



**Doctoral School of  
International Relations**

**SUMMARY**

**Csaba Barnabás Horváth**

**Power Balance in Asia**

Ph.D. thesis

**Supervisor:**

**dr. László Csicsmann**

**Docent**

Budapest 2013





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## Table of Contents

I.	Research topic .....	4
II.	Methodology and hypothesis.....	6
III.	Results .....	9
	Traps in Sino-Indian relations.....	9
	Traps in Sino-Japanese relations .....	12
	US policies and the Sino-Indian and Sino-Japanese tensions .....	13
	The role of Russia .....	14
	Economic interdependence .....	18
	Conclusion .....	18
IV.	Selected reading list .....	20
V.	Papers by the author related to the topic.....	26

## **I. Research topic**

The rise of China, and the intensifying Sino-American rivalry is one of the most exciting issues in global politics. Different aspects of the issue raise different questions: If the total GDP of China really surpasses that of the USA, then exactly what kind of role will Beijing have in the global international system? On the regional level, how will the Sino-American and Sino-Japanese competition for influence in Southeast Asia come out? The significance of the issue is well demonstrated by the fact that after the leadership transition in China and presidential elections in the USA both in 2012, the first trip of president Obama lead to Southeast Asia.

In his 2012 book, “The China Choice” Hugh White concludes, that it would be neither in the interests of China, nor the USA to show confrontative attitude towards each other. Instead, he suggests the USA to embrace China in a system similar to the concert of great powers that existed in Europe during the decades after 1815. (White [2012])

In his paper “The Rise of China and the Future” published in Foreign Affairs in 2008, G. John Ikenberry states, that it is more advantageous for China to integrate into the US lead global system, than to try to build its’ own.(Ikenberry [2008] pp. 23-37.)

In his 2012 paper in Foreign Affairs, Zbigniew Brzezinski concludes, that only a “Broader West”, including Russia and Turkey, can be able to properly balance China. (Brzezinski [2012] pp. 97-104.)

In his 2011 book, „A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia” Aaron Friedberg concludes, that it is neither in the interest of the USA, nor in the interest of China to let their rivalry to escalate into an antagonistic standoff, and that it is also possible to avoid that. (Friedberg [2011])

In his 2010 paper, Barry Buzan concludes that a peaceful rise will be possible, but difficult for China. In his view, China has two choices: If it focuses on regional dominance, then it can emphasize its’ difference from the West in terms of culture as well as social and political views. If China takes increasing its’ global influence as the main goal, then it will have to face an increasing pressure for reforms. (Buzan [2010])

In his 2011 book “On China”, Henry Kissinger states that China and the USA are linked to each other by such a deep interdependence, that a cold war between them would seriously endanger the economic development not only both of them, but that of the entire Asia-Pacific region as well. According to his conclusion, an American strategy trying to prevent the rise of China would be inappropriate, since China is not trying to change the internal system of other countries, holds a key position in the global economy, and follows a relatively restrained foreign policy. (Kissinger [2011])

In his paper “The Geography of Chinese Power”, Robert D. Kaplan identifies the three natural directions of China’s expansion as Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Russian Far East. At the same time, he identifies Russia and India as the two main natural barriers for China’s expansion. (Kaplan [2010])

My thesis, as well as my main hypothesis differs from most of these works, and is on a common platform with Robert D. Kaplan’s work in the sense that instead of focusing on the policies of the USA and China, it focuses on the geopolitical factors that are beyond the control of the players, but that are defining their choices. In my thesis, I am attempting to analyze, how these external factors form their policies.

## **II. Methodology and hypothesis**

The primary focus of the thesis is not on the political doctrines and goals of China and the USA themselves, but on those external geopolitical factors, that determine their choices and policies.

As an analysis focusing on external factors that limit the options of the players, my thesis represent a geopolitical-realist approach. To describe this approach, we can take a work of Robert D. Kaplan. In his paper “The Revenge of Geography”, published in 2009 in Foreign Policy, Kaplan describes the validity of geopolitics as a key element of the re-emerge of realism. Kaplan describes this kind of realism in contrast not only with

the liberal, but in contrast with the neoconservative view as well. He concludes that the liberal and neoconservative approaches are two manifestations of the same idealistic view, since both can be rooted back to the universalistic idea of promoting western democracy. In contrast, this kind of realism is analyzing external factors beyond the control of the players, such as geography, cultural identity, or historical legacy, and trying to define how these factors affect the players. He points out that geography is a key factor among these. Before the emerge of political science as a discipline on its' own, in the political thinking of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, geography as a discipline has played a key role and often included the analysis of political, cultural and geo-strategic factors. (Kaplan [2009])

