
Great Power Rivalry in a New Asia Pacific Order: Examining the Great Power Concert Model for Asia Pacific

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Abstrak

Meningkatnya kekuatan China di kawasan Asia Pasifik memimpin tatanan regional untuk menghadapi potensi persaingan antara kekuatan besar yang ada di wilayah tersebut. Tulisan ini berusaha untuk meneliti kekuatan persaingan besar dalam urutan Asia Pasifik yang baru. Seperti yang diusulkan oleh Hugh White (2008), tulisan ini berpendapat bahwa 'the European great power concert model' berpotensi menjadi cara untuk menjaga perdamaian dan stabilitas di kawasan Asia Pasifik, namun memiliki masalah yang cukup besar dan hambatan untuk diterapkan di wilayah tersebut

Kata Kunci: Persaingan kekuatan besar, China, Amerika, Great Power Concert Model

Abstract

China's rising power in the Asia Pacific region is leading the regional order to face a potential of rivalry between existing great powers in the region. This paper hence seeks to investigate the great power rivalry in a new Asia Pacific order. It argues that while 'the European great power concert model', as proposed by Hugh White (2008), could potentially be a mechanism for maintaining peace and stability in the Asia Pacific region, it has considerable problems and obstacles to be applied in the region.

Key Words: Great power rivalry, China, the US, Great Power Concert Model.

INTRODUCTION

For over three decades the Asia Pacific region has maintained a relative peace order and stability. In fact, Mearsheimer (in Alagappa, 2011) has argued that peace in Asia even preceded the termination of the Cold War. In 1958, for instance, military hostilities between China and Taiwan regarding the Quemoy and Matsu islands were ended. Moreover, maritime dispute in the Southeast Asian region between Indonesia and Malaysia-Singapore had been settled in 1965-6, as well as the de-escalation of borders military hostilities over Sino-Vietnamese (in 1987) and Myanmar-Thailand (in 1992). Nevertheless, it is inevitable that potential of

conflicts in the region remains exists. Philippines, Tibet, Thailand, and Indonesia are still encountering the insurgencies of the separatist movement (Bitzinger & Desker, 2008). Other significant issues such as terrorism after the Bali Bombing in Indonesia, nuclear ownership of North Korea, India and Pakistan, the issue of the Spratly Islands and tension between China and Taiwan, are challenging a current order. But nonetheless, all these challenges have relatively been managed by the cooperation among countries and major powers in the region.

In regard to China as a new emerging power in Asia

Pacific region, it argues that China's rising power might indeed lead to instability and insecurity over the Asia Pacific current order. The rise of China in economy has put its position as a major trading partner of every East Asian country (including Australia), overtaking Japan and the United States that had never been contested for more than a half decade ago (Drysdale, 2012). Moreover, China is also in an attempt to modernize its military force, the People Liberation Army (PLA), in order to expand its power throughout Asia Pacific region. Having an impressive economic growth as well as significant strides in its military power, China sets to release from the political and strategic subordination of the United States which has been maintaining the pattern and understanding of the global order after the Cold War but now it is being deeply contested. Facing this new challenge, the United States aims to preserve its sphere of influence has reformed its defense strategy and is concentrating its resources throughout Asia Pacific (Prantl, 2012). This fact shows that the rise of China's power brought current order into a new pattern of power relations and that it could trigger, as Mearsheimer contended (2005), 'an intense security competition with considerable potential for war' that is mainly caused by great power rivalry between China and the United States. Therefore, it is likely threatening the peace, security and regional stability, and the war in Asia Pacific, as White claimed (2008), remains thinkable.

Responding current pressure in Asia Pacific, Hugh White's work (2008) addresses several models set to overcome the clash of major power within a shifting order. Among his models, White suggests that European Power Concert is 'the most promising option' for Asia Pacific order. The model requires major powers such as China, the US, and Japan, to engage in a cooperative relationship and to acknowledge the power legitimacy among others without dominating and confronting in a violent conflict among others (White, 2008). The model of course would place a huge burden to each major power and otherwise would instead lead the Asia Pacific region into the risk

of major conflict. Considering that the risk of war is caused by the major power rivalry, this essay then aims to explore two major questions: What are the drivers of the Great Power rivalry in the region that can lead to regional insecurity?; and, to what extent the great power concert model is effective to create regional security and stability?. The essay argues that China's economic, military, and politic development in the region may threaten the primacy of other major power and risk to the conflict. The great power concert as a model for preserving Asia Pacific security from the impact of great power rivalry are to some extent can be applicable in the region. The essay would be firstly exploring how the transformation in Asia has brought the region within a relative stable and peace condition. It will also examine the roles and influences of the great powers and the factors which considerably trigger conflicts in the region. In the next part, it would be examining how the great power concert model proves to be effective in enhancing regional security. The last part of the essay then would be the conclusion.

ANALYSIS

PEACE, SECURITY, AND GREAT POWER RIVALRY IN ASIA PACIFIC

During and after the Second World War, Asia Pacific was experiencing a high intensity of warfare that put the states in a subordinate position and war-prone region. Asia Pacific at the end of World War II comprised weak and less power states as just freed from colonization. Some states were still relying upon their former colonial power, meanwhile others sought to align with one of the two existing great power, the Soviet Union and the United States. These two blocs powers then shaped the dynamics of the international order and the foreign policies of the Asian countries. Wars throughout the Asia Pacific were more about two blocs power that compete their primacy and ideology. Yet, when the scale of minor and major wars have reached a peak at early 1970s, it was then over the years changed into a more stable and peace witnessing the declining of war and conflict throughout the region and hence it began to experience a dramatic

change and transformation (Alagappa, 2011).

According to White (2008), peace and stability in Asia Pacific can be maintained because of the US's role in doing what it is called as 'double reassurance' strategy. In this case, peace in the Asia Pacific, in what White called as post Vietnam order, emerged from the deal of the US double reassurance. This strategy was initially designed by The US in order to deter the Soviet Union Power to expand in Asia. It engaged China and Japan as the 'America's principal ally'. The deal has changed China's policy which at the beginning it really contested the western dominated strategic in Asia and use the command economy model. Yet, the fact is that this policy made China suffered from inability to compete with Western power. For Japan, this will ensure Japan's security and keep the US as its main ally. Meanwhile for the US, the deal was beyond the expectation which not only contained the Moscow's expansion of power into Asia, but also it maintained the US power and primacy in the region.

Peace and stability that have been maintained then created a foundation for the growth of the economic development of states, particularly China. China now has become the major world economic power among other economic powers in the world. After twenty-two years process of reformation, China's economy developed in unprecedented rates. In 2004, China's government has strengthened and enhanced its economic macro control. It resulted a best ever development which contributed GDP for amounted to 13,687.59 billion yuan in 2004 and that was about 9.5 percent higher than the prior year. An outstanding achievement in China's economic development was gained in its 'five year plan' economic strategic in 1996-2000 and in 2001-2005. For example, China accomplished to sustain a rapid growth which its GDP has reached to 12,500 billion yuan by 2005 with the annual economic growth of around 7 percent (China's economic development, 2008). China, according to the IMF, also attempts to overtake the US and Japan position as the major trading partner in the Asia. All these economic developments make China's economic

growth rapidly and simultaneously brought the region to face a transition of order. China's cumulative power that is contributed by its economic growth undermined the post-Vietnam order. Hence, China would seek to shift the US primacy in the region by expanding its power and influence and become the regional hegemonic power. This means that the US economic power in the region is threatened by the emerging power of China.

Not only gaining a great economic development, China has also evolved a geopolitical strategy that can enhance its credibility in the region. Beijing consensus, as a form of China's soft power foreign policy that guarantees its rising in peaceful ways, reflects Beijing's policy towards its neighbor countries that can ensure the trust of other state towards China, such as the support of China upon the ASEAN Charter that adopts the principle of the balance between individual rights and social obligations, China's support for global initiatives in counter-terrorism and non-intervention. Although Beijing's foreign policy shows its new 'play-nice' strategy that is not directly challenging the US power, China is still more assertive in pushing its own agenda and even more chauvinistic in its behavior, and seeks to shift US's power in the region (Bitzinger and Desker, 2008). China's ambition as a regional great power can also be clearly seen from its attempt to upgrade and modernize its military capability. Since the late 1990s, the China's People Liberation of Army has been upgraded to the new military equipment. The official Chinese defense budget has spent more than six-fold between 1997 and 2008 for this upgrade and modernization. Russia is mainly the single country that contributed much to the arm purchases of China that the trades flow of these arms have exploded over the past decade (Bitzinger and Desker, 2008).

