

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**MASTER THESIS**



**BEYOND COMPETITION: HEGEMONIC WAR  
BETWEEN THE USA AND CHINA IN EAST ASIA**

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**THESIS SUPERVISOR  
ASSIST. PROF. ALI ASLAN**

**ISTANBUL, 2021**

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by

**RIZKY AMALLIA**

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Political Science and International Relations**

**THESIS SUPERVISOR**

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**ISTANBUL, 2021**

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts Political Science and International Relations

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This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the School of Graduate Studies of Ibn Haldun University.

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

REKABETİN ÖTESİNDE: DOĞU ASYA'DA ABD VE ÇİN ARASINDA  
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Bu araştırma ABD ve Çin arasındaki normalleşmiş iki taraflı kârlı ilişkilere rağmen çözülemeyen savaşın arkasındaki sebebi inceler. Ikenberry gibi liberal uzmanların literatürü, liberal uluslararası düzenin devam ettirilmesine odaklanmaya meyillidir, böylece ABD ve Çin'in, uluslararası liberal düzenin mutlak zafere ulaşacağı bir yarışmadan daha fazlasıyla karşı karşıya olmadığını savunmaktadır. Bu araştırma, Ikenberry'nin tezini çürütmeye çalışarak, ABD ve Çin'in şu anda Doğu Asya'daki hegemonik savaşın üçüncü aşamasında olduğunu savunmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, Robert Gilpin'in hegemonik savaş teorisi nitel tündengelimli araştırma yöntemiyle ve söylem/veri analizi veri toplama stratejisiyle test edilmiştir. Süreç önemli toplantılar, konferanslar ve yazışmaların yanı sıra, liderlerin birçok konuşmalarını, iki taraflı ve çok taraflı anlaşmaları, mutabakat anlaşmalarını, basın açıklamalarını içermektedir. Çalışma üç önemli çerçevede incelendiğinde ABD-Çin rekabetinin Gilpin'in hegemonik savaş teorisine uyduğunu bulmaktadır: siyasi, ekonomik ve ideolojik rekabet. Siyasi rekabette, BM liderliğinde ya da Çin liderliğindeki bir bölgeselcilik oluşumunda ikilik vardır. Ekonomik rekabette, Birleşmiş Milletler'in ticaret savunmacılığı ile Çin'in kuşak ve yol girişimi karşı karşıyadır. Üstelik, ideolojik alanda Çin'in barış içinde birlikte var olmanın beş prensibi liberal değerlerin varlığını tehdit etmektedir. Bu bulgularla, bu tez 2 şeye ulaşır. İlki, ofansif

realistlerin bu konuyla alakalı görüşlerini güçlendirir. İkincisi, hegemonik savaşın kesin süreci hakkında geniş kapsamlı çalışma sağlayarak çalışma boşluğunu doldurur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** ABD-Çin rekabeti, Doğu Asya, Hegemonik savaş, Liberal Uluslararası Düzeni, Offensive Realizm



## ABSTRACT

### BEYOND COMPETITION: HEGEMONIC WAR BETWEEN THE USA AND CHINA IN EAST ASIA

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This research examines the reason behind the unsettled conflict between the USA and China despite their normalized, profitable bilateral relations. The existing literature from liberal scholars, such as Ikenberry, tends to focus on the maintenance of liberal international order, thus argue that the USA and China are facing not more than a competition in which the liberal international order will secure the victory. Attempting to invalidate Ikenberry's thesis, this research argues that the USA and China are currently in the third phase of the hegemonic war in East Asia. In this study, Robert Gilpin's theory of hegemonic war is tested through a qualitative deductive research design, with content/discourse analysis as the selected data-gathering strategy. The process involves analysing numerous speeches from the leaders, bilateral and multilateral agreements, memorandum of understanding, press releases, as well as important meetings, conferences, and correspondences. The study finds that the USA-China rivalry matches the characteristics of Gilpin's theory of hegemonic war when examined under the three important frameworks: political, economic, and ideological competition. In political competition, the duality exists over the creation of the US-led or China-led regionalism. In economic competition, the United States' trade protectionism policy is vis-a-vis China's Belt and Road Initiative. Moreover, in the ideological sphere, China's Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence is currently challenging the existence of liberal values. With these

findings, this thesis accomplishes two things. First, it strengthens offensive realists' arguments concerning the topic. Second, it fills the gap of the study by providing a comprehensive study about the precise process of the hegemonic war.

**Keywords:** East Asia, Hegemonic War, Liberal International Order, Offensive Realism, US-China Rivalry



## DEDICATION

To Nava, the most fragile yet the strongest woman I know.



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My deep gratitude goes first to my advisor, Mr. Ali Aslan, whose guidance and help make this work possible despite the uncommon challenges I face during this period of a pandemic. I am especially indebted to him for his patience, insightful feedback, and understanding throughout the process.

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Rizky Amallia

ISTANBUL, 2021

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMRO	ASEAN Plus Three Macroeconomic Research Office
APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
APT	ASEAN Plus three (Japan, China, South Korea)
APTERR	ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CPTPP Partnership	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific
KORUS FTA	Korea-US Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PRC	The people's Republic of China
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
ROK	The Republic of Korea
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
WTO	World Trade Organization

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In 2012 the former Vice President Xi Jinping, who was in a transition to his presidential position at that time, addressed the importance of the US-Sino relations in a meeting in Washington. He emphasized their relations as “a new type of relationship between two major countries” and urged both parties to strengthen their trade and military cooperation (Schneider, 2012). Undoubtedly, China is the United States’ third-largest goods trading partner with a total value of 558,1 billion USD and the United States appreciates a surplus of trade activities with China in terms of service<sup>1</sup>. The Office of Trade Representative (n.d.) also mentions that the economic ties between the two parties resulted in the creation of employment that reached the approximate number of 911.000 jobs. Moreover, then-President Obama and former President Hu Jintao met at the G-20 meeting in Mexico within the same year, in which the Chinese leader took the opportunity to talk about the idea of deepening the dialogue between the two parties, seeking win-win cooperation, managing frictions, and sharing global responsibilities (Lampton, 2013: 53). Taking all these developments into account, it is tempting to ask a very crucial question: why does the crisis between China and the United States persist despite their normalized profitable bilateral relations? This thesis is dedicated to solving this puzzle.

Conceivably, the United States is hesitant about what China’s intention truly is, like many other scholars who attempt to explain the unusual type of relations between the two. It is very common for President Xi Jinping, in particular, to use discourses that touch upon the creation of new world order. In 2013, he delivered a speech at the

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<sup>1</sup> The data is derived from the Office of the United States Trade Representative. According to the latest information, the United States's total export of service to China is \$76,7 billion with a \$36,4 billion total surplus. For more information, kindly visit <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/china-mongolia-taiwan/peoples-republic-china#:~:text=U.S.%20goods%20and%20services%20trade,was%20%24308.8%20billion%20in%202019>.

Moscow State Institute of International Relations concerning China's view on the current international situation. In this opportunity, he called on the international community to build a new type of international relations based on win-win cooperation and common development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The People's Republic of China, 2013).

What matters from the characteristic of his speech is that his promotion of creating a new type of international relations indicates the failure of the current system to meet its goal: to maintain peace and equal development. In a meeting held at the United Nations Office Geneva in 2017, he mentioned that the goal of peace and development is far from being met, and that creating a system that endorses the equality of sovereignty is the key to reach these goals. To say this undoubtedly means to accuse the United States-led liberal international order to have failed in its mission. It is also clearly stated in his speeches that his country supports several values that go against the liberal international order, for example, the principle of sovereignty, dignity, and non-intervention. Recently, he presented a speech during the meeting of the World Economic Forum concerning the importance of multiculturalism. He emphasized the criticality of the world to realize diversity and to recognize it. As every state has its own history, experience, and culture, it is required for all of them to abandon ideological prejudice (Xinhuanet, 2021). A value that indeed contradicts with the tradition in the liberal international order that favours the repression of other ideologies that are against liberal virtues. China instead wants to build a new type of international relations based on mutual respect, equality, and mutual benefits. In the same meeting, President Xi Jinping also expressed his desire to carry on engaging his country in global economic governance and to push for economic globalization that is more open, inclusive, and beneficial to all. This indicates that China is starting to show its will to be included in global governance as a responsible stakeholder, and to "push a new economic globalization" signifying China's dissatisfaction with the current order. Indeed, it is important to note that only a rising power with a motive to counter the hegemon would be brave enough to challenge the existing order and actively talk about the alternative one.

Liberal scholars failed to address the significant explanations above. Ikenberry, in particular, has many times refused the fact that China is intending to create a new system. He is exceptionally persistent with his point that the liberal international order is too strong to be shaken. He composed a well-written thesis about three types of liberal international order to explain how the order transforms throughout times against the challenges. While it is important to fully acknowledge his exemplary study, persistence may also mean neglecting the changes that are happening before our eyes. If this is the case, not only we as international relations students have failed to remember that changes are the inevitable characteristic of international politics, but we may also have failed to witness the seemingly most important hegemonic contest of the century. Written upon this foundation, this thesis challenges liberalism, particularly Ikenberry's approach towards the U.S-Sino relations in the liberal international order.

To answer the research question mentioned in the first paragraph of this section, this study attempts to examine the U.S-China relations under the scope of Robert Gilpin's theory of hegemonic war. The central argument of this study is that the reason behind the U.S-China unusual type of relations is that the two parties are now in stage three of a hegemonic contestation, or so-called "the state of the disequilibrium". Although the dimension of contestation between the two involves the whole world system, this thesis will exclusively focus on the East Asian regional order for the sake of the limitation of the study. Moreover, East Asia is chosen in conjunction with its strategic importance for the two powers. If the world is facing the shift of the hegemon, East Asia will be the first place for such a major transition to occur.

This thesis is organized in the following order: Chapter 1, 2, and 3 give a brief introduction, literature review, and explanation regarding the methodology and research design of the study respectively. Chapter 4 discusses the weakness of Ikenberry's most significant writings about liberal international order and subsequently, chapter 5 explains why offensive realism, especially Gilpin's study is chosen to be the most suitable one as the theoretical framework of this study. Chapter 6, as the most important section of this thesis, will provide a comprehensive discussion on how the hegemonic war is currently occurring by evaluating it from the

three main perspectives: political, economic, and ideological competitions. Finally, chapter 7 will conclude the whole discussion briefly.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Among the literature about China's rising power that this study focuses on, the subjects commonly discussed involve economic analysis, energy analysis, power transition and balance of power, China's soft power, human rights, Chinese world order, and the Chinese school of IR. Furthermore, power transition and balance of power theory are on the top list of popular analysis topics. Many scholars implemented different theories to understand the pattern of behaviour between China and the USA, as well as several countries in the region such as Japan, South Korea, and other Southeast Asian nations. However, the analysis remains limited to the categorization of neighbouring countries' behaviour to either balancing, bandwagoning, or hedging. The relations between the USA and China, on the other hand, have always been discussed to be challenging but not to be beyond the competition.

#### **2.2 China's Rise and the USA**

The most prominent work on the duality between the United States and China is apparently written by John Ikenberry. His study includes the analysis of the competition between the two countries under the umbrella of power transition theory. According to him, there are three ingredients of power transition: tension, distrust, and conflict (2008: 23). Even though the discourse on China's rising power is a thing beyond doubt, the subject of power transition is still very open to debate. There are two ways to define the duality between the two countries: China vs the United States or China vs the Western revived system. Ikenberry endorses the second scenario in which the triumph of the Western system is inevitable. In this sense, The United States' global position may be weakening, but the international

system the United States leads could remain as the dominant order of the century (Ikenberry, 2008, 2011, 2018).

Graham Allison (2015) addresses the similar discussion following Thucydides' two key drivers in the shift of power: the rising power's growing entitlement and the status quo's determination to defend its endangered position. Indeed, he believes that historical record over 500 years shows the rapid shift of a relative power of a rising nation mostly resulted in war. When it comes to China-US competition, he emphasizes that there is no such nation, except China, that has grown so fast and risen so far. In terms of economic activities, China has already surpassed the United States in many areas including manufacture, steel production, smart-phone and e-commerce markets, as well as being the first destination for foreign direct investment. With these developments, China does not only wish to be rich, but also powerful. Thus, Xi Jinping's idea of creating a new international order needs to be taken seriously. According to him, it is important how the leaders of the two states sustain attention and a deep mutual understanding.

Nevertheless, it is true that not all power transitions generate war or intend to overturn the old order. One of the examples occurred during the early decades of the twentieth century when the United Kingdom transferred its global authority to the United States without a great conflict. Another example is Japan from the late 1940s to the early 1990s. Despite its rapidly growing economy, Japan has never challenged the international order. Moreover, the possession of a nuclear weapon of great powers like the United States and China can actually prevent such a war from happening, so to speak, war-driven changes have been abolished as a historical process and it is no longer a mechanism of historical change in the modern era. Nevertheless, the United States still needs to make sure its military capacity is sufficient to deter China's ambitious mission in the region (Ross, 2013).