The main conclusion of my thesis is that in their competition for more influence, geographic location is a comparative advantage for the USA, and a comparative handicap for China. On the one hand, the location of the USA has most of the strategic advantages of an island nation, with both of its' land neighbors, Canada and Mexico being inside its' zone of influence. Therefore, it's hegemony over the North American continent at this moment seems to be unchallenged, and the continent itself is strategically shielded by the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic Oceans. On the other hand, in contrary to the USA, China has at least three direct neighbors that have great power identities on their own: India, Russia and Japan. Since direct neighborhood usually does lead to some kind of conflict of interests, this geographic setting seems to give the opportunity of "divide and rule" to the USA, playing out the powers of Asia against

each other, in somewhat the same manner, as Britain has continuously played out the powers of mainland Europe against each other during the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, in its' mainland power balancing policies. On the other hand, China is not able to play out the same card against the USA, because on the North American continent, there is no significant country defying the USA. Since the USA is able to play out this card against China in Asia, but China is not able to play out this card against the USA in North America, this gives the USA a comparative advantage versus China. This comparative advantage of the USA seems to be the most clear in case of India and Japan, since they are the second and third most significant economies in Asia after China, but they both have unresolved disputed issues with China, that the USA can play out.

### **III. Results**

#### ***Traps in Sino-Indian relations***

China and India have been rivals since as early, as the 1960s, due to border disputes and a general, mutual geostrategic mistrust. What further complicates the issue is that, as a consequence of this rivalry, China has been allied with Pakistan ever since then. The alliance between China and Pakistan involves China in the bitter feud between India and Pakistan, therefore posing a serious obstacle for any meaningful compromise between China and India, even if they were able to solve their other disputes. On the other hand, China and India are somewhat trapped in this trilateral issue. For India, a compromise with China would have no meaning without China ceasing its' cooperation with Pakistan. For China, on the other hand, dumping Pakistan would be a suicidal move if there is no solid guarantee for a real change in India's doctrine. And so far, we can see no such guarantee. So, dumping Pakistan to get the benevolence of India would be an extremely risky, on the short run, self-harming step for China, it is therefore unlikely. On the other hand, as long as China and Pakistan continue to cooperate, a meaningful compromise between China and India, and a fundamental change in the doctrine of India seems to be extremely unlikely. The trapping combination of circumstances therefore seems to deem China and India to security

rivalry, as well as to deem India for aligning itself with the USA, and Pakistan aligning itself with China.

### The Beijing-New-Delhi-Islamabad triangle

During the 1950s, Pakistan was a key ally of the USA, while the PRC cooperated with the USSR, (Ross [1993]) and India positioned itself as a key member of the non-aligned movement, trying to build good relations with the PRC as well. From the mid-1950s however, tensions started to increase between China and India, and armed border incidents became more and more frequent. (Malik [2012] pp. 347-349.) These developments culminated in the Sino-Indian border war of 1962, and Sino-Indian relations have been marked by rivalry ever since then. Cooperation between China and Pakistan started back in that time. The deterioration of Sino-Indian relations was an excellent opportunity for Pakistan to get the support of China, along the “enemy of my enemy” logic. By this time, the Sino-Soviet split has already occurred, so alignment with China did not harm the traditional alliance between Pakistan and the USA. During the normalization of Sino-American relations in the 1970s, it was even a benefit for the USA, that its’ Pakistani ally already maintained friendly relations with China for a decade by then. (Siddiqi and Yang [2011] ) In the 1970s and 1980s, the China-Pakistan duo was supported by the USA, while India received support from the Soviet Union.(Malik [2012] p. 348.)

This equilibrium however, ended by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of rivalry between the USA and the PRC. By now, rivalry

with China brought the USA and India to a common platform. (George and Venkatshamy [2012] pp. 195-197.) The cooperation between China and Pakistan continued, but as of now, the changed environment causes incredible difficulties in the cooperation between the USA and Pakistan. During the Cold War, Pakistan was the key ally of the USA in South Asia, and their cooperation continued well into the 2000s as well. By now however, it gradually seems to have become more important for the USA to reach cooperation with India against China, than its' alliance with Pakistan. It does not seem to worth for the USA to jeopardize the cooperation with India for the alliance with Pakistan. (Staniland [2011] pp. 133-148.) Pakistan on the other hand, continues to define itself against India, so it increasingly views the US cooperation with India as abandonment, if not betrayal. (Pant [2012]) This, of course helps China in becoming the number one ally of Pakistan, since a strong Pakistan is in the interest of China to balance India. Cooperation between the two countries increased in the past two decades. China sold heavy water and plutonium to Pakistan, and provided technological assistance to the Pakistani nuclear program. Pakistan on the other hand provided access to the strategic port of Gwadar for China. China has also sold airplanes, submarines, and short range missiles to Pakistan, and provided technological assistance to the development of communication satellites and ballistic missiles. (Pant [2012])

What we can see in the region, is that the rivalry between China and India, and the cooperation between China and Pakistan is continuing. This however, limits the choices of both India and Pakistan, pushing India to

align itself with the USA, and Pakistan to align itself with China. (George and Venkatshamy [2012] pp. 194-203.) We can see a system of multilevel power balance policies here, with the USA balancing China by supporting India, and China balancing India by supporting Pakistan.

