culminating with the collapse of the Nationalist government and the establishment of Communist rule. Revolutionary *China* did not find easy to adapt to a hostile environment for Sino-centricity.

China was no longer the *Center of the World* –as professed by the Chinese ancestors of the Communist leaders. *China* became² an isolated country regionally and globally. The Communist leaders had to reinvent a *role* for *China*.

Its forking had to be consistent world-widely and regionally. The past, even if rejected for its mistakes, could still offer universally acceptable lessons. The

¹ When the overthrow of the *Qing Dynasty* took place.

² Even if only for a short period.

Communist leaders itemized *the idea of harmony* and *harmony protection* as a midpoint on which to build on the *role* that Communist *China* would play in world and regional affairs.

The Communist leaders understood that time was a unifying factor and the only safe term of reference for the interpretation of a country`s destiny¹. This time, in the international system, there was not only one *China*. There were two *Chinas*. There was a lot of conjecture and surmise regarding *China*`s new status in the international system². The past was perfect for conferring to the newly founded People`s Republic of *China* a softer outlook. *The role conceived by the national elites* was the *role of peacefully co-existing* with the other nations³.

It was a new recipe of five principles: *mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence*. These principles were enunciated in 1954.

On their bedrock, Communist *China* was determined to lose the choosy character that was prevalent in the foreign policy of Communist *China* and to develop a more commodious diplomacy. *China* stood firm in stating that there were no states with which *China* did not want to interact. *China* was open to interactions that did not infringe the five principles or its sovereignty.

The new foreign policy emphasized the importance of *communitarianism*, following *the great Confucianist tradition*: “At no time and in no circumstances should a Communist place his personal interests first; he should subordinate them to the interests of the nation and of the masses. Hence, selfishness, slacking, corruption, seeking the limelight, and so on, are most contemptible, while

¹ It was not *the imperial approach to time and history* that the rulers of *Imperial China* had – in which there were components of time`s immovable eternity in the power that concentrated in their hands; Time was understood in the present and *the idea of harmony* was linked to *the present time*.

² Between 1945-1971, *China* lost the United Nations` membership.

³ „This principle was expounded in the common *Programme* adopted by the *First Session of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference* on 29 September, 1949 as well as in the *Announcement of the Central Government of the People's Republic of China* made by Chairman Mao Zedong at the proclamation *Ceremony Marking the Founding of the People's Republic of China*. It embodied the major content of the *Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence*” - electronic documentation in informatic system, made by accessing: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/ziliao/3602/3604/t18053.htm>, date of accession: 19th of November 2013, accession time: 17:29 p.m.

selflessness, working with all one's energy, whole-hearted devotion to public duty, and quiet hard work will command respect"¹. (Mao, 1938)

The new security concepts included implementing *communitarianism* and cohesiveness in the domestic public life and a conciliatory, placid approach in foreign affairs. Concomitantly, *China* supported revolutionary warfare and Communist insurgencies in its backyard: *Southeast Asia*. *Southeast Asia* and *Northeast Asia* appealed to *China*'s deputation of exporting the products of its Cultural Revolution, beginning with its strategic neighbourhood.

Under the *SEATO* aegis - that was founded in 1966 – was created to foil the spillover of the Communist insurgencies from *China* to *Southeast Asia*. Before that, in 1962, *US* and its allies concocted *Plan 4* – a secret plan meant to protect *Southeast Asia* against a Chinese military invasion that was thought to be nearing.

It was a plan that entailed the use of nuclear weapons to protect *Southeast Asia* from becoming a region with a semi-colonial status towards the Chinese. Some signs of worry were already there: in 1945, after Ho Chi Minh declared the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Indochina became a theatre of military operations in which guerilla warfare and Communist insurgencies preponderated; in 1948, Communist insurgency broke out in Malaya, while in 1948, the Malayan Secret Service denude the Communist insurgency's plans for revolt; Indonesia, from the mere start, declared *a zero-tolerance policy* towards the Communists. Communism was feared of because of its unsteady effects upon the regional security environment. *China* was blowing a Cultural wind of change in *Southeast Asia*, something that could not have impelled passivity from the *Southeast Asian* states.

By *redefining its role*, *China* sought major changes in the security environment of the approximate regions. *China* was not that keen on practicing *role-adaptation*, but was rather willing to adapt the proximate, regional security environments to its own *role*. In this period, *China* played a double *role* in foreign policy: *the role of peaceful actor* and *the role of Communist growth-ranker*.

¹Electronic documentation in informatic system, made by accessing: http://afe.EASia.columbia.edu/ps/China/mao_being_Communist.pdf, *date of accession: 18th of October 2013, accession time: 18:06 p.m.*; These ideas refer to the individual sacrifice for the public good and well-being, ideas whose proponents include the pillars that *Confucius' communitarianism had stood for*.

Attention was drawn to the excesses *China* made for the accomplishment of its goal-setting. An important turn for *China* was the defeat of the *Gang of Four* by the group coordinated by Deng Xiaoping and the entering of *China* in a new era of development and innovation from 1977.

China would no longer make investments with unspoken encouragement for the support of the Communist insurgencies in *Southeast Asia*. *China*'s approach in regional affairs would be more pragmatic, than ideological. Confidence in Marxism was no longer wholly implemented, as *China* envisioned a transformation from within in a more hard-headed and knowing manner.

China's *role* could not bifurcate from the socialist path, but with the task of solving *China*'s domestic structural problems in: *agriculture, industry, national defense, science and technology*¹. In foreign policy, *China* would preserve the same peaceful tenure.

In 1998, one of the most originaive changes occurred in *China*'s security strategy. In the document released in 1998, which was entitled: *China*'s *Defence* – the Chinese strategic planners envisioned a concept of security that would interrelate *China*'s concerns for military modernization, as well as for economic security and for the peaceful coexistence: "Security cannot be guaranteed by an increase in arms, or by military alliances. Security should be based on mutual trust and common interests. We should promote trust through dialogue, seek security through cooperation, respect each other's sovereignty, solve disputes through peaceful means and strive for common development"². The principle inferred was: *quan mian hua – the principle of comprehensive security*.

China never renounced to its positive rethoric of peacefulness, that accompanied Chinese foreign policy makers ever since the first generation of Chinese Communists. In the post-Cold War Era *China*'s *ideational discourse* tried to find new means through which *China*'s *national role* could be further globalized.

China was preparing itself for not following in the footsteps of USSR. In the domestic elites' consideration, USSR failed at understanding the complex series of forces that were shaping the international security environment, by not paying enough attention to the influence that economic performance can have upon security.

¹ These areas were part of Deng Xiaoping's *Four Modernizations Programme*.

² *Defence White Paper 1998*, Ministry of National Defense, People's Republic of China, 1998.

The Chinese foreign policy-makers were discontent with *the unipolar moment* that *US* was enjoying in the post-Cold War Era. *China* was trying to make its strategic relevance visible, by a non-hawkish, less provocative discourse in foreign affairs, a relevance that would allow it to combine a peaceful security *role* in: economic, traditional, transnational security challenges (such as terrorism) as well as in non-traditional security¹.

In the *National Defense White Paper of 2002*, *China* unwaveringly kept *the five principles of peaceful co-existence*². A special place in the chapter reserved for the regional security cooperation was dedicated to the extended region of Asia-Pacific.

The White Paper of 2002 showed that *China* was ready to assume more responsibilities in the region: “Conducting dialogue and cooperation with Asia-Pacific countries is an important content of *China*’s policy concerning Asia-Pacific security, and a component part of its policy of *good-neighborliness and friendship*. *China* persists in building *a good-neighborly relationship and partnership* with its neighbors and strengthens regional cooperation constantly”³.

Even if the White Paper presents a Chinese commitment for the non-use of nuclear weapons⁴, *China* still did not ratify the *Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty*⁵.

China also applauded the success *ASEAN* has made in creating a peaceful security environment for *Southeast Asia*: „The cooperation in *East Asia* with the Association of *Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)* and *China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (10 + 3)* as the major channel, has become more practical.

¹ It was a new stance in foreign policy after the Western condemnation of the brutal suppression of protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Despite these disapprobations, *China* insisted that its human-right record is not untarnished, but under reform; *The New Security Concept of 1997* was meant to show the world that reasons for adjudging *China* as antagonist or a juggernaut of international norms was unfair.

² It is striking how these principles served as landmarks of continuity for *China*’s *national auto-conceived role*.

³ *Defence White Paper (2002)*, Ministry of National Defence, People’s Republic of *China*, 2002.

⁴ An important specification for the *Southeast Asian* states was that: „*China* has consistently advocated the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons. On the very first day it came into possession of nuclear weapons, *China* solemnly declared that at no time and under no circumstances would it be the first to use such weapons. Later, *China* undertook unconditionally not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or nuclear-weapon-free zones, and has consistently urged all nuclear-weapon states to enshrine these commitments in a legal form”, according to: *Defence White Paper (2002)*, Ministry of National Defence, People’s Republic of *China*, 2002” – an implicit engagement to respect *the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons` Free Zone*.

⁵ On the other hand, *China* is signatory of the *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*.

China and *ASEAN* have reached a consensus on the establishment of a free trade area within 10 years, initiating full cooperation in the field of non-traditional security issues”¹. *China* affirmed an adherence to the *ARF* method of conflict-resolution through dialogue.

Stepping on to more enhanced security accountableness, *China*’s answerableness to the complexities of its regional *role* can be examined in the *National Defense White Paper – China’s National Defense in 2010*. Released in 2011, *China*’s regional and global *role* is described as *defensive in nature*, even if the security challenges that *China* has to pay attention to, have boosted in number.

China’s *role* in security affairs would be to protect and shield from any obstruction *China*’s *national security*, to be able keep in the same status of preservation the domestic and regional security stability and harmony and to held itself as a non-belligerent country, while accomplishing these objectives: “*China* pursues a national defense policy which is defensive in nature. In accordance with the *Constitution of the People’s Republic of China* and other relevant laws, the armed forces of *China* undertake the sacred duty of resisting foreign aggression, defending the motherland, and safeguarding overall social stability and the peaceful labor of its people. To build a fortified national defense and strong armed forces compatible with national security and development interests is a strategic task of *China*’s modernization, and a common cause of the people of all ethnic groups”².

China’s ultimate intentions are prescribed as a custodian of its national security interests, *from an anti-hegemonic stance*: „The pursuit of a national defense policy which is defensive in nature is determined by *China*’s development path, its fundamental aims, its foreign policy, and its historical and cultural traditions.

China unswervingly takes the road of peaceful development, strives to build a harmonious socialist society internally, and promotes the building of a harmonious world enjoying lasting peace and common prosperity externally.

China unswervingly advances its reform and opening up as well as socialist modernization, making use of the peaceful international environment for its own development, which, in return will contribute to world peace.

¹*Defence White Paper (2002)*, Ministry of National Defence, People’s Republic of *China*, 2002.

²*China’s National Defence in 2010 (2011)*, Ministry of National Defence, People’s Republic of *China*, 2011.

China unswervingly pursues an independent foreign policy of peace and promotes friendly cooperation with all countries on the basis of the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*. *China* unswervingly maintains its fine cultural traditions and its belief in valuing peace above all else, advocating the settlement of disputes through peaceful means, prudence on the issue of war, and the strategy of “attacking only after being attacked.

China will never seek hegemony, nor will it adopt the approach of military expansion now or in the future, no matter how its economy develops”¹. *The macro-role* that the Chinese policy-makers envisioned for *China* is that of a *peaceful actor*. This *macro-role* can be divided in two subsequent *roles*: *defender of national sovereignty* and *promoter of anti-hegemonism*.

3. Rounding Off the Arguments Presented

China’s foreign policy is addictive to the peaceful rise rhetoric. The peaceful ascent is circumscribed, as we have showed in the arguments presented across this article, with the historical delivery, style and arrangement of *the Sino-Southeast Asian interactions*.

Filling the broadest sense of this discourse, the cultural traditions, still maintained and steadily kept in, from the imperial era, have helped forge the rhetorical profile of affording a halcyon behavioral mode.

In Southeast Asia, more than in any other part of the world, *China’s Southeast Asian presence*, characterized discursively by a placid gist, shows numerous areas of manifestation. Even if there are incongruities with the manner in which *this auto-conceived role* is actually perceived, it has become a far-too long trialing experiment in China’s foreign policy.

¹*China’s National Defence in 2010 (2011)*, Ministry of National Defence, People’s Republic of China, 2011.

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***<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/datablog/2012/nov/18/oecd-south-East-asia-economic-outlook#data>, date of accession: 24th of November 2013.

****OECD Southeast Asian Economic Outlook 2013 – with perspectives on China and India (Executive Summary)*, electronic documentation in informatics system, made by accessing: <http://www.oecd.org/dev/asiaandpacific/SAEO2013%20E-Executive%20summary.pdf>, date of accession: 24th of November 2013.

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