The discussion on the peaceful power transition theory on China and the United States duality is also supported by a Taiwanese scholar Shih-Yueh Yang. He stated that the power transition itself is not necessarily violent, and the key factor that determines a violent or peaceful transition is whether the rising challenger is satisfied with the treatment of the leading defender. A power transition will be peaceful if the

leading defender is willing to accommodate the challenger appropriately (Yang, 2013: 37). Furthermore, three main issues are to be taken into account while analysing the process of power transition. One is the challenger's satisfaction, the others are the preventive wars from the defender and the regional or global power structure. It is his belief that rather than expecting a challenger to initiate war, states should expect the declining, but still stronger, power to initiate war. So to speak, if China and the United States would go to war, it is most likely that the war will be initiated by the United States. However, this is very unlikely to happen since China is not willing to antagonize the US (Guo, 2006; Rosecrance, 2006; Clark, 2011, Shiffrinson, 2018).

Another prominent liberal thinker, Joseph Nye (1995), mentions that the United States should possess sufficient military capability to deter China in case of enforcement and to provide sufficient defense mechanism to reassure US security partners that they can rely on the superpower against a rising China that may possess threat in any case. He addressed the importance to create a “deep engagement” as the US grand strategy. Certainly, this approach has as its aim to encourage the survival of the liberal economic order and to promote cooperation in creating a global institution under American leadership. In other words, to deal with the worst possibility, such a strategy is designed to carry on the country's influence and deep engagement in the region in terms of economy, security, and politics. China indeed demonstrates its will to engage itself with the current system and its adoption of capitalism would contribute to its peaceful manner (Weede, 2010).

Offensive realism, on the other hand, is another theory touching upon the subject of China's rising power. Mearsheimer (2014) argues that China's domestic political situation and engagement with the global capitalist order are not particularly the sign that the country endorses the current western system. On the contrary, the country may seek regional hegemony in East Asia as it becomes more powerful. As China's struggle for power forces the United States to be its adversary, China's rising power will not be peaceful. In this sense, China's regional and international involvement will pose a threat to the continuity of the US dominance. Randall Scheweller (2014) provides a similar explanation in his paper *China's Aspirations and the Clash of Nationalism in East Asia* as he centralizes his argument on how China will possibly

be more vocal about its dissatisfaction towards the current dominant order and pursue an agenda to change it with the new one. This new order is later expected to be in accordance with its values, cultural, ideological, and sociological characteristics. He also emphasizes that China is unlikely to have the will to participate in global governance and would prefer to draw its whole attention to the Asia Pacific instead. Some scenarios such as the withdrawal of US forces from the region, a regional trade zone, and the harmonization of the regional states' foreign policy with China's foreign policy may favour China's effort. This view on rising China is often considered pessimistic. However, it is very uncommon for realism to approach the subject optimistically as long as the international system is still under anarchy. In a world where conflict is natural and inevitable, it is very natural to expect an unfavourable scenario. Especially, the regional condition somehow exacerbates the possibility as China has already been facing many troubles in its geographical location. China has territorial disputes in East Asia with Japan, and in the South China Sea with the majority of ASEAN countries.

### **2.3 China's Rise and the Neighboring Countries in East Asia**

Much literature focuses on the study of neighbouring countries' behaviour as independent research agendas rather than connecting it with the duality between the United States and China in the region. These studies, however, also varied from the analysis of bandwagoning to accommodating and hedging (Ross, 2006; Chung, 2009; Jerden & Hagstrom, 2012; Chen & Yang, 2013; Foot, 2014; Liang, 2017). By examining the complex interaction of China's military, economic, and cultural influence in the region, it can be concluded that secondary-state behaviours tend to accommodate China's rising power rather than balance against it. In this context, secondary states are the countries that cannot provide their own security against conflict, or have insufficient defense capability in case of dispute, and require assistance from the great power to protect them. This is the general view of military capability in the Asia Pacific such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Moreover, culture can be another aspect for countries to choose whether to accommodate or balance the rising power. In this sense, the domination of Chinese Confucian values in East Asia can restrain states from balancing against it.

In Southeast Asia, the response of the countries is very dependent on the level of threat and trade expectation. Based on the calculation of these two factors, some countries decided to bandwagon, balance, or even hedge. Southeast Asian countries that expect a high level of threat and negative economic benefits are likely to see China as an undesirable regional power, thus, are more likely to choose a soft-balancing strategy (Chen & Yang, 2013). Soft balancing strategy is a particularly new term to explain states' behaviour that tends to choose to balance in a more considerable manner. Rather than balancing with a great power completely by allying, states involved in this strategy are more likely to limit their diplomatic coalitions with the possible threat while upgrading the existing alliances at the same time. For example, rather than forming a formal military alliance with Washington, some Southeast Asian countries prefer to bring more US military presence back in Asia to constrain China. Taiwan, Japan, Australia, and Mongolia are the example of those who express security concerns with China and, therefore, are placed on the balancing category.

On the contrary, some countries that expect a low level of threat and positive economic relations are more likely to bandwagon China's rising power. In fact, bandwagoning strategy is very much correlated with weaker states who tend to expect profits from the rising power. Thus, it is more than just a way to survive. Cambodia is an example of a bandwagon actor in the region. By endorsing China's power rise, the country is seeking a more prosperous economic condition with its enhanced economic relation with Beijing (Chung, 2007). Other countries with similar strategies are Myanmar, North Korea, and Laos. Not only that they express a lack of security concern, but they also engage in positive economic relations and share values with China.

The third category is hedging. Thailand, Singapore, South Korea, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam are the example of this category. South Korea's response is the combination of active economic engagement and effort to maintain its military alliance with the US, seeking an optimal balance between the United States and China. The Philippines is also an active hedger that has security concerns in terms of ideological differences and the maritime territorial dispute over the Mischief Reef in the South China Sea.

Although Japan is likely to balance against China's rise, some studies have also shown that Japan tends to accommodate rather than balance. Accommodating strategy means that Japan is actually supporting the rise of power. However, this strategy is not seen as the intention, but to be accepted more as a consequence of action. The main objective of an engagement policy is to minimize conflict and avoid war without compromising the integrity of the existing international order. Furthermore, Japan's position is crucial for another subject: the integration of Asia. Whether such a case is possible mostly depends on the competition between Japan and China in an effort to be the leader of the region. Japan and China must reach fundamental reconciliation and exercise joint leadership so that the effort to launch a Northeast Asian Forum among Japan, South Korea, and China to facilitate mutual understanding and trust can be possible. However, they should be careful with the increasing influence of nationalism because the nationalist movements can mobilize states to enter into conflicts, especially if they already have an important involved issue. In this case, the examples might be conflict on the Senkaku Island and the South China Sea.

#### **2.4 Discussion of the Literature Review**

Although the discussion topic regarding China's rising power is very wide in nature, two of the most important subjects are its relation with the countries in the Asia Pacific and its competition in the region with the United States. Both topics have been discussed previously, and this section is written to analyse the gap in the literature.

To begin with, most of the discussion regarding the relation between China and the United States has been very biased by the liberals. The liberal view is dominated by political scientists such as John Ikenberry and Joseph Nye who particularly see China's rise as a threat to the United States' hegemony in the Asia Pacific. Without neglecting the significance of their studies, there is a reason why the study is biased. Instead of seeing conflict as a common political phenomenon, scholars of East Asian politics started to see it as a phenomenon to be avoided, and thus, tend to blame the party who is believed to be the confronter. Ikenberry and other liberals are capturing

China as the “naughty” actor whose action is destructive, and thus, needs to be prevented.

On the other hand, some scholars position themselves on the side of China’s peaceful rise, such as Xin Li and Ian Clark. They tend to blame the United States for its overreaction and view the US’ fear of China’s rise as irrational. Moreover, they consider China as a status quo state without any intention to challenge the United States in the region. This argument is also very optimistic and fragile at the same time. Because looking at the historical pattern, rising powerful countries always pursued such a goal to surpass the current hegemon’s power dominance. Thus, looking at China as an innocent actor will not bring the discussion to another level. Shih Yueh shared a similar view regarding the subject. According to them, a power transition will be peaceful if the leading defender is willing to accommodate the challenger appropriately. In this case, the United States should accommodate China’s rising power. Moreover, they add a constructivist argument that a peaceful transition is possible with the shift of identity from enemy to friendship occurs. In reality, despite the increasing economic activities between the two parties, and the normalization of political and diplomatic relations, the competition between the two countries carries on occurring.

Furthermore, another dimension of the gap in the literature on China and the United States relations is that it focuses mostly on the politico-security approach. While offensive realists such as Mearsheimer and Scheweller sufficiently explain the issue, they are trapped in the explanation that focuses mostly on military capability, sufficiency, and defense mechanism. It can also be seen in the discussion regarding the impact of China’s rising power on the neighbouring countries in East Asia. Rather than calculating the real influence of China and the United States in this region in many aspects including politics, economy, and ideology, the analysis tends to focus on whether China is considered a threat and what role the United States is willing to play, mostly involving military capacity. Moreover, the neighbouring countries, in this matter, are seen merely as the receiver of the implication rather than actors that can influence events.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Conflict is a natural phenomenon in politics. However, the analysis on the relation between China and the United States is so biased that it prevents us from understanding the conflict between them as a natural phenomenon. We need a new framework that does not blame a particular party for being the challenger, and also explains the nature of their conflict from a broader perspective rather than only relying on politico-security matters. The study should also include the neighbouring countries in the Asia Pacific as the active participants in the phenomenon, not only as the tool used by the parties to balance each other.



## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Question

As previously stated, the existing literature lacks unbiased studies about the topic, especially those coming from the liberal camp. While offensive realism explains the phenomenon comparatively better, the studies are limited to the discussion on the possible future scenarios without providing how the precise process would occur. This thesis, taking the stance that it does with the offensive realists, aims at filling this gap by attempting to explain the current process of the power transition, under the umbrella of Robert Gilpin's theory of hegemonic war. While doing this, unlike the other studies in the literature, the conflict between the two countries is seen as a natural phenomenon of politics; thus, no party is seen as just while the other is seen as evil. Furthermore, other than categorizing the regional actors as pursuing bandwagoning or balancing strategy, this thesis attempts to affirm that they instead play an important role as the mobilizer of the competition. The reason why this study invalidates the former theses is that the regional actors are proved to possess more active roles in shaping the dynamics of the contestation. Above all, the research question is as follows: why does the crisis between China and the United States persist despite their normalized profitable bilateral relations?

This question is posed especially to challenge liberal arguments that believe the rise of China is possible to contain if there is a shift in the relationship between the two countries from enemy to friendship and if the United States is willing to accommodate the rise. However, despite having a profitable economic relation and normalized political and diplomatic relation, the two countries seem to carry on competing in the region. Another aim of this research is to challenge the explanatory theory of balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging, which tend to see the neighbouring countries as weak and the receiver of the implications of the competition. This

research, on the other hand, will analyse the East Asian nations as the active mobilizer where the competition takes place.

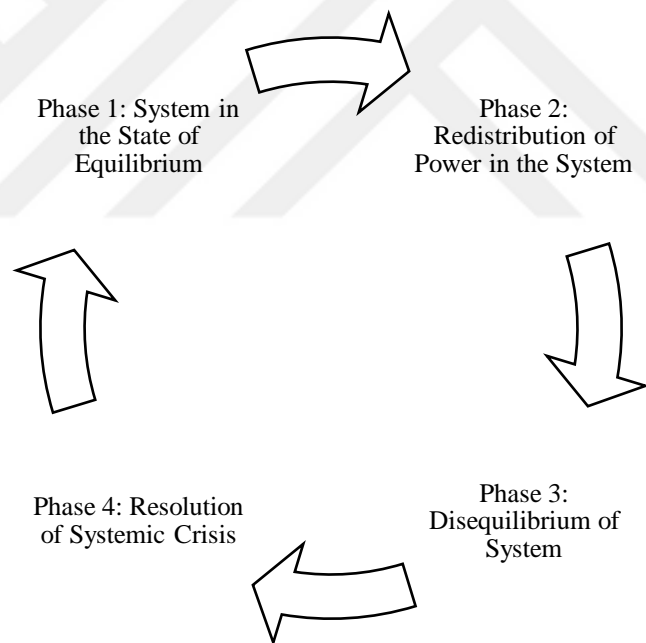
Derived from the explanation above, should be stated that the independent variable is the power relations and China's uneven growth of power, and the dependent variable will be the regional order and change. Conducted under the framework of the theory of hegemonic war introduced by Robert Gilpin, the hypothesis of this research is: China and the United States are currently in the third phase of the hegemonic war in East Asia.

### **3.2. Theoretical Framework**

Although I believe that Robert Gilpin's theory of hegemonic war is a central organizing idea in the study of international relations, it is not commonly preferred in the study of China's rising power vs the United States compared to the balance of power and the theory of alliances. Perhaps, the reason why the theory itself is not very popular in the study of East Asia politics is that scholars tend to ignore the possibility that a traditional big war can ever occur, making it difficult for the theory to be implemented.

However, the theory of hegemonic war is very comprehensive in nature. First of all, this thesis supports the fundamental idea that the uneven growth of power among states is the driving force of international relations (Gilpin, 1988: 591). Secondly, the theory distinguishes the hegemonic war from other types of war for it changes the political, strategic, and economic affairs. It also transforms the structure of the international system regardless of the awareness of the participants (Gilpin, 1988: 592). Thirdly, the hegemonic war consists of three main elements: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. In this paper the thesis is the United States as the hegemonic power in East Asia; the antithesis is China as the counter-hegemon state with the uneven growth of power; and the synthesis is the China-shaped international system in East Asia, which is yet to be constructed.

According to Gilpin’s study, there are four phases in which hegemonic war occurs. The first phase is called the “system in the state of equilibrium”. In this phase, a particular system is set and a hegemonic power rules the system. The second phase is “redistribution of power in the system”. This phase occurs amid the differential growth of power, in which the challenger emerges with the rising economic, military, and technological power. As the consequence, the system moves from a condition of equilibrium into one of disequilibrium, which is known as the third phase. One of the reasons for the disequilibrium to occur is that military, technological, and other changes have benefited the challenger. In this phase, the distribution of power has undergone a radical transformation that has weakened the institutional foundation of the existing system. This includes the clash between the status quo and the revisionist camps. The fourth and last phase of the circle is the peace settlement that creates a new status quo (Gilpin, 1981: 11-15).



**Illustration 3.1. The Four Phases of Hegemonic War (Gilpin, 1981)**

As explained in the previous chapter, the main hypothesis of this research is that China and the United States are undergoing the third phase of the hegemonic war: the disequilibrium of the system. Following this explanation, it is important to clarify several points. First, the international system in this research is narrowed into the international regional system in East Asia (Northeast and Southeast Asia). Second,

the disequilibrium of the system between China and the United States will be analysed by evaluating their relationship with the countries in the region. Finally, the analysis will be conducted under three frameworks of Robert Gilpin's hegemonic war theory: political, economic, and ideological struggle.

### **3.3. Approach on Methodology and Data-Gathering Strategy**

The nature pattern of this thesis is explanatory. Thus, qualitative research is the foundation of the methodology. Combined with deductive reasoning, this thesis will focus on testing the existing theory to a particular political phenomenon. In this sense, this research will be conducted with content and discourse analysis. They are important as the data-gathering strategy in the study for a few reasons. First, within the current time framework, it is difficult to obtain information through direct and personal contact. Thus, content analysis that involves coding of written documents, audio transcripts, public speeches, or internet pages (Halperin & Heath, 2012: 177) is the most suitable one as the alternative. It helps the researcher understand the actors' thinking, belief, and stance without the need to have direct personal contact. This study is particularly used to analyse the discourse of current political leaders in the countries involved to understand their approach towards China and the United States. Understanding the words and languages used by the leaders of the respected countries is crucial because it reflects the way they communicate their ideas and belief, which are the most important components in shaping their mission. Thus, the data-gathering process will involve analysing numerous speeches from the leaders, bilateral and multilateral agreements, memorandum of understanding, press release, as well as the meeting, conferences, and correspondences.

Above all, the analysis approach while coding the data is qualitative based on interpretation, for it is the most suitable one for the content/discourse analysis. It will allow this study to provide an in-depth and detailed outcome as it will require us to look deeper than just analysing ranks and counts. With the qualitative design, this study will be able to record attitudes, feelings, and behaviours, which are the most prominent factors to learn in this research. It will also stimulate a detailed picture and can be built up to understand why the subjects of the study act in certain ways and provide certain outcomes.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **IKENBERRY'S LIBERAL CONCEPTION OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER AND CHANGE: A DISCUSSION ON ITS LIMITATION**

An order, either regional or international, occurs when states share similar expectations on how to conduct interaction. It is the result of balance, command, and consent (Ikenberry, 2011). The three aspects determine the values accepted by the members of the order, which later will determine how the interaction among them should be conducted. Historically, international orders rise and fall. A major conflict between the hegemonic power and the revisionist states always results in the creation of a new world order. The latest order that dominates the international system is the liberal international order.

Ikenberry (2011) remarks that the current liberal international order is open, rule-based, and progressive. This is the system that took its hegemonic place after the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union; it is a unipolar world system with the United States as the leader. The system has made it possible for the spread of Western values with many countries starting to embrace democratic principles, creating the so-called liberal internationalism. Countries like China and Russia, on the other hand, may not be willing to integrate themselves into the liberal international order, but will surely benefit from it. The fact that the liberal international order includes particular states and excludes others is the first limitation of the theory. The liberal international order seems to appear as an exclusive system in which some states meet the requirements to be part of it, while others do not. Although Ikenberry has refused to characterize the order as exclusive since he claims that the states voluntarily join the order (2011), it is inevitable to see that the liberal international order does put membership requirements such as to have a liberal democratic regime and to embrace the capitalist free market economy that states need to accomplish to achieve recognition as the part of the system. For this reason,

Russia and China are the example of the states to be continuously positioned out of the system because the two only embrace the requirement partially.

The liberal international order is set to explain the establishment of a stable order characterized by the rule of law and institutionalized cooperation (Ikenberry, 2011: 18). Serving the main objective of the liberal international order, institutions play the key role to determine rules and values and direct states to perform the desired behaviour. According to him, institutions allow states to establish cooperative security, democratic community, collective problem solving, universal rights, and shared sovereignty (Ikenberry, 2011: 19). This over-optimistic view of institutions' roles and their exclusive characteristics indicate that the theory disregards the reality of the anarchical order of the international system. First of all, the liberal international order is characterized by its hierarchical nature. The institutions are claimed to be built voluntarily with a set of rules but only the stronger states acquire such a privilege. While other weaker states are expected to behave accordingly, the liberal international order neglects that the anarchical nature of international system still prevails. The facts show that institutionalized norms and values do not stop states from acting to fulfill their particular interests. The European Union is an example of pride for the liberal international order for its ability to be the only supra-national actor in the current international system with states show their willingness to share sovereignty. However, the norms of this institution failed to govern Turkey to behave accordingly. Turkey refuses to recognize the right of self-determination of the Kurds, even though the consequence has to be the failure to join the EU.

Second, instead of creating stability and peace, institutions can be the source of conflict. The complexity of relationships among states that are institutionalized can be the obstacle of a problem to be solved, or a liberal norm to be accepted, even by its own members of the order. Consequently, this interdependence type of affiliation that is allowed by the liberal international order restrains its own values to function properly. The most appropriate way to explain this is by describing it as a clash of values. It happens when a state belongs to more than one institution that has a contradictory set of values. The contradicting values clash with one another and hinder the state from accepting one or both. The most important example of this is the case of the minority group, such as the Uighurs. The democratic states that

belong to the United Nations have all accepted that human rights are a universal value needed to be respected and protected at any cost. However, when the Uighurs are faced with basic human rights violations, only 22 countries were willing to show their support to condemn the violation by signing the joint-statement to be addressed to the Human Rights Council. Among those that refuse to sign were Turkey, Pakistan, and Indonesia. These three countries, besides being members of the United Nations, also have institutionalized relations with China, in which they set up certain rules and have to act accordingly. While they have a responsibility to accept the principle of human rights, they are unable to defend it in real practice because their shared values with China include the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs and the acceptance of the issue as an internal problem.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, although the liberal international order is defined by hierarchy in theory, the nature of the system is still driven by anarchy in practice. Not a single institution can acquire the ability to be an authoritative actor to define and govern how states shall behave. This fact shows that Ikenberry's optimism on the creation of the universal human rights principle has not met satisfactory realization. In his explanation about liberal international order 3.0<sup>3</sup>, he foresaw that the post-hegemonic era will bring with it the erosion of Westphalian sovereignty. However, human rights remains an unacceptable excuse for states to interfere with each other's domestic affairs and in the liberal international order, states have played the Westphalian sovereignty card like never before.

Coming back to the subject of hierarchy, liberal internationalism 3.0 emphasizes the importance of the establishment of consensus on norms of intervention. Ikenberry (2010) argued that in the post-Westphalian era, the international community will need to establish a legitimate authority to intervene in weak and troubled states. As

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2 To learn more about how China legitimize its values to prevent Pakistan from interfering in the issue of the Uighurs, see the 2005 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Good Neighborly Relations between the two: <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/xw/t190407.htm>, for Indonesia, see Sino-Indonesia Joint Statement on Bilateral Cooperation: <http://id.china-embassy.org/eng/zgyyn/zywx/t87364.htm> and for Turkey, see Joint Communiqué between the Republic of Turkey and the PRC: [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-communication-between-the-republic-of-turkey-and-the-people\\_s-republic-of-china\\_br\\_april-19\\_-2000\\_-ankara-.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/joint-communication-between-the-republic-of-turkey-and-the-people_s-republic-of-china_br_april-19_-2000_-ankara-.en.mfa)

3 Ikenberry elaborated liberal international order throughout certain periods and classified it into three: liberal international order 1.0, liberal international order 2.0, and the current version liberal international order 3.0. See Ikenberry (2011) on The Three Faces of Liberal Internationalism

he sees responsibility belongs to the great powers, the liberal international order is inevitably highly hierarchical in terms of power distribution. It is very contradictory to his previous claim about hierarchy, which according to him, should be allowed neither in too little nor too extreme a level (Ikenberry, 2010: 36). However, claiming the need for the establishment of the norms of intervention that only belongs to the great powers justifies that intervention upon human rights violation will only apply to the weak and troubled states. It is clear that in this matter, the great powers are untouchable. In this sense, the liberal international order is built upon an unequal basis of power. It gives the opportunity for the great powers to be more powerful and the weaker states to be more vulnerable. It gives the great powers freedom to use the built norms to serve their interests. It makes Turkey faces international pressure upon the Kurdish Question, Indonesia upon Papua issue, or North Korea upon basic citizenship rights. However, the pressure upon America on the racial issue and the increasing Islamophobia in Europe that limit human beings' fundamental rights remains less vocal. Randall Schweller's critics support the above explanation. He disapproves of Ikenberry's view that institutions both limit and project state power by functioning as mechanisms of hegemonic self-restraint. He argues that institutions cannot be autonomous from the hegemon's power and interest (Schweller, 2001: 163). However, instead of taming the exercise of power and power relation, institutions are used as tools to perform control on weaker and vulnerable states. Subsequently, there has been no case in which institutions were effectively used by secondary states to protect themselves from the exercise of hegemonic power, as well as in which institutions prevented the hegemon from doing something it intended to do (Schweller, 2001: 177).

Another optimistic assumption of the liberal international order is that states can cooperate to solve security dilemmas (Ikenberry, 2010: 19). For liberal internationalists, trade and exchange can have a civilizing effect on states. Their willingness to cooperate to reach mutual gains can facilitate the creation of mutual understanding. However, this manner oversimplifies security dilemma as they neglect two main crucial points. First, states are aware that a common goal does not instantaneously mean the ability to reach it. Second, concentrating on economic dependency as the solution to the problem provokes the overlooking of the possibilities that leaders change, values shift, and new opportunities emerge (Jervis,

1978: 168). Geographic location plays a key role in the emergence of a security dilemma. Even if Japan and China enjoy a great number of trade values with a total of \$330 billion in 2018<sup>4</sup>, Japan would inevitably feel insecure if China conducts military or fishery activities near Senkaku Island.

The liberal international order also endorses the concept of co-binding to solve the security issue. Ikenberry attacks the neorealist argument upon the security dilemma by claiming that the theory overlooks the importance of co-binding as a crucial feature of the Western liberal order. The post-Cold War era has shown the desire of Western liberal states to cooperate on the creation of security consensus. The most important example of this phenomenon is the establishment of NATO. Ikenberry (1999) emphasizes NATO as the alliance that goes beyond the traditional realist conception of defense alliance because the members of the alliance established a complex trans-governmental policy process for the political and military decisions. The alliance also allows member states to be involved in joint-force planning and international military command structure. The creation of NATO as a security co-binding was made perfect by the establishment of the European Union as an economic co-binding. Both these two were based on the desire of the states to overcome the dynamics of anarchy and to help states understand that military competition is relatively costly (Ikenberry, 1999: 184). Looking at the condition after the 22nd anniversary of the article, have NATO member states assuredly got rid of anarchy? The Aegean Sea dispute is sufficient to answer this question. Both being the member of NATO, Turkey and Greece have been involved in the territorial dispute in Aegean Sea since the 1970s. The conflict includes many aspects such as the status of territorial waters, national airspace, exclusive economic zone, the use of continental shelf, as well as the role of the flight information region. One of the fundamental reasons for the conflict is that Turkey has not signed the convention on the Continental Shelf and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. That behaviour has naturally resulted in Turkey not recognizing Greece's claims over its

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<sup>4</sup> China is listed as Japan's largest trading partner, while Japan is China's second one after the United States. The detailed information about the trade values among them can be found here: <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/092815/chinas-top-trading-partners.asp#:~:text=China%20is%20also%20Japan%27s%20largest,China%20valued%20at%20%24149.7%20billion.>

exclusive economic zone and territories on the islands. This shows that even a powerful NATO as an institutionalized security body cannot force its own member to sign a certain agreement or to accept a certain status quo. Moreover, NATO's indifferent behaviour towards the dispute also shows that an institution may have a consensus on a goal, but they may not be able to reach it. As minds change due to dissatisfaction and new opportunities arise, states cannot bind themselves to the same path no matter how much they demonstrated a commitment to the status quo in the first place. NATO's failure to normalize the relation between Greece and Turkey is an example that an institution can be built upon a very optimistic intention, but performs ineffectively in practice.

The members of the European Union are also not free from disputes. Italy and France have been in conflict over Mont Blanc border rights. The dispute was currently worsened by French authorities that set up natural protection zone on the disputed area which naturally has made the Italian Prime Minister send a formal complaint letter to the French Government (Giuffrida, 2020). Other disputes over territories can be seen between Spain and Portugal over Olivenza and Vila Real, as well as the dispute on Lake Constance among Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Although the conflicts mentioned above do not possess the characteristics of a serious conflict arising in the future, it still shows that even in a highly-institutionalized type of relationship, states are triggered by the actions of others that involve the disturbance on the territorial integrity. Hence, we come back to the very basic nature of states that possess three characteristics: First, states are highly concerned about their territories. Second, they are triggered by insecurity as the result of other states' activities that disturb their territories. And finally, they are affected by the anarchical order of the system regardless of the institutionalization of the relationship.

Another important feature of the liberal international order is, by all means, the capitalist economy and international institutions that promote economic openness. Ikenberry's optimism on economic openness and the capitalist system is that the order provides the opportunity for states to focus on absolute gains rather than relative gains. Moreover, economic openness also allows liberal states to use it as political ends, for example, by using free trade to maintain harmonious political and strategic relations among them (Ikenberry, 1999: 190). It is the dynamic market of

the liberal international order that makes it difficult to forecast the distribution of gain and loss. Thus, states that attempt to calculate them will face uncertainty as to the consequence. This will result in the absence of the existence of a loser or a winner in trade affiliation (Ikenberry, 1999: 192).

If we are to define relative and absolute gain, the former belongs to structural realism and the latter was introduced by neoliberal institutionalists. In a trade agreement, states will evaluate the gain by comparing the amount of their gains with the other party's. In this sense, states approach a comparative value of gain and loss, or the so-called relative gain. This power-oriented approach is related to zero-sum game, in which a state needs to be the relative winner in order to be the most powerful. The self-help system is accounted responsible for this. In a world dominated by uncertainty, cooperating for mutual gains will only result in insecurity about how the gain will be divided and whether the parties with more gains will implement a policy intended to damage or destroy the others (Waltz, 1978: 105). The absolute gain, on the other hand, is the way states approach trade activities by looking at only their own gains rather than comparing them with the others. Absolute gain is very encouraged in the liberal international system, as it is believed to be the source of peaceful affiliation among states. However, the fact shows that Ikenberry's optimism on states' devotion towards absolute gain is tackled by the United States, the very own leader of the order. The emerging trade war between the United States and China proves that absolute gain is not the focus of the states, including the liberal Western ones. Under the Trump administration, the United States has accused China of exploiting the American economy, thus, causing the country to face a great deficit from the trade activities between the two. Considering the status of the United States as China's number one export destination, it is inevitable that the trade has favored China's profound profits. Trump's decision to put tariffs on Chinese products is an evidence that the country evaluates its gain comparatively rather than individually. It is a decision based on the zero-sum game in which China's gain is interpreted as the loss for the United States.

Ikenberry does accept change in the liberal international order. He confirms that hegemonic war occurs and it is mainly the reason for the collapse and shift of the order. But when it comes to the debate whether the liberal international order is soon

to be replaced, he is determined that it is more durable than many pessimist realists have contemplated. His optimism leads him to go further to argue that China does not own the opportunity to impoverish the highly durable liberal international order that has maintained peace and stability for approximately seven decades. There is nothing wrong with his optimism, except that the historical hegemonic war might be currently occurring, and we are too blind to realize it.

In his book *Power, Order, and Change in World Politics*, Ikenberry elaborates three features a state will need to acquire to lead a hegemonic order: 1) the capability to persuade and coerce other states to integrate within the order; 2) the legitimacy based on normative values; 3) the ability to provide service and benefits to solve problems (2014: 84). This order that is built either based on command or consent requires the leader to maintain its capacity to carry it on. Command-based order requires the leading state to have the continuous capacity to enforce order while the consent-based one obliges the leading state to maintain prolonged bargain and agreements (Ikenberry, 2014: 97). An enduring order acquires a characteristic to be normatively appealing. For instance, states tied themselves to the United States not only because it has a powerful military and the largest economy, but also because it was stable, open, and rule-based (Ikenberry, 2014: 99). For this reason, Ikenberry is unsure that China will lead the new order because it lacks the capacity to create a normatively appealing order.

Nevertheless, I argue that what makes an order appealing to other states is not its normative values, but the possible benefits it brings. Rather than their tendency to accept certain norms and bond themselves to them, states are more likely to be driven by profits when they decide to join a particular order. This claim is rather difficult to ascertain, for states' intention will always remain concealed. Yet it is still possible to argue that, for instance, the European countries' decision to integrate themselves to the order offered by the United States in the aftermath of World War II was driven by the possible profits rather than their willingness to embrace norms. In the aftermath of the war, the European countries did not come together to discuss their regret for the devastation and decided to embrace the leadership of the United States. Instead, it was the famous European Recovery Program the so-called Marshall Plan that brought them together. The billion-dollar plan was naturally appealing for the

western European states that desired the cash flow to build back their countries after the catastrophe of the war. It was only after the Marshall Plan that the European countries committed to the US-led order with the Mutual Security Act and the Mutual Defense Assistance Act.

Ikenberry (2014) believes that an order can fall only with the existence of massive violence. However, the destructive effect of a nuclear weapon has been the game-changer in international politics. It makes war between the great powers irrational and implausible; thus, hegemonic war will disappear. Consequently, although the rising revisionist state has the capacity to change the order, there might be no possibility for it to exercise its intention. However, this thesis argues that a hegemonic war is still possible to occur without massive violence. The very fundamental feature of the liberal international order, institutions, can backfire and contribute to the collapse of the order. As the liberal international order grows from the inner western states system to be the universalized one, powerful states around the world enjoy the independence to exercise their power under the umbrella of an institution. The United States no longer possesses control over what values are introduced and what type of behaviour is encouraged in the institutionalized relationship among states around the world. Thus, it gives the powerful revisionist state the opportunity to promote its own values and use the institutions to turn them into its own hegemony, without any need to risk its perpetual growth as in the case of traditional hegemonic war. It is true that China, for example, has been doing this by promoting its Five Principle of Peaceful Co-existence, the strict non-interference principle, and the special interpretation of human rights issues. It is highly possible for China to preserve its agenda by using its successfully-constructed institutions either through bilateral agreements or regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Still, Ikenberry's optimism on the endurance of the liberal international order prolongs. It does face some crisis. But the crisis itself is not about the order, but authority. To elaborate, the crisis of the order means the collapse of liberal norms and the liberal international order while the crisis of authority refers to the declining power of the United States within the order (Ikenberry, 2011: 280). He claims that what the world is currently witnessing is rather the declining influence of the United

States, and it does not necessarily mean the crisis of the order. However, it is clear that the liberal international order is at the stake of crisis both in terms of authority and the order. The United States' hegemonic influence is declining, no one, including Ikenberry, rejects this view. Moreover, the liberal international order is also in crisis subsequent to its failure to achieve its own goal to create a post-Westphalian era characterized by the triumph of self-determination, human rights, and wealth. The liberal norms such as self-determination and human rights do not function properly as they consistently clash with the Westphalian sovereignty and territorial integrity. The case of the Uighurs, the Kurds, and the Palestinians will remain as evidence of the ineffective liberal international order in promoting self-determination and human rights. Moreover, although states are getting wealthier, it has been a common sense that the highly increasing inequality issue is the inevitable product of the capitalist system (Muller, 2013: 30).

## **CHAPTER V**

# **REALIST CONCEPTION OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER AND CHANGE: HOW OFFENSIVE REALISM COVERS IT ALL**

No one loves a political realist, Robert Gilpin once stressed. The pessimistic view of realism towards international politics has consistently been challenged. Yet, it is not wrong to say that the invalidation only demonstrates the strength of the theory itself. This chapter is intended to explain how realism has survived the challenges and stood as the dominant theory in explaining the international order and change, by focusing on the discussion of structural defensive and offensive realism.

### **5.1. Defensive and Offensive Realism**

In a self-help system, uncertainty and insecurity determine states' behaviour. They hinder cooperation from succeeding, if not taking place, and invalidates the concept of mutual gains. Without a doubt, the question of "who will gain more?" will dominate over the question of "will both of us gain?" (Waltz, 1979: 105). The absolute gain is unlikely to persist for states will eventually fear the increased capabilities of their partners and begin to be more aware of the possibility that their partners will use it to act against them. In this case, the absolute gain will fail subsequent to the unequal distribution of gain. This explanation demonstrates that states may have an optimistic approach for worthy ends but since the quality of international life has not changed in many ways, states could not figure out the way to reach them. This is the reason why we have to re-evaluate the concept of interdependence. Optimistic liberal institutionalists have argued that the prominent peace in the current order is made possible on account of the broadening connection among states. However, if interdependency is undoubtedly worthwhile, then why do many states work on reducing their dependency? While the liberals fail to answer

this question, Waltz emphasizes that states have always competed for wealth and security (Waltz, 2000: 33).

Additionally, organization and freedom relate to each other eminently for defensive realism. States' willingness to join a managing organization requires them to give up on their freedom, partially or totally. The elimination of the proportion of their freedom will result in the emergence of insecurity. For the most part, defensive realism provides a better understanding of the matter of institution than liberalism does. Liberal internationalists especially have overlooked the possibility of the power and control struggle within the organization. However, the more influential an organization, the more it possesses the desire to control (Waltz, 1979: 112). The anarchical order, on the other hand, will eliminate the possibility of states' struggle over controlling an agency or organization and that the system permits states to exist separately.

Defensive realism accepts both anarchy and hierarchy as the existing orders in the international system. While anarchy governs the system as a whole, the hierarchical order exists in the second layer and governs some agencies in the society. In the existence of these two, especially in the anarchical order, states are likely to possess sensible behaviour. States seek their own preservation, and at the maximum, may prompt universal domination (Waltz, 1979: 118). In the anarchical order, self-help is the main driving factor of states' behaviour. Self-help requires states to possess the capability to efficiently assist themselves in order to reach prosperity. Otherwise, the state of suffering is inevitable. Fear of such undesired consequence drives states to fall into the balance of power condition. If some states are relatively more powerful, other states would emulate to preserve their security and survival. This behaviour generates the system with the equilibrium of power, sufficient to discourage other states or parties to interfere with the interests of others. Power is a means, not an end (Waltz, 1979: 126). Hence, it is only until security that brings survival is preserved that states will seek other goals such as profit and power. This is the reason why many secondary states tend to join the weaker side, for the stronger side threatens their existence. On the weaker side, the secondary states would feel secured, safe, and accepted. International politics is not a competitive system, as once the balance is disrupted, it will restore itself in one way or another (Waltz, 1979: 128)

Another defensive realist, Stephen Walt, sees the alliance as the form of balance of threat rather than power. In this sense, when states decide to either balance or bandwagon, the existence of threat and its severity are what is to be taken into account. To illustrate, in the condition of balancing, states will ally with the weaker states in order to avoid being dominated by those who can dominate (Walt, 1985: 5). In the condition of bandwagoning, however, states decide to join the threatening coalition with the hope of avoiding being attacked or to share the spoils of victory (Walt, 1985: 8). Four factors affect the severity of threat: aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive capability, and offensive intention (Walt 1985: 9).

Aggregate power includes the total resources such as population, industrial capability, military capacity, and technological strength. States with aggregate power on account of their abundant resources possess the capability to punish enemies or reward their allies (Walt, 1985: 10). Thus, this can be the motive for other secondary states to either balance or bandwagon. Moreover, geographical proximity is also crucial for states to determine the severity of the threat. The threatening state may not be dangerous for others at a great distance. The characteristics of power are also important. Powerful states who are offensive or clearly have offensive intentions possess more threat compared to relatively defensive ones. In a condition where the offensive power authorizes rapid victory, for instance, the secondary states would have no opportunity to resist bandwagoning as no alternative balancing alliance would be able to provide protection. However, when the powerful state demonstrates the offensive intention without the imminent massive conquest, states will tend to form an alliance to balance against it (Walt, 1985: 12).

Walt's balance of threat straightforwardly challenges the importance of ideology in forming an alliance. In fact, it is security consideration that dominates the alliance decision compared to the ideological preferences. Hence, ideologically based alliances are unlikely to survive (Walt, 1985: 24). However, the existence of nuclear weapons may be the game-changer of this circumstance. As nuclear weapon makes it harder for a state to possess an offensive approach, one shall attract allies by using ideological factors. Yet, the ideological factor alone is not enough to define a form of alliance. To give an alternative explanation on this subject, Walt introduced the concept of bribery and penetration. In the condition of international bribery, the

powerful state provides economic and military assistance to attract allies. The incentives are expected to create a sense of gratitude and dependence that will drive the receiver to get closer to the donor (Walt, 1985: 27). Meanwhile, powerful states may also demonstrate a political penetration strategy to attract allies by establishing lobbying organizations and conducting foreign propaganda. Although the examples of this strategy are easy to find, for example, the effort made by the United States to increase its influence in the Far East by using the “China Lobby”, the situations that support the penetration strategy to have effective outcomes remain limited.

What money is to economics, power is to international relations (Mearsheimer, 2001: 12). It is indeed the most appropriate sentence to open the discussion about offensive realism. This branch of structural realism is more reliable since it positions itself in the middle ground between traditional realism and defensive realism. Defensive realism’s argument on the power relation among states is excellent except that its assumption about states’ desire over power is missing one point. Waltz and Walt argue that states pursue power only to a degree sufficient to preserve their existence, for an excessive power growth may provoke other states to form an alliance against the aggressive state and put its security into danger. However, some crucial questions are to be answered: how do states know which level of power is sufficient and which one is excessive? How to measure this when we know that no one can assure the others’ intention? In the anarchical order with uncertainty as the natural characteristic, one shall attempt to maximize its power by taking advantage of the situations when the benefits outweigh the costs, thus, seeking hegemony in the system (Mearsheimer, 2001: 21).

Similarly, defensive realism has put forward a distinguished understanding of alliance formation. However, neither Waltz nor Walt acknowledges the relation between uncertainty and alliance. To be sure, the alliance won’t stay permanently. Even if states show endeavor to maintain the balance, none is sure when someone will go offensive and break the commitment. Offensive realists also emphasized that “alliances are only temporary marriages of convenience” and “today’s enemy may be tomorrow’s friend and vice versa” (Mearsheimer, 2001: 33). It is because states follow only their interest and behave selfishly in the self-help order. Great powers won’t put aside their agenda for the sake of the interests of the international

community. Thus, even if states cooperate or form an organization, it is rather a type of conspiracy among powerful actors to serve their specific interests at the expense of others that are outside the elite club (Schweller & Priess, 1997: 8). When the established institutions fall after the strong states attempt to overthrow them, which is the innate intention of any revisionist state, the institutional order will devolve into a balance-of-power system as the default order (Scheweller, 2001: 172). However, Mearsheimer, while bolstering the idea that balance of power is the default order, refuses to consider bandwagon as the key alternative strategy available to the threatened great powers. He instead proposes the idea of buck-passing, after balancing, as the second rational preferred strategy. Bandwagoning is not common as it forces states to focus on the absolute gain, which is not the nature of states in the realist world. Buck-passing, on the other hand, is when states use another threatened great power to check the aggressor while they stay on the sidelines. With this strategy, the threatened states avoid the cost of conflict with the aggressor (Mearsheimer, 2001: 139).

Offensive realism also enriched defensive realism's discussion on the concept of "aggregate power" introduced by Stephen Walt as the combination of the total resources such as population, industrial capability, military capacity, and technological strength. For Walt, the aggregate power of a state determines the behaviour of other states in the system. The more the aggregate power of a state, the bigger the threat it possesses, thus, the more other states will decide to balance or bandwagon. However, besides its effect on the other states, Walt does not sufficiently discuss how the aggregate power can also influence the owner. Do states with aggregate power merely concentrate on how to exercise it to their allies and enemies? Mearsheimer (2001) answered this question by emphasizing the hegemonic tendency of powerful states. He divides power into two: potential power that consists of wealth and population, and actual power that consists of military capabilities. The combination of potential and actual power in excessive amounts may influence the state to be the potential hegemonic power. It will desire to control all of the great powers in the region since it has a good prospect of defeating them in conflict. Only, the potential hegemon needs to make sure that the gap between its power and the power of the second great state in the region is tremendous (Mearsheimer, 2001: 45).

Furthermore, offensive realism broadens the discussion on power by putting forward its hierarchical nature. While defensive realists believe that the state's ultimate aim is to preserve its survival, offensive realists accept the idea with a broader explanation. According to Mearsheimer, a state's aim is rather hierarchical. Along with survival as the most substantial aim, states also seek non-security goals such as greater economic prosperity and the influence of ideology (Mearsheimer, 2001: 46). In fact, Waltz shared the same argument. The difference is that while Waltz believes that these secondary aims can only be preserved after the survival is obtained, Mearsheimer argues that both security and non-security aims can get along together as long as the behaviour does not clash with the balance of power.

Some non-security aims such as wealth and economic prosperity sometimes bring states to inevitable interaction among them, which turn into cooperation and institutionalized relations. Defensive realists believe that cooperation will not last long as uncertainty will lead states to focus on relative gain rather than the absolute one. Offensive realists emphasize this subject in a broader explanation. In fact, they go further to claim that no amount of cooperation can eliminate the possibility of security competition (Mearsheimer, 2001: 53). This is why, in the cooperative relations among them, states are divided into two: the established, satisfying power and the rising, dissatisfied power (Schweller & Priess, 1997: 11). The competition between the two is perpetually about the power proportion, derived from the fact that institution is the set of rules and norms governed by the status quo power. It is naturally legitimate for the established power to create an order that serves its interests, causing the dissatisfied power to rise and react. Schweller shares a similar argument when he addressed that institutions are incapable to be independent of the status quo state's influence and interests. Thus, binding institutions either work best when they are least needed or do not work at all (Schweller, 2001: 163).

To conclude, structural realism provides a broader understanding of international politics compared to liberalists' view. Defensive realism manages to explain that the state's ultimate aim is survival, with the possession of sufficient power is better than having the excessive one. However, offensive realists such as Mearsheimer and Schweller broaden the idea by emphasizing some aspects defensive realists tend to overlook, such as how uncertainty affects the balance of power and how aggregate

power influence alliances. With this, they go further to conclude that the survival of the state will be at its most preserved place when the state reaches the hegemonic position. The next discussion will be regarding the change of the order as the battle over hegemonic power put forward by Robert Gilpin, whose comprehensive idea has made him the exceptional offensive realist among the others.

## **5.2. Robert Gilpin's Distinguished Approach**

Intention changes, all branches of realism accept this. But how about interest? Is the uncertainty in the anarchical order of the system the sole factor to affect the state's intention and interest? Although realists may have argued in a parallel way that the change of intention is constantly followed by the change of interest, it is Robert Gilpin that brought this subject into a comprehensive discussion. As he puts forward the idea that states' interest does change, the factors that influence the shift is not limited to the uncertainty of the order, but also economic, technological, and other developments. That is why it is important to evaluate the international system in terms of the distribution of benefits: which parties gain the most from its operation and whose interests are being served. Hence, changes in the system also mean changes in the distribution of benefits, and that the study about international political change should focus on how a certain political actor attempts to shift the system to advance its own interests (Gilpin, 1981: 10).

Particularly, there are five behaviours of states that will likely cause the international system to change: 1) if the threatening state believes that the new system will be more profitable, 2) if the expected benefits exceed the expected costs, 3) state's desire to expand politically, economically, and ideologically, 4) if the economic cost to maintain the status quo rises quickly, 5) new equilibrium will emerge with the redistribution of power if the disequilibrium is not resolved (Gilpin, 1981: 10-11).

Gilpin's definition of power is rather thorough. It is similar to Stephen Walt's aggregate power that consists of military, economic, and technological capabilities. What makes Gilpin's conception more prominent is that the rise of the accumulation of these aspects does not only influence other states, but also the owners themselves. The development of power in terms of military, economic, and technology is the

game-changer in international politics because it causes the change of power of states and it may then change the states' interest. This process, argued Gilpin (1981), is the most destabilizing factor in the international system. Moreover, he also differentiates what he calls power and prestige. The former is specifically the combination of military, economic, and technology; the latter is the element that affects the result of political action such as public morale and leadership quality (Gilpin, 1981: 14). In international relations, prestige includes respect and common interest as the result of the powerful state's effort to promote its ideology to legitimize its rule. Based on economic and military power, prestige is a reputation of strength and is very important for a powerful state to exercise its interest without having to use explicit power. To some extent, its leadership is as well justified by the secondary states because they prefer the certainty of the status quo rather than the uncertainty of change (Gilpin, 1981: 30).

The power obtained above is the key for states to proceed with their interests. States normally have three types of objectives. First of all, they are likely to pursue territorial expansion, for territory is the way to achieve wealth and security. Second, states seek to increase their influence over the behaviour of other states. Either by forming alliances or possessing threats, states attempt to build an international rule and political circumstances to serve their political, economic, and ideological interests. Third, states will desire to control the international economy after political and ideological dominance (Gilpin, 1981: 23-24). On account of this claim, Gilpin is allegedly the only offensive realist who put a great focus on economic and ideological influence and considers them as equally prominent with political dominance.

Additionally, international relation students including other offensive realists pay only a little attention to the category of changes in the international system. Gilpin, on the other hand, extends the discussion of change not only limited to the balance-of-power and alliance shift. He marked three categories of change: 1) system changes, 2) systematic change, and 3) interaction change (Gilpin, 1981: 40). The first implies a dramatic change in the system, such as the change of the character of the system from the Greek city-state to the European state system, later to the nation-state system. The second one refers to the change in the governance within the

system with the new distribution of power and hierarchy of prestige. The third one is regarding the change of rights and rules in the interaction among states within the system (Gilpin, 1981: 42-43). The change of the governance and the system as a whole may have a revolutionary characteristic, even through a hegemonic war.

Gilpin, above all, provides a very detailed and comprehensive theoretical framework compared to other structural realists. His explanation about power, prestige, as well as international order and change maximizes the function of realism as a grand paradigm to explain the dynamics of international politics. Moreover, his distinguished focus on globalization, economic, and technological subjects has also enriched realism's discussion and made it possible for the theory to stand stronger against liberals' criticisms.

## CHAPTER VI

### BEYOND COMPETITION: HEGEMONIC WAR BETWEEN THE USA AND CHINA IN EAST ASIA

This chapter seeks to deliver the main hypothesis of this research: China and the United States are undergoing the third phase of the hegemonic war: the disequilibrium of the system. The discussion about China-US hegemonic war will also complete Gilpin's discussion concerning the modern hegemonic wars. According to him, three major hegemonic wars ever occurred throughout history: The Thirty Years War (1648), the 100 Years War (France vs Britain between 1792-1815), and World War I and II. Hence, the analysis of the US-China conflict will also be evaluated according to political, economic, and ideological struggle as demonstrated in the table below:

**Table 6.1 Hegemonic Wars in Modern Era (Gilpin, 1988)**

Variables	30 Years War	100 Years War	World Wars	US-China
Politics	Habsburg vs Nation States	French vs British Hegemony	Sea Power vs Land power (The clash of European states)	US-led vs China-led regionalism
Economy	Feudalism vs Capitalism	Mercantilism vs Market principle	Industrialization and the clash of societies	Trade Protectionism vs Belt and Road Initiative
Ideology	Protestantism vs Catholicism	Revolutionary republicanism vs Conservative political forms	Conservative political form vs Nationalism	Liberal values vs Five Principles of Peaceful Co- Existence

## **6.1. Political Competition: China-Led Regionalism or US-Led Regionalism?**

On the contrary to what Ikenberry refers to as the “post-Westphalian” order, it is more accurate to describe East Asia as a “post-Western order”. The United States’ declining power in the region is undeniable and China’s growing leadership is currently at stake. The way to analyse this is to examine the popularity of both China-led regionalism and US-led regionalism in the region. However, unlike the latter, the former subject is somewhat understudied and underestimated (He, 2020: 80). Several reasons may explain this situation. First, when it comes to how regionalism should be, the standard always refers to a supra-national type of integration such as the European Union. However, China has an intergovernmental approach concerning the matter (He, 2020: 82) and the study of this paper finds that it is as successful as supra-national regionalism. Moreover, given the fact that Asian history differs itself from the European, a supranational organization has never been the subject of existence. Second, China-led regionalism is commonly approached from the perspective of East Asian countries as their response to China’s rise. The countries’ response to their engagement with China is evaluated as to their balancing or bandwagoning rather than a result of China’s expansive influence. For example, South Korea and Taiwan are considered accommodators of the rising power while Japan and ASEAN countries are the balancers (Ross, 2006; Chen & Yang, 2013; Chung, 2007; Jerden & Hagstorm, 2012). However, it is also important to see the subject from China vis-a-vis the USA perspective. Regionalism shall be seen as a dimension of the competition between them rather than only as a connection between China’s rising power and the neighbouring countries’ responses. I argue that China’s engagement with East Asian countries is a sign of political competition between China and the US. And the way the neighbouring countries choose to engage shows their preference for either China or the US. The analysis below will examine how regionalism is approached in terms of the US-China competition for dominance.

### **6.1.1 The USA’s Declining Influence**

In one of his papers, Ikenberry (2014) demonstrates three objectives that the United States should follow as a grand strategy towards East Asia. First, the United States needs to pursue alliance building and cooperative security. Second, the United States

should promote economic openness and the internationalized capitalism. Third, the United States shall pursue the agenda of multilateral cooperation by building an institutionalized order.

While the second is perhaps the only successful grand strategy that the US could manage, the great power happens to fail especially in the first and third attempts. However, the analysis concerning alliance building and cooperative security is beyond the discussion of this thesis. It instead will exclusively focus on how the United States fails in its institutionalization effort by evaluating its relation with ASEAN and the establishment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

ASEAN has been the most important instrument for the great powers wishing to dominate East Asia, not only because ASEAN consists of the ten Southeast Asian countries, but it is also the most well-established and comprehensive integration that exists in the region. The United States has demonstrated its interest in building a good relation with ASEAN, although its effort remains limited to the bilateral cooperation between the two instead of using the organization as a way to further integrate the region.

The United States began its engagement with ASEAN as a dialogue partner in 1977, ten years after the establishment of the organization. In 2002, the United States announced the ASEAN Cooperation Plan. It is an initiative with the US funding to support US - ASEAN activities in enhancing mutual interests in various areas such as trade and problems concerning trans-national crime (U.S Department of State, 2005). However, despite its effort to fund seminars and studies to educate people about the benefits of the free trade agreement, this initiative merely helps the US reach its goal, which is reflected in the unwillingness of ASEAN countries to join the US-initiated TPP. This plan was followed by another initiative called Trade and Investment Framework Arrangement between the USA and ASEAN four years later. Similarly, the framework could only enhance the relationship between ASEAN countries and the US in a bilateral way rather than creating an institutionalized multilateral cooperation.

Certainly, it is also necessary to discuss America's participation in the East Asian Summit. However, it is not a significant sign of the US leadership for a few reasons. First of all, the East Asian Summit is an initiative of ASEAN countries together with the plus-three members (China, Japan, and South Korea). America's participation was rather the result of the invitation in 2009 together with Russia. Moreover, the summit is originally designed for a broader participation including enhancing the invitation to Mongolia, Bangladesh, even the European Union and Arab League. Secondly, with this broad participation, the summit is a forum for annual dialogue rather than a formal, integrated cooperation. For this reason, the leadership of the summit still belongs to ASEAN as an entity and the dialogue will not achieve a certain establishment of cooperation unless it is further discussed in the ASEAN internal summit that is exclusive to the ten members. Thus, the participation of the USA in this forum only demonstrates that the great power is still willing to engage itself with East Asia, both to keep its presence in the regional development and to balance China's emerging leadership position.

Trans-Pacific Partnership is another sign of America's failure. In the statement regarding the initiative, the Office of the United States Trade Representative (n.d.) remarked US participation as the sign of "leading Asia Pacific regional integration initiative". It involves the United States with eleven countries including Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. The Office later describes it as an "ambitious agreement" and is to include other states throughout the Asia Pacific region. It is also remarked as the most promising platform for Asia Pacific regional trade integration. However, the reality seems to work the opposite way of how the United States wishes it to be. First of all, since its establishment in 2016, TPP could only manage to attract a small number of East Asian states. Singapore and Brunei were already members before the United States decided to join. Malaysia was reported to refrain from joining because of domestic pressure and the majority of the population was skeptical about how the agreement would give Malaysia more benefits (Deutsche Welle, 2016). With the insufficient willingness of East Asian countries to participate in the cooperation, TPP is rather a failed integration project that the United States decided to withdraw itself from in 2017.

## **6.1.2 China's Emerging Leadership and Engagement**

### **6.1.2.1 ASEAN Plus Three (APT)**

The first important regional cooperation is ASEAN + Three, which is a cooperation among ASEAN member states with China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. This cooperation is significant not only because it excludes the United States, but it also embraces almost all countries in East Asia, marking it as one of the most inclusive establishments in the region.

There are two main important reasons why APT is important. First of all, what is most appealing is that the states of APT members consider this cooperation as an important element to foster “East Asian regionalism”<sup>5</sup> which I believe is crucial both to denounce the skepticism towards Asian integration without the United States and to confirm that the integration is not merely a multilateral cooperation. It started as an informal summit among the leaders of ASEAN with China, Japan, and South Korea in December 1997 and was institutionalized in 1999 with the Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020). Within the same document, it is stated that the leaders aim at making APT the driving force towards the long-term goal of building an East Asian Community. Some leaders of the member states have also mentioned the word “integration” and “regionalism” as a part of their discourse during meetings and speeches. The most recent example comes from Chinese Premier Li Keqiang’s speech on a virtual meeting concerning the Covid-19 pandemic, in which he mentioned that the member states need to work toward signing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement to enhance the “regional economic integration” (The State Council the People’s Republic of China, 2020). Moreover, he also emphasized the importance of using local currencies in regional trade and investment and improve the currency swap network. In fact, this can also be seen as China’s effort to globalize its currency to stand as the alternative to the US dollar. At the end of his speech, Premier Li Keqiang reminded the member states to support China-led financial institutions such as Asian Development Bank

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<sup>5</sup> The word “regionalism” is mentioned in the first third article of the overview of ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation, published by the ASEAN Secretariat in April 2020. More information: <https://asean.org/storage/2016/01/APT-Overview-Paper-24-Apr-2020.pdf>

and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. In addition, ASEAN also releases the document of APT Leaders Statement on Connecting the Connectivities Initiative (2019) subsequent to the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting that emphasizes four important points concerning integration and regionalism:

- The leaders of member states recognize the geographical proximity, as well as the increasing interdependence between ASEAN Plus three countries.
- The leaders of member states recall the importance of connectivity for the collective effort to establish regional integration and cooperation.
- The leaders affirmed the importance of peaceful cooperation, openness, mutual learning, as well as regional and inter-regional economic integration.
- The leaders reaffirm to build the ASEAN Community with ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

The second important characteristic of the integration is that it is very comprehensive in nature. With its main focus on various areas such as economy, social, and politics, the member states have enlarged their cooperation within many aspects such as political and security, transnational crime, trade and investment, tourism, agriculture and forestry, energy, science, technology and innovation, environment, social welfare, labour, culture and art, and many more (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020). The table 6.2 below will explain a comprehensive insight about the growing cooperation among the countries in East Asia throughout the years<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> The data in this table are collected from the official documents concerning the list of the agreements, the ministerial level statements, and the annual summit statements. For the list of the agreement, the detailed information can be found here: <https://aseanplusthree.asean.org/resources/agreements/>, for ministerial level, statements the detail is available on <https://aseanplusthree.asean.org/resources/statements-and-declarations/ministerial-level-statements/>, and the summit level statements from here: <https://aseanplusthree.asean.org/resources/statements-and-declarations/summit-level-statements/>

**Table 6.2. The List of Established Cooperation in ASEAN+3**

<b>Year of Summits</b>	<b>Established Cooperation</b>
1999-2001	East Asian Business Council Human Resource Development Fund ASEAN Action Plan on Social Safety Nets President Kim Initiative on East Asian Free Trade Area
2002-2003	China's proposal on ministerial meeting on transnational crime Japan's initiative for Development in East Asia and East Asian Study Group Beijing Declaration on Revitalising Tourism for ASEAN, China, Japan, and Korea
2004-2005	China to sign the Protocol of Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone The second meeting of NEAT(Network of East Asia Think-Tanks) Discussion on Asian Bond Market Initiative and Initiative and East Asian Summit China to contribute USD 200.000 to ASEAN+3 Unit
2006-2007	Discussion on East Asian Cultural Week The proposal of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia China proposed Agricultural Technology and Management Training Program
2008-2009	Collective Measure and Joint Actions against H1N1 Virus Cooperation on Food Security and Bio-Energy Development The East Asia Emergency Rice Reserve Pilot Project The establishment of the ASEAN Plus Three Finance Cooperation Fund
2010-2011	Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation ASEAN Plus Three Macroeconomic Research Office ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Fund ASEAN Plus Three International Conference on Disaster Management ASEAN Plus Three Plan of Action on Education Joint Declaration on ASEAN Plus Three Civil Service Cooperation
2012-2013	Memorandum of Cooperation on Tourism ASEAN Plus Three Joint Cultural Performance: Unity in Diversity Negotiation on Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
2014-2015	China's proposal for hosting an East Asia Investment Summit ASEAN Plus Three Energy Cooperation Second APT Youth Environment Forum ASEAN Plus Three Economic Ministers' Consultation APTERR's Project for natural disasters
2016-2017	The 11th Annual Meeting of Deans and Directors of Diplomatic Training Institution of APT countries APT Guidelines on Student Exchange and Mobility APT universal Health Coverage Network MoU between AMRO and the Asian Development Bank APT Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication
2017-2018	APT Cooperation Work plan 2018-2022 APT Center for the Gifted in Science APT Student Camp and Teacher Workshop APT Junior Science Odyssey
2018-2019	APT Work Plan on Cooperation in Culture and Arts
2020	The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 APT Plan of Action on Mitigating the Economic Impact on the Covid-19 Pandemic APT Regional Economic Outlook

Above all, the information in the table 6.2 explains that the ASEAN Plus Three is very significant to show how China has been the leading actor in the organization on

its way to establish regionalism and that its success to exclude the United States completely from such comprehensive, integrated cooperation is rather a sign of its effort to be the regional leader.

#### **6.1.2.2 The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**

The world was stunned by the news in November 2020 that Asia Pacific countries have just signed the world's most comprehensive economic partnership called RCEP. The partnership that involves the 10 ASEAN countries with APT member states (Japan, South Korea, and China), as well as Australia and New Zealand, is to be considered as the world's largest free-trade bloc. Moreover, this partnership deserves to be remarked upon as historical for several reasons:

1. Not only does the bloc excludes the USA from the process of the negotiation that started in 2011, but it also includes US allies in the region such as Australia and New Zealand.
2. The bloc will cover 30% of global trade that includes 2.3 billion people (ASEAN Secretariat, 2020).
3. It is the first multilateral trade agreement between East Asian countries (Ward, 2020).

Another important point to mention is that RCEP holds the possibility for China to take the lead in writing trade rules in the region. It's especially significant after the United States decided to withdraw itself from the Trans-Pacific Partnership in January 2017. However, one year after the US withdrawal, the remaining TPP countries have moved on with the new version of the pact, known as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Earlier this year, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang expressed China's desire to consider joining the agreement. In APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, President Xi Jinping declared a similar statement (Atkins, 2021). If China's desire to join this agreement to be realized soon, it means the world's second-largest economy will fill the place the United States once possessed. Most importantly, with RCEP and CPTPP, China's effort of regionalism in East Asia will officially be confirmed after leaving the US behind in terms of political affairs.

To prove my argument that the RCEP is a form of regionalism, it is crucial to conduct a discourse analysis on how the leaders of the signing states interpret the agreement. Below is the analysis of the leaders' statement from the beginning of RCEP negotiation to its signing process<sup>7</sup>.

- November 2012 Joint Declaration on the Launch of Negotiations for the RCEP states that besides enhancing economic growth and equitable economic development, RCEP is also expected to be the means for deepening integration in the region.
- November 2015 Joint Statement on the RCEP Negotiations states that the leaders ensure the RCEP to be the growth driver and key pathway for broader economic integration in the region.
- September 2016 Joint Leaders' Statement on the RCEP reaffirms the potential of the RCEP to deepen regional economic integration.
- November 2017 and November 2018 Joint Leaders' Statement on the Negotiations for the RCEP states the agreement to be the pathway for economic integration and the way to the expansion of regional trade.
- November 2019 Joint Leaders' Statement on the RCEP affirms the agreement to be the supporting pillar to a strong multilateral trading system.
- November 2020 Joint Leaders' Statement on the RCEP acknowledges the agreement to be critical in building the region's resilience through the inclusive and sustainable post-pandemic economic recovery process as a mega-regional trading arrangement.

Furthermore, besides joint statements, the leaders of the involved states also demonstrate their opinion concerning the agreement individually. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang addressed the partnership as a landmark achievement of East Asian regional cooperation with the greatest development potential (Foreign Affairs Ministry of the PRC, 2020), a statement that rather explains how RCEP is expected to be developed into a broader term in the future. He also stated that RCEP is the sign of the victory of multilateralism against the emerging protectionism and unilateralism amid the

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<sup>7</sup> The data is derived from the official press releases and statements along the process of the establishment of the cooperation. All of the Joint Statements can be accessed through RCEP official website: <https://rcepsec.org/official-documents/>

crisis brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong remarks the cooperation as the sign of a “closer interdependence” which is a major step for the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore, 2020). Likewise, Indonesian President Joko Widodo demonstrates his insight regarding this multilateralism commitment as the symbol of peace, stability, and prosperity (Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

### **6.1.3 Conclusion**

The discussion regarding the US and China-led regionalism above demonstrates that China’s leadership in the region is very well welcomed by East Asian states. Undoubtedly, the United States is still an important strategic and economic bilateral partner for many countries in the region. But so is China. Moreover, what is crucial from what the study found is that despite America’s effort to integrate the region, the countries refrained from supporting the agenda, which can be seen from how East Asian states demonstrate their skepticism to join the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership. On the other hand, along with its declining influence, the United States has to witness the establishment of two significant integration agendas in the region. It is however important to state that, for example, during the dialogue process towards the establishment of RCEP, none of the involved East Asian countries initiates or shows its intention to invite the United States to participate in the process.

## **6.2 Economic Competition between the USA and China: The USA’s Trade Protectionism vs China’s Belt and Road Initiative**

Being a hegemon power carries with it a great responsibility to protect the international system, especially for the order to be stable and in favour of its status. However, as the maintenance of the order provides profits to the hegemon, it is also associated with the economic drain since the hegemon is demanded to expand its military forces, finance its allies, provide foreign aids, and other costs that obligate it to have a continuing economic surplus. However, will it always be able to maintain its economic leadership? The historical accounts answer this question as no. The United States, like its historical predecessors, also faces the decline of its economic hegemony. In this section, the analysis will focus on two major explanations. First,

its decline of the economic leadership will be explained following Gilpin's theory by analysing its trade activities with the regional actors. Second, this section argues that corresponding to the historical accounts, the United States is currently adopting a more protectionist economic policy and is challenged by China's free-market policy of the Belt and Road initiative.

Undoubtedly, changes are the natural character of the international system. A hegemon power, in this matter, may enjoy an economic surplus that favours its expansion policy, but, at some points, it may have neither the motive nor the capacity to expand (Gilpin, 1981: 157). Gilpin further argued that a major characteristic of a decline of a hegemon is the establishment of a disequilibrium. This state of decline is favoured by a scenario that the cost to maintain its hegemon status to be rather costly. He stated that "there is a tendency for the economic costs of maintaining the international status quo to rise faster than the financial capacity of the dominant power to support its position and the status quo" (Gilpin, 1981: 156).

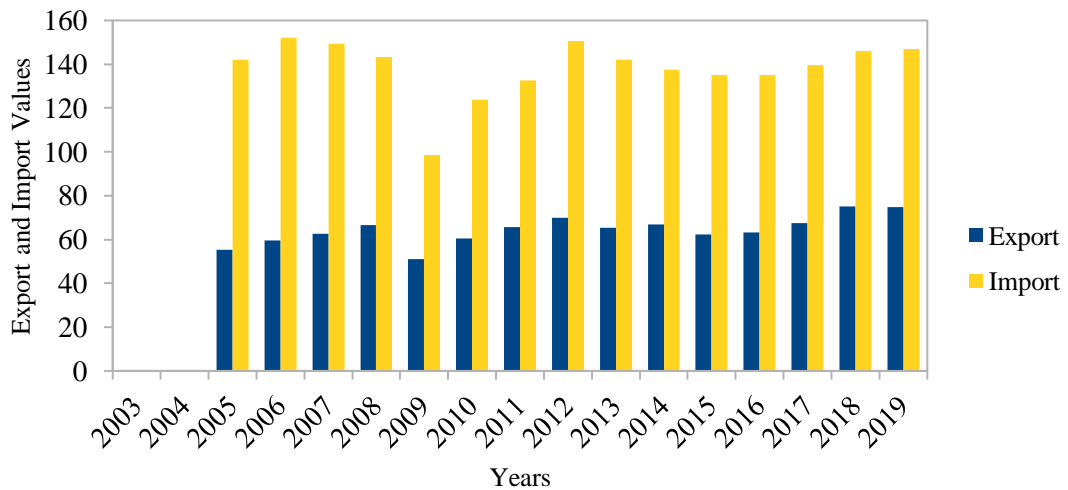
In explaining how the hegemon loses its political dominance, Gilpin (1981) focuses on two major explanations from the perspective of external factors: the increasing cost of political dominance and the loss of economic leadership. As this section is composed to analyse the economic dimension of the US-China competition, the study will exclusively focus on the second factor: the United States' loss of economic leadership.

The loss of economic leadership of dominant power is firstly marked by the transfer of advanced techniques from an advanced society to a less advanced society (Gilpin, 1981). With these newly acquired techniques, a less advanced society enjoys the important technologies more efficiently than others and later appears as a new rising power that to some extent even possesses the capacity to be the counter-hegemon. In this case, China is a clear example as it successfully becomes the only third-world country that managed to levitate its status with its remarkable advancements. Gilpin (1981) further argues that although the world market economy favours the wealth-concentration that lingers around states with a more advanced economy, this is not always the case. An exceptional event, in the long run, will show that through trade, foreign investments, and the transfer of technology, economic activities tend to shift

from the old center to the new center. Moreover, these new centers frequently overtake and surpass the old centers (Gilpin, 1981: 178). The next section will analyse how the United States lost its status as the economic leader in East Asia and is replaced by China by analysing their trade values with the regional countries.

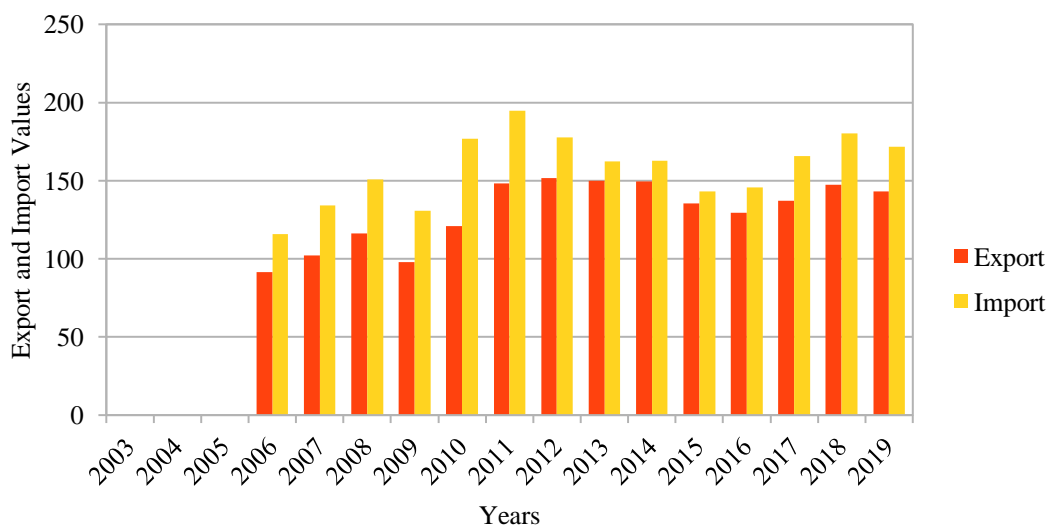
### **6.2.1 The United States' Loss of Economic Leadership and China's Takeover**

America's declining economic influence can firstly be observed in its important allies in the region. Japan has been known as one of the most prominent America's partners, especially in East Asia. The relationship between the two countries, which was re-established after Japan's surrender in World War II, developed rapidly with the United States' significant effort to make Japan adopt the liberal system in its domestic realm. In terms of economy, the United States claims Japan to be one of its strongest and deepest partners in trade activities (U.S Department of States, 2020). It was shown by the effort made by the United States to engage Japan in the Trans-Pacific Partnership that was signed in 2010. Although Japan signed the agreement in 2013, the Trans-Pacific Partnership does not meet the expectation. As to be seen in Figure 6.1, the trade between the USA and Japan still favours the Japanese side with its remarkable export while the United States seems to continue suffering from the deficit. The United States' highest export value is recorded to have happened in 2018 with a total of 75 billion USD. The second-largest value occurred the following year with 74 billion USD. However, when compared with Japan's export value, Figure 6.1 demonstrates that Japan has benefited more for the long decades from their trade relations. Japan's highest export value reached the amount of 150,45 billion USD in 2012 after consistently raising from 149,42 billion USD in 2007.



**Figure 6.1. The USA' Trade with Japan Period of 2003-2019 (in USD billion)**

When we compare this with Japan-China trade activities, it is clear that the United States is standing far behind to be considered as a competitive economic partner in East Asia. While the United States is merely able to export goods with the highest total value up to 75 billion USD, China hit the total export of 151 billion USD in 2012. Although the number infrequently decreased to 150 and 149 billion USD in 2013 and 2014 respectively, the total amount of exports conducted by China to Japan are still half higher than the United States every year.

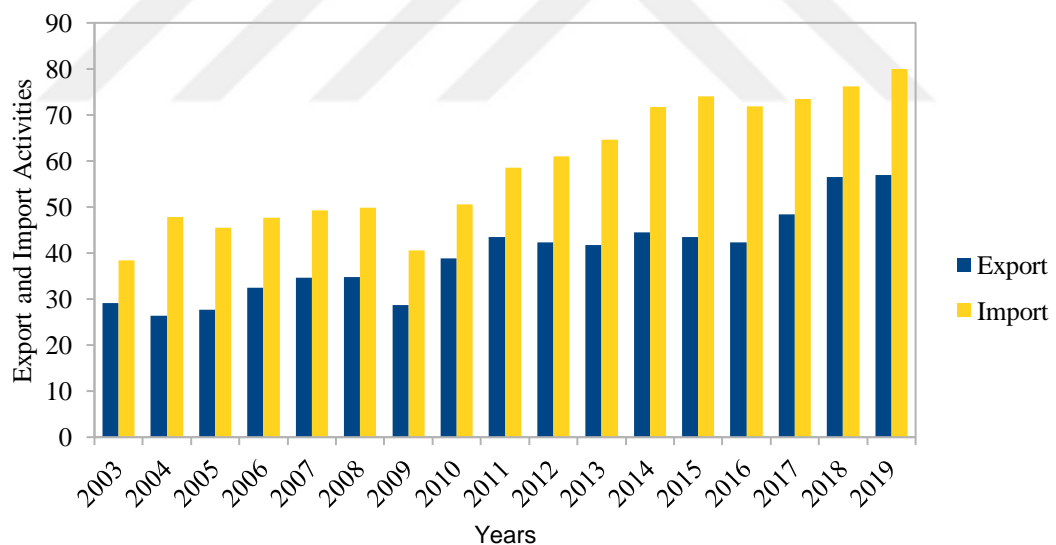


**Figure 6.2. China's Trade with Japan 2003-2019 (in USD billion)**

The same explanation is also appropriate for Japan's export activities to China. While Japan's highest export to the USA hit 150 billion USD in 2012, its highest

export value to China was 194 billion USD, which occurred in 2011. The second and third highest numbers are also recorded to reach 177 and 180 billion USD in 2012 and 2018. In general, unlike the United States that faces a great trade deficit due to the huge gap between its export-import activities with Japan, China enjoys a more stable and mutually-beneficial trade relation. Moreover, as the amount of Japan's yearly exports are consistently higher to China than to the United States, it can be concluded that China is relatively in a more important position for Japan in terms of economic relations.

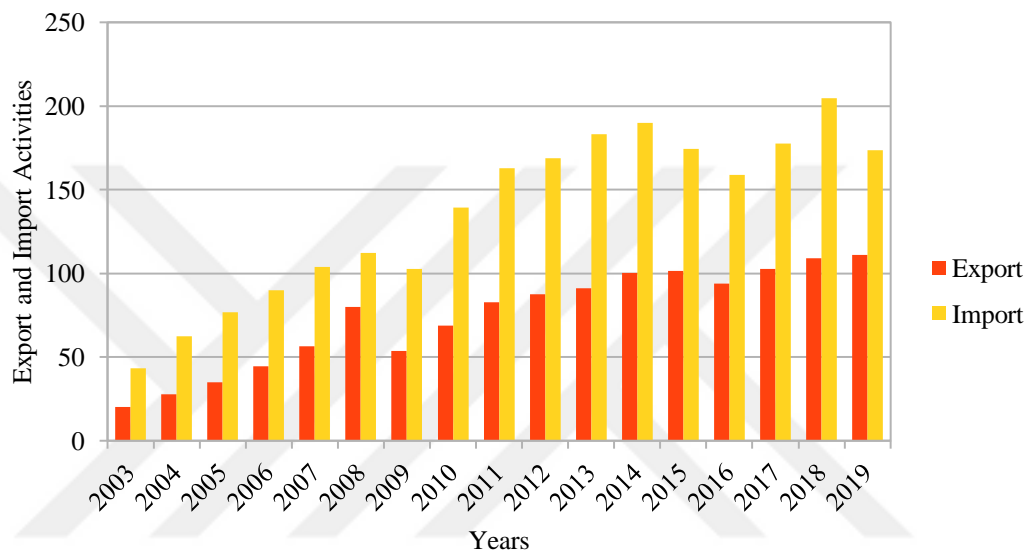
In the case of the Republic of Korea, it appears that the United States could manage to balance the trade despite that the yearly deficit is inevitable. However, Figure 6.3 still demonstrates that South Korea earns more benefit in the trade, especially after the Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA) was signed in 2007. The ROK's total export to the USA in 2008 was 49,82 billion USD and increased dramatically to 79,95 billion USD in 2019.



**Figure 6.3. The USA's Trade with the ROK 2003-2019 (in USD billion)**

However, the United States could only manage to decrease its deficit by increasing its export from 34,81 in 2008 to 56,89 billion USD in 2019. In other words, while ROK accomplished the total increase up to 30,13 billion USD of its export during these 11 years, the United States could merely raise it to 22.08 billion USD.

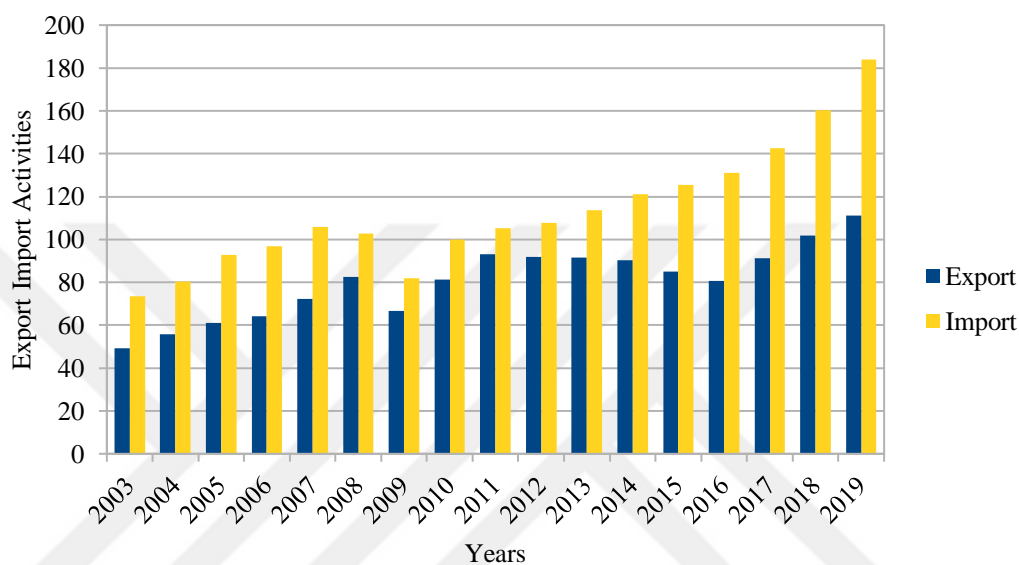
China, on the other hand, successfully overtook America's position after 2003. In that year, the USA's total export to the ROK was 29,1 billion USD while China fell behind at 20,09 billion USD. However, within only a year, China surpassed the USA's total export number in 2004 with 27,81 billion USD while the USA, oppositely, faced an export decline to 26,33 billion. From that moment on, China succeeded in a significant increase in its export from only 35,11 in 2005 to 110,98 billion USD in 2019.



**Figure 6.4. China's Trade with the ROK 2003-2019 (in USD billion)**

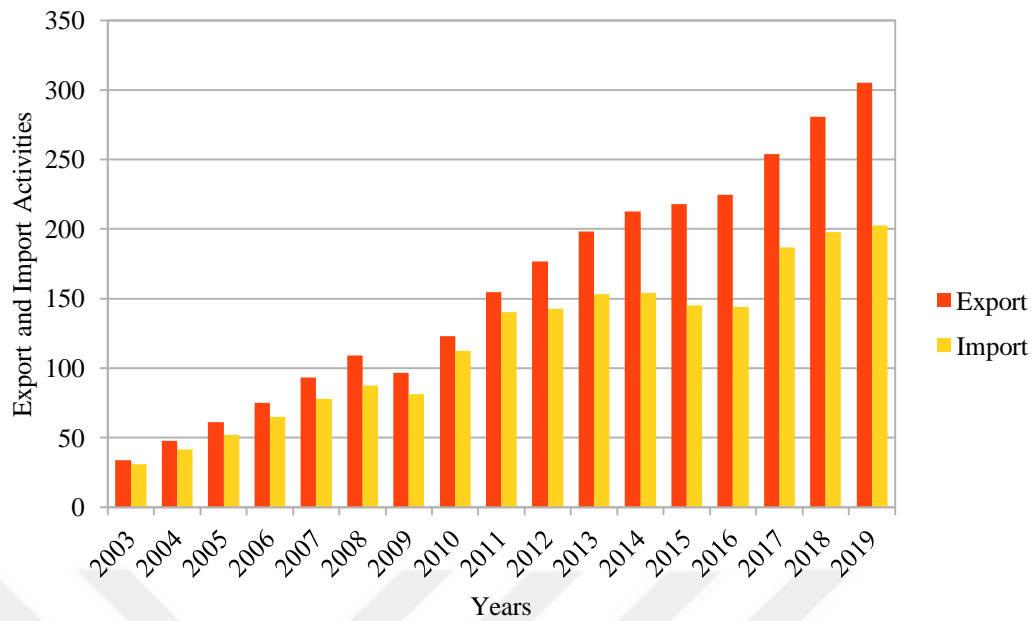
Undoubtedly, South Korea also appreciates its profitable trade with China. In 2003, the country managed to make 43,13 billion USD of its total export and increased it up to 204,57 billion in 2018. On the other hand, although the chart of its trade with the USA also demonstrates a continuous surplus, the highest number only reached 79,95 billion USD in 2019, which is not even half of its highest trade value with China. The relationship between the two was inevitably exacerbated by Trump's decision to re-evaluate their trade and claimed the KORUS FTA to be a job-killing deal (Padden, 2017). On the other hand, China and ROK's officials appear to appreciate each other for their mutually beneficial economic relations. President Moon Jae-in appreciated the trade between the two that has exceeded 200 billion USD and expressed his agreement to cooperate under the scheme of China's Belt and Road Initiative (Presidency of ROK, 2019).

Correspondingly, the similar phenomenon in which the United States loses its significance in terms of economic relations can mostly be seen from its trade activities with ASEAN member states. Figure 6.5 demonstrates that the United States was, in fact, ASEAN’s most prominent export destination until 2009. In 2003, for example, while ASEAN’s total export values to the USA reached 73,61 billion USD, its export activities to China was only worth 30,79 billion USD.



**Figure 6.5. The USA’s Trade with ASEAN 2003-2019 (in USD billion)**

However, Figure 6.6 shows that in 2010, China made a remarkable increase of imports from ASEAN from 81,51 to 112,58 billion USD, surpassing the United States for the first time. From that moment on, China has overtaken the USA’s importance as ASEAN’s most significant trade partner with their mutually beneficial export and import activities with exceptionally high values. In 2018, for example, ASEAN’s export to China was worth 197,68 billion USD while its export value to the USA stayed at 160,26 billion. In 2019, ASEAN noted its highest number of export to China with 202,55 billion USD while United States imported only 183,79 billion USD worth of products.



**Figure 6.6. China’s Trade with ASEAN 2003-2019 (in billion USD)**

Likewise, China appears to appreciate its win-win economic activities with ASEAN. Figure 6.6 demonstrates that China’s export to ASEAN consistently increases year by year. When compared with the USA, China was far behind the hegemonic power in terms of exporting products to ASEAN countries. The United States dominated ASEAN markets until 2004. In 2005, however, both China and the USA reached approximately equal export values of 61 billion USD. Nevertheless, while the USA could merely increase its value up to three billion USD in 2006, China increased its worth from 61 billion to 75,09 billion USD, surpassing the USA for the first time as the largest exporter to ASEAN member states. China’s success persists until the current date. In 2019, for example, while the USA exported 111 billion USD worth of products, China hit the record by reaching the total amount of 305,41 billion USD, making ASEAN its most valuable trade partner as much as itself important for ASEAN export destination.

These events indicate that corresponding to Gilpin’s claim concerning the declining hegemon, the United States inevitably lost its economic leadership in East Asia, and is replaced by China as the counter-hegemon in the region. China, in this matter, appears as a new economic leader that acts in accordance with its principle of mutual benefit.

## 6.2.2 The USA's Trade Protectionism vs China's Belt and Road Initiative

Power struggles often exhaust the state at the center of the system, thus, making them vulnerable to external conquest and domination (Gilpin, 1981). During this situation, the cost for the hegemon power to maintain its dominance in the periphery increases significantly to the point that it creates a crisis of leadership. In responding to this decline, Gilpin argues that the challenged hegemon has two options. One is to increase the resources devoted to maintaining its status in the system. Later, it can instead reduce its existing commitments without ultimately diminishing its international status (Gilpin, 1981: 188). The second option carries with itself three general ways. The first is to weaken or destroy the challenger. The second is to adopt a defensive policy. And the third is to reduce international commitments. (Gilpin, 1981: 191)

To adopt a defensive policy, particularly, is the most preferred action taken by the challenged hegemon. The historical account of the hegemonic transition from Britain to America supports this claim. Admittedly, it is an exceptional case for International Relations students as literature believes that the hegemonic transition from Britain to America was a peaceful one, and was rather the consequence of the major world wars instead of a direct war between the two. Although it is correct that the transition was made successful by the major wars, the process of transfer was not, for the most part, peaceful. Huggill (2010) argues that America began to challenge Britain in economic terms as early as 1861 and posed a direct naval challenge in 1866. Huggill specifically focuses on the struggle over telecommunication, in which America challenged Britain's domination of global submarine cables by attempting to dominate the global wireless telecommunication. Britain, following defensive economic policy, made a restriction to the American companies and encouraged its European allies to prevent America from gaining greater influence (Huggill, 2010: 417-418). Moreover, the economic war between the two also emerged on cotton production. In the 1860s, Britain was the major source of America's cotton imports as well as the skilled labourers to help the United States build its industrialization. However, in the 1870s, America started to produce more pieces of cotton than Britain which forced Britain to import textile products from America. To deter America's growing cotton agriculture, Britain adopted a protectionist economic

policy, marked by King Edward VII's order to increase the number of cotton domestic production (Hugill, 2010: 406).

The American steps towards the protectionist policy were firstly initiated by Trump on the first day of his role as the new US president in 2017. On his inauguration day, he addressed the importance of protecting American borders from the foreign countries that steal their products, companies, and jobs. He stated that protectionism will lead to prosperity and strength<sup>8</sup>. However, it is important to note that to have a protectionist trade policy is principally different from having a mercantilist policy. While mercantilist encourages exports and discourages imports, the policy is rather obsolete to be implied in the modern era since no country could escape from the wave of imports while conducting its international trade activities. Protectionism, on the other hand, aims to improve economic productivity by focusing on utilising domestic resources and while allowing international trade to carry on occurring, the protectionist policy prevents it from exploiting the domestic economic activities. There are three things to look at as the parameter of protectionism. The first is tariffs on imported goods. The second is the import quotas. And the third is the withdrawal from less-benefited economic agreements. The discussion about whether America follows a protectionist policy towards East Asia will be discussed following these characteristics.

First of all, to Japan, Washington implied additional tariffs of 25% on Japanese steel and 10% on aluminium (Nikkei Asia, 2020). This decision is a reflection of Trump's claim about Japan being a free-rider in the alliance between the two countries (French, 2017). Consequently, such a decision resulted in Japan getting even closer to China, shown by the two countries' first bilateral summit that was held in 2018 after the absence of such meetings since 2011 (Fritz, 2018). The most important, and perhaps the heaviest, however, was the tariffs put on Chinese products that initiated a trade war between the two parties. The total tariffs imposed exclusively on Chinese goods is 550 billion USD, while the total tariffs imposed by China on American products is 185 billion USD (Wong & Koty, 2020). Not only that, but the Trump

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<sup>8</sup> In terms of trade, he added the motto: buy American, hire American, which emphasizes a protectionist trade policy. Full text of the speech: <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/01/full-text-donald-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript-233907>

administration also obligated China to purchase 200 billion USD worth of American products and services between 2020 and 2021, and the products imported from Hong Kong were to be treated as manufactured in China. In response to this, China did its best not to exacerbate the conflict by issuing the list of 79 American products that would be eligible for tariff waivers, such as medical disinfectants, silver and gold ores, and aluminium alloy products (Zhang, 2020). However, along the way after the two parties concluded several talks with Phase One Deal, China was permitted by WTO to impose sanction worth 3,6 billion USD on American products after the case of the US anti-dumping rules that China reported as illegal before the trade war occurred (Murray & Donnan, 2020). After WTO announced that the 2018 US tariffs on China indeed violated the rules and regulations of international trade, the Trump administration claimed that the act was necessary to defend the country from an unfair trade practice and that it won't let China use WTO to take advantage of America (Macias, 2020).

Another sign of America's protectionist policy towards East Asia is President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. While former President Obama believed that the agreement could help the United States increase its influence in the Asia Pacific and hinder China from growing even further, Trump argued that the agreement only stole jobs from the Americans while benefiting the multinational companies (Pham, 2017). The president also pledged to end the country's free trade agreement with South Korea by claiming that the agreement has not been fair since the ROK appears to reap a greater share of benefits (Paletta, 2017). Some analysts interpret Trump's protectionist policