

Eurasian Geopolitics and China

Emi Mifune, Professor, Faculty of Law, Komazawa University

It goes without saying that China is the center of upheaval in Eurasian geopolitics. How should Japan recognize China, which is expanding and increasing its influence, and how should Japan discuss its diplomacy with Eurasia?

This paper, the research outcome of the first year, comments on the following five points as preconditions for analyzing China in the current Eurasian Dynamism from a perspective that is neither "Dragon slayer (anti-China)" or "Panda hugger (pro-China)". First, in Section I, this paper will consider which of the three major approaches of international relations should be used to analyze Chinese diplomacy. Next, in Section II, the basic perception of the Belt and Road Initiative is dealt with. In Section III, the timeline of China and Xi Jinping is reviewed. In Section IV, how we should position the year 2027 is considered. In Section V which is the final section, China and Asia under Finlandization are looked at.

Realism, Liberalism, or Constructivism?

The first topic is which approach of the international relations theory should be taken for analyzing Eurasian geopolitics.

Realism in the international relations theory is a perception with which its proponents consider that, in an anarchical world, the method for nations to pursue their national interests is power and the goal of nations is to obtain and expand their power. In addition, the essence of international relations with regard to nations is the struggle for power for their own individual goals among nations and, consequently, nations try to maximize their own national interests. With this pessimistic view, the proponents deem in this approach national security as the most important topic in mutual-distrust international relations.

On the other hand, with liberalism in the international relations theory, its supporters think that, not as explained in the realism theory, international relations are not just conflict and competition, but also building cooperative relations. With this approach, however, the proponents do not have the optimistic view that cooperative mechanisms will be spontaneously formed in an anarchical international society where there is no authority over nations. The proponents think that the creation of "some mechanisms for making cooperation possible" will make cooperation possible in an international society. Analytical approaches depend on what is focused on in the mechanism, but the basic views can be broadly divided into four approach types: (1) sociological liberalism, (2) interdependence liberalism, (3) institutional liberalism, and (4) republican liberalism. (Some use market liberalism / commercial liberalism in place of interdependence liberalism.)

It is very difficult, however, to look into a cooperative mechanism for China, which is promoting egotistic diplomacy.

On the other hand, there are quite a few challenges in the constructivism approach. In China, where non-material factors such as norms and identities do not have a significant impact on changes to external policies, national interests take precedence over international norms. It can be said that the constructivism approach cannot handle conflicts of norms among different spheres well. Constructivism is not an

effective method for analyzing the current Chinese diplomacy.

Therefore, it can be said that the best approach to analyzing the dynamism of the current Eurasian international relations is realism.

II The Belt and Road Initiative: Political Instrument That Is Not a Large-area Economic Strategy

The second topic is how to perceive the Belt and Road Initiative.

The idea of the Belt and Road Initiative is to pursue the Pax Sinica, a China-led "community of a shared future for mankind", while expanding China's friendship network. The concept of a "Community with Shared Future for Mankind", which was added to both the Constitution of the Communist Party of China in 2017 and to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China in 2018, is a world view that includes respect for non-democratic nations, but does not aim at building a political community.

The concept of the Belt and Road Initiative is that the Chinese Communist Party and China commit to a China-led global governance and that China leads the situation by forming five areas of connectivity: policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, trade facilitation, financial integration and people-to-people exchange. Many Japanese media outlets continue to claim that the Belt and Road Initiative is a massive economic strategy. The Belt and Road Initiative is more than just an economic partnership or building of an economic area in Eurasia.

The Belt and Road Initiative is to expand infrastructures which have "the same specifications as China's" and to create and manage a complex infrastructure network in order to enhance collaboration in advanced fields such as artificial intelligence (AI), nanotechnology, and quantum computing, to promote big data, cloud computing, and smart city construction, and to build the "Digital Silk Road" in the future. It is not just an economic area. The goal of the initiative is to promote the construction of a cross-border optical cable network for improving connectivity of international communications, develop plans for an intercontinental submarine cable project, and establish a satellite information network so that China can make the best use of these projects in the area of security. As seen in the 13th 5-year plan in 2016, the initiative is perceived as closely associated strategies for China to be a "maritime power", "space power", and "Internet power".

Under the coronavirus pandemic, G20 in 2020 agreed to a suspension of debt for developing nations. Two-thirds of public loans suspended by G20 are loans from China. The institutions that finance the Belt and Road Initiative are mainly the China Development Bank and the Export–Import Bank of China, and China claimed that the loans from government-owned banks such as CDB are not subject to the framework of relieving developing nations because "they are private institutes" and consequently had them removed from the framework. At the 2020 Summit, China agreed to "strongly encourage private creditors to participate under equal conditions in granting the suspension of repayments for public debt", but it is suspected that loans from China to developing nations are "hidden loans". The Belt and Road Initiative is a political instrument for reinforcing China's supremacy in developing nations.

III Timeline of China and Xi Jinping

Let's move on to the third topic, the timeline of China and Xi Jinping.

The Chinese Dream of Xi Jinping is to aim to be a rich and powerful nation in the timeline of the Two Centenaries—China's major national goal referring to the centenaries of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 2021 and of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 2049. He also aims to increase the comprehensive national power, revitalize the Chinese people, and enrich the nation. In other words, Xi Jinping believes that the historical mission of the Chinese Dream is to recover from China's humiliating history after the Opium War and achieve a great revitalization of the Chinese people. In this sense, the Chinese Dream through the two 100-year marathons is a national project to be a rich and powerful nation.

One thing Japanese people should be cautious about in the timeline to achieve the Chinese Dream is that the process includes military expansion and territorial expansionism. China is not trying to recover the domination of the Qing dynasty in compliance with international laws. It's trying to change national borders with "power".

Now let's look at the three key years shown in the Made in China 2025. "China Manufacturing 2025" is an indicator regarding industrial development in which China seeks to shift from a "manufacturing power" to a "world-leading manufacturing power" in three phases. The strategic three-phase objective is to become one of the world's strongest manufacturing powers by 2025 in the first phase, rise to the intermediate level among the world's manufacturing powers by 2035 in the second phase, and become the leading manufacturer in the world in 2049 in the third phase.

When the Chinese Communist Party talks about the Chinese Dream, is it possible that it does not include China-Taiwan unification?

If (on the assumption that Xi Jinping continues to be the president of China) China becomes a power that rivals the United States, and holds the western Pacific under its control to become the "maritime power", what route will it establish to open the path to the Pacific?

In this sense, the China-Taiwan unification and seizure of the Senkaku Islands should not be discussed only from the perspectives of "recognition of history", "energy issues", and "fishery problems". The establishment and enforcement of the coast guard law should be recognized on the basis of that awareness.

IV How Should "2027" Be Perceived?

Let's move on to the fourth topic.

With regard to the positioning of "2027" in the geopolitical context of Eurasia, I focused on the following two points regarding the 5th plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which was held in October 2020.

First, while the long-term goal by 2035 has been formulated and Xi Jinping aims to stay in power toward 2035, no successor has been confirmed. Given that Xi Jinping has conducted campaigns to eradicate corruption and purged many hostile and resistance forces, he cannot easily retire.

The second point I noted in the 5th session is that how "2027" should be perceived.

In the 5th session, China declared, with regard to national defense, that it will enhance its fighting potential to protect its national sovereignty, security, and rights and interests of development, and secure the realization of the 100-year military goal in 2027. Judging from this declaration, I believe that Xi

Jinping has set a unification of China and Taiwan by force by 2027. This is because the U.S. military is changing its policy and strategy by 2027.

Concerns about an invasion of Taiwan by 2027 have been put forth not only by military personnel who want Congress to approve a better budget for them. In the final report of the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence released in March, Chairman and Ex-Google CEO Eric Schmidt emphasized the risk of depending on Taiwan semiconductor firms when Taiwan might be absorbed by China. The week prior, President Joe Biden signed an executive order aimed at securing critically important product supply chains in the U. S.

On the other hand, China, with a population of more than 1.4 billion people, is entering into the "first aged society in developing countries". It is expected that the country will transition from an aging society to an aged society in 2025, its pension fund reserves will reach its peak in terms of capacity for supporting people in 2027, the population will decline from the peak in 2028, and the reserve for the pension fund will run out in 2035. Following this, it will enter into a super-aged society in 2036.

If the "2027 issue" is taken into consideration together with the security issues and China's pension and social welfare problems, Eurasia's security may face a major shift in the near future.

V Afterword / Asia under Finlandization

Let's move on to the fifth and final topic.

China, which has strengthened its bilateral relationship through the Belt and Road Initiative, is trying to improve its development ability from "lines" to "planes" in Eurasia and the Indian Ocean. The idea of containing China is no longer realistic.

If the trust on America as a balancer and an alliance collapses, small and medium Asian countries will consider neutralization by means of "Finlandization" as an option for their survival rather than jumping on a bandwagon or mulling over choices between the two. Hans Mouritzen, senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies stated in the journal *Survival* in 2017 that small countries in Asia would be "Finlandized". Robert Kaplan, a geopolitician from Eurasian Group stated in *Foreign Policy* in 2019 that Japan would be "Finlandized".

Asian countries, which must rely on the United States for security policies to counter China's threat, must look at China's sphere of influence in their economic policies. They will be in a difficult situation if they are required to make a two-part choice between the United States and China. Japan, which is facing a serious aging society with a small number of children and consequently a shrinking market, must consider how it should interact with China—the largest threat. Researchers studying the current relationship between the United States and China are required to examine the possibility of "Asian countries under Finlandization" as well as the "United States' withdrawal theory" and "U.S.-China selection theory".

Southeast Asian countries are increasingly dependent on China for their economies and vaccines, even though they are facing territorial problems in the South China Sea. Even for countries which consider China as the "biggest security threat", it is becoming increasingly difficult to confront China, which is expanding.

In South and West Asia, there is also an expansion of favorable environments for China. Since

Mohammad Javad Zarif, a foreign minister of Iran who is "deepening relations with China", visited Pakistan in May 2019 and announced a proposal to link Pakistan's Gwadar Port to Iran's Charbahar Port, the plan to connect China, Iran, and Pakistan has been attracting attention. Because Iran has agreed with Afghanistan to make the Charbahar Port a distribution hub between the two countries, the connection between the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Charbahar will lead to the expansion of the network of countries along the line of the Belt and Road Initiative to Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and the expansion of connected areas from Azerbaijan to Russia and Turkey in terms of "planes" as well as "lines". In addition, the partnership concept between Charbahar Port and CPEC is not only positioned as "lines" and "planes" in that area, but it can also create a further multilayer connection from Central Asia, West Asia, and the Middle East to the countries along the line of the Belt and Road Initiative.

In 2020, the relationship between the European Union and China has deteriorated, following offensive remarks made by China's high-level government officials after the COVID-19 pandemic, issues concerning the next-generation communication standard (5G), Taiwan problems in relation to the Czech Republic, and human rights issues including the repression of Hong Kong and Uyghurs. On the 30th of December, the day before the end of Germany's EU presidency term in 2020, which had placed importance on the relationship with China, the EU announced "general consent" in the investment agreement with China, ignoring Jacob Sullivan's demand for the EU to postpone the investment agreement with China until the EU discussed issues surrounding China with the U.S. after the Biden administration was inaugurated. This was deemed as a message to China that the EU does not necessarily place importance on America's security policies in the Asia-Pacific region. Ursula Gertrud von der Leyen said in November 2019 before taking the position of President of the European Commission that "the Commission would fulfill its geopolitical responsibilities", but the EU showed that such "responsibility" does not extend to the Asia-Pacific region.

Middle-powered Japan has no country to which it can "buck-pass" the threat from China. India has been behaving cautiously in developing strategic linkages within and outside the 'Quad' by persistently striving to anticipate a Chinese response. Japan should develop diplomacy sufficiently so as not to be made the buck-catcher by buck-passers such as the United States and India. Japan must seek to produce and maintain a balance of power policy toward China based on the Japan–US alliance.