### ***Traps in Sino-Japanese relations***

Among other issues, the double question of Japan's alignment with the USA and the remilitarization of Japan seem to form an especially difficult trap for Beijing and Tokyo. At the present Japan is strongly allied with the USA on security issues. Therefore, a Sino-Japanese cooperation regarding the USA-PRC rivalry seems to be impossible, as long as this alliance between Japan and the USA exists. Japan, however, cannot give up its' alliance with the USA as long as it does not have sufficient security capacities on its' own. Achieving sufficient security capacities however, would require Japan to revise its' 'peace constitution', and go through a process of significant remilitarization. A remilitarization of Japan however, seems to be unacceptable for China at this moment. Without remilitarization though, Japan will not be able to give up its' alliance with the USA. So, the issue of the armed forces of Japan seems to be a key obstacle to a meaningful Sino-Japanese compromise. A Japanese armed force with a size and capacities acceptable for China would likely to be insufficient for Japan. An armed force with a size and capacity sufficient for Japan would likely to be unacceptable for China. Japan is unlikely to give up its' alliance with the USA without remilitarization as a precondition. China however, is unlikely to tolerate a Japanese

remilitarization without Japan giving up its' alliance with the USA as a precondition. This trap seems to block a meaningful Sino-Japanese security compromise, therefore deeming the two countries to rivalry, and dooming Japan maintain its' cooperation with the USA.

### ***US policies and the Sino-Indian and Sino-Japanese tensions***

As we can see, there are several factors, beyond the control of the players that make a meaningful Sino-Japanese or Sino-Indian compromise extremely difficult to reach. As a consequence, these factors make it easy for the USA to play out India and Japan against China. The manifestation of this combination of factors seems to be the quadrilateral cooperation between the USA, India, Japan, and the regional 'Anglo-Saxon' state, Australia. The quadrilateral cooperation between these four countries started in 2008.

Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe played a key role during his first term in the formation of the initiative, when he called for a quadrilateral summit between the leaders of the USA, India, Japan and Australia. Originally, Abe argued that a "broader Asia" should be taken into focus, and within this broader Asia, the four most significant countries that share the principles of multiparty democracy and human rights should intensify cooperation, and encourage China to accept similar principles well. Representatives of the four countries held their first informal quadrilateral talk in May 2007. This has already triggered diplomatic protests from China.

(Terada [2011] p.8.) Due to protest by China, cooperation did not formalize on a quadrilateral level since then, but the four countries established a network of bilateral agreements, linking any two of them to each other. Besides security pacts that have already existed between the USA and Japan and between the USA and Australia for decades, new ones were formed between each two of the four. India and Japan signed their security pact in 2008, (Paul [2012]) while Australia and India signed theirs in 2009. Australia even agreed to sell uranium to India. (Panda [2012]) The USA and India signed their framework agreement defining their security cooperation already in 2005. As a result, we can see the network of a USA-Japan, a USA-Australia, a USA-India, an India- Japan, an India-Australia, and a Japan-Australia security agreement being formed.

The cooperation thus includes two out of those three neighbors of China that have a great power identity on their own (India and Japan out of Russia, India and Japan) as well as the USA. This cooperation, if it continues in the long term, means such a broad informal coalition, that poses a significant obstacle for China in its' competition with the USA, even if it manage to become the single strongest power on Earth.

## ***The role of Russia***

To summarize the analysis that is included in my thesis on the role of Russia, is that despite its' cooperation with China during the height of the SCO period in 2001-2008, it can rather be viewed as a third party balancing between China and the USA, than a committed ally of China. Despite the recent past marked by SCO, we can already see certain factors that question the long term future of Sino-Russian cooperation. It seems to be likely, that the Sino-Russian dispute regarding the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 was not just a seasonal anomaly, but symptom of deeper structural problems. The attempt and failure of Russo-American special partnership in the early 1990s and the attempt and loss of momentum of the SCO cooperation form the outlines of a definite Russian great power behavior:

- Russia has a great power identity, and depending on the actual circumstances, is ready to face disputes with each of the USA and China, and political ideology is not a major influencing factor in this. (Hostile Sino-Soviet relations around 1970, and hostile Russo-American relations in the late 1990s)
- Depending on the actual circumstances, Russia is also ready to cooperate with each of China and the USA. Usually cooperates with the one seen as the lesser potential rival against the one seen as the major potential rival at the given moment.

- Since Russia's foreign policy is defined by its' own great power identity, it won't participate in any alliance where it could only have the role of the junior partner.
- Due to the relative decline of the fundamentals of its' great power position in the last two decades however, today Russia could only be a junior partner on the side of either the USA or China.

Along this logic, it is not profitable for Russia to commit itself on the side of neither China, nor the USA, because it could only be a junior partner on the side of each one. Sino-Russian cooperation in the frames of the SCO fits the decades old trend of Russian foreign policy, but only as long as the USA is a more significant potential rival to Russia, than China is. Present tendencies however are likely to make exactly this judgment less and less clear in Moscow in the coming decades. The further strengthening of China and the further relative decline of the global hegemony of the USA can even bring a moment, when Russia will see a lesser potential rival in the USA than in China. Thus for Moscow, exactly the continuation of the trend of the past decades, the very same logic that defined its' policies in the past, suggests the choice to commit itself neither on the side of China, nor on the side of the USA, but cooperating with one or the other from case to case, always depending on the actual circumstances of the moment. As we could see, the symptoms of structural problems within the SCO are already apparent, with China

trying to ease the dependence of the Central Asian countries on Russia, while Russia is struggling to maintain it.(Wilhelmsen and Flikke [2011])

For Russia, besides traditional security, the character of its' economy also makes balancing the rational choice. The main driving force of Russia's economy is today energy export, and the two main export markets of these goods are the EU and China.(Markestos [2009]) If, in the future Russia roughly equally shares its' energy exports between the EU and China, this can result a competition between the EU and China for these goods, what can increase the space for maneuver for Russia.

At the same time, this logic in Russia's foreign policy makes it an interest for both China and the USA to make efforts to avoid disputes with Moscow. In 2001-2008 it was in a large part the confrontative doctrine of the Bush administration that pushed Russia into the SCO, while the Russo-American cooperation of the early 1990s was preceded by decades of hostile Sino-Soviet relations. Thus hostile relations between the USA and Russia can push Russia to cooperate with China, while hostile relations between China and Russia can make it to cooperate with the USA. We can already see sings of awareness about this factor not only in the Chinese, but also in the American foreign policy. While (especially since 2010) the Obama administration has increased its' engagement in the Asia-Pacific, is strengthening its' cooperation with its' old allies (such as Japan,

Australia and the Philippines), is trying to build cooperation with its' new allies (such as India and Vietnam), is making efforts to form coalitions from these to contain China, we can see right the contrary regarding Russia in Europe. American policies considerably changed since the color revolutions of the early 2000s. The USA took the option of Ukrainian and Georgian NATO membership off the agenda, and Russia reinforced its' influence in those countries since then. This shows some willingness of the USA to improve relations with Russia, and to avoid forcing it into an alliance with China. We can't tell whether this is a conscious attempt to loosen the ties between Russia and China, or it is just the spontaneous consequence of the USA concentrating its' limited resources to the Asia-Pacific. But the result is the same in both cases.

### ***Economic interdependence***

In the thesis, the effects of global economic interdependence were analyzed in a separate chapter as well. The conclusion of this chapter is that the rivalry of the USA and the PRC is in character much closer to the power games of 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, restrained by dynastic solidarity, than to the antagonistic standoff of the Cold War and other 20<sup>th</sup> century conflicts.

### ***Conclusion***

My thesis concludes that the geographic factor has a defining impact on the possibilities of China and the USA-PRC great power rivalry.

While the USA has all advantages of an island nation with both Canada and Mexico being inside its' zone of influence, China is a classic continental power, with at least three such neighbors that have great power identities on their own: India, Russia and Japan. This setting includes factors that make cooperation extremely difficult between China and India, as well as between China and Japan. At the same time these factors make it easy for the USA to align itself with India and Japan. At the same time, in case of Russia, keeping distance towards both the USA and China seems to be more likely than alignment on the side of China. Altogether these factors are a handicap for China and an advantage for the USA. At the same time, this setting, as well as the policies of the USA closely resemble the continental power balance policies of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century Britain towards mainland Europe.

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## V. Papers by the author related to the topic

Horváth Csaba[scheduled to be published in 2014]: *A Kínai-orosz viszony alakulása Kína felemelkedésének tükrében* – accepted for publication: Kül-Világ, 2014/1

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