These three important material factors: economic, politics, and military, are a significant driven of the rivalry between great powers, most importantly between the US and China. The US as existing great power has been enjoying its position as major power in Asia should face a real threat from its strategic

counterpart. A changing order led by China indeed creates an uncertainty among Great Powers. The double reassurance order in fact has not worked well since it cannot ensure the relationship between China and Japan that indeed constrained China. Current order seems to move to a balance of power system in which each major power competes for their own interest. While China is developing its economy and military capacity, it also builds the relationship with several 'rouge states' such as Iran and Russia, which threatening the US interest in the region. Adversarial relationship and security uncertainty would likely the pattern of the current order. Any misperception regarding states behavior and action would likely lead others to perceive it as the threat and potentially risk to conflict.

GREAT POWER CONCERT MODEL IN ASIA PACIFIC

Although it is not easy to predict whether or not the rivalry of great powers will likely bring the region into a major war because of war would often be caused by many and complex factors, it might at least be said that the potential of that war has emerged and it would risk the regional security and stability. This is what Hugh White, a professor of Strategic Studies at the Australian National University, addressed in his work (2007 & 2008) by proposing a model of power concert of Europe. The concept of European Power Concert as argued by White is a promising model for maintaining Asia Pacific security, peace, and stability.

The power concert initially was conducted by several great powers in Europe such as Austria, France, Britain, Russia, and Prussia. This concert was a coercive diplomatic security managed the new order for Europe aimed to uphold regional stability and integrity in the post-Napoleon War (Khoo & Smith, 2010). It effectively worked between 1853-1823 and it thereafter faced a steady decline until its collapse at the Crimean war of 1854. The concert basically adopted four main principles: First, it was based on multilateral consultation in which conference diplomacy among great powers was conducted to manage crisis situation. Second, there was no any territorial change

without the agreement and consent of great powers. Third, great powers' commitment was to protect all their essential member states within the system. And last, the recognition of all great power regarding their equal power and status and respected each other (Acharya, 1999).

In the context of Europe, the concert accommodated the idealistic notion of collective security and the extreme form of balance of power; put the concert as the middle ground. It was also quite depend on the degree of self-restraint among its members and not require a perfect harmony (Miller, 1994). Although White argues that the concert of power would be the promising option for Asia, he acknowledged that it is difficult to be followed by major powers in the region. The concert demands the United States to accept the legitimacy of China's power and relinquish its primacy in the region without confronting China. Meanwhile for China itself, the concert would delay China's interest in getting regional primacy and put China to remain accepted the US role in the region. It also gives burden to China to acknowledge Japan's primacy and strategic role in the region meanwhile Japan in attempt to transform itself to be a credible regional strategic player (White, 2008).

Apart from this huge burden for the major powers, White is optimistic that the concert would suit for Asia since other models are unlikely to be adopted. The first model delivered by White is the Roman Empire model. It presupposes Asia would remain in the current order without any change in which US would keep its role and power in the region meanwhile China and other power should accept it. This model as White argued is not plausible since China's power increasingly growth over the years and it is unlikely to be smaller than before in the foreseeable future. This power then challenges the US primacy and the current order. The second model is the twenty-first century European Union model. It requires Asia to be like European deeply-integration, that is, the use of force in international system should be banished as well. However, this model was gained by European states from the long tradition of political

cooperation. It does not mean that it is not possible to Asia, but it needs a long phase particularly for major powers to acknowledge the primacy of one another and able to cooperate and manage the potential of conflict and threat. This of course would take a long time even centuries, like the history of the European countries. The last is the balance of power model of Europe in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and twentieth century. The system worked well in preserving the interests of states in gaining the hegemony and hence in this condition the system may create peace. However, it would cost of strategic competition and lead to occasional systemic of war. Therefore, the only one European model that suits for Asia context is the power concert (*Ibid*, 2008).

For the supporters of the Asia power concert, they argue that concert model would effectively resolve any crisis situation in Asia through the consultation of major powers in the region. Great power's role in this concert would likely ensure regional stability because any changes within territorial problem would require prior agreement from major powers. Moreover, the principle of equality among members of the concert will shape the relationship of major power and that the conflict between states and major powers will be moderated (Khoo & Smith, 2001). To some extent, according to Acharya (1999), the concert can be applied in the Asia so that regional security and stability can be enhanced. Although in the theory and practice in European countries that the concert was applied to manage multilateral relationship, it could potentially be applied to bilateral relationship since the nature of Asia's great power interactions are predominantly bilateral. This can be done by 'a series of overlapping and cross-cutting bilateral relationship which are non-exclusionary and not directed against any member of the great power system' (Acharya, 1999). Furthermore, the concert does not need to be merely in formal institution arrangement since the European concert was not too much adopting the institutionalization within their functions. The member of the concert would be much benefited from the mechanism of the concert which permits its

members to preserve their own interests and to balance other major powers while simultaneously collaborate and cooperate to manage the regional conflict and security. This will be the case that great power rivalry within a form of power concert will be more moderate than the balance of power system.

In the case of the US-China relationship, the concert principle of 'equal status' can build a more constructive relationship between China and the US. Although China is different with the US in term of their ideology, it is in term of the economy relationship similar, which adopts the economic capitalist. Without being democratic, China can maintain a strong relationship and cooperation with US. Hence, a share commitment in economic capitalist may pursue common interest in preserving regional security and stability. Meanwhile, the relationship between China and Japan also developed to a more cooperative after a long adversarial relationship during 1990s as an impact of Japan's aggression toward China during the World War II. China and Japan had normalize their relationship and agreed that their leaders should conduct a reciprocal visit in order to maintain the relationship between Japan and China. Similar patterns of bilateral relationship also happened between China and Russia in which Russia at the early 1990s send a large scale of defense equipment to China. This is the key that has tied the relationship between China and Russia although this was based on the Russia's strategic to content NATO's expansion to Asia and China's fear over the Japan-US defense cooperation.

In short, if the concert of power would be applied at all, this should not resemble the European classical power of concert. Rather, it would be proper in term of a set of bilateral relationship and consultation that can reduce the tension of and moderate the rivalry of the great power relationship. Moreover, the concert itself will be more relevant in preserving the security issues in the North Asia than in the Southeast Asia and South Asia. The pivotal issues of regional security in Asia Pacific are much involving the major power in problem of North Korean's nuclear, the status of

Taiwan, the disputes of South China Sea, normalization of China-Japan relationship, and the intention of Russia to expand its power in the Asia. To Southeast Asia, the problem will be much less since it has ASEAN as a regional security framework to manage its security issues. Meanwhile, in South Asia, the disputes between India-Pakistan and the issues of their nuclear weapon is the second security issue in the region. Yet, the concert would not work well since major power such as China, Japan, and US do not recognize India as one of major power states (Acharya, 1999).

Nevertheless, it should be considered the concert of power itself has considerable problems and obstacles for preserving peace and stability in the Asia Pacific. The concert will depend much more to the degree of self-constrained of each major power. Major Powers should agree that they have to refrain from action and ambition that could trigger conflict between them and respect each other particularly in crisis time. To some extent, both Great Powers, China and US, are unlikely to constraint themselves for a longer time. For China, the issue of Taiwan is quite sensitive particularly over the US efforts in thwarting Beijing's attempts to get Taiwan back to the China's primacy. China will never support the US military presence or indeed if it deploys its Theater Missile Defense system to Asia. Moreover, China would hardly compromise or be constrained internationally regarding its project in modernizing the People Liberation Army since it is the only way to defense Beijing's policy over the Taiwan's problems. In contrast, the United States domestically will accept pressure from public opinion since China remains to undermine the principle of human rights. It would seem unrealistic for the US if it is going to maintain the relationship with China meanwhile the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) remains on their rule that potentially challenged the credibility and trust of the US principle whether in domestic or international stage (Khoo & Smith, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Peace and stability that have been maintained for

over three decades in Asia Pacific now is being under pressure. The great powers rivalry is the main factor that significantly contributes to the instability of the region. The rising of China, although to some extent seem peacefully, reflect the ambition of China to replace the supremacy of the US throughout the region. Great Power Concert of the Europe to some extent can be applied, particularly in the relationship of states in North Asia. Yet, this model still has some problems that need to be fixed before the rivalry between major powers surely brings the region into a great war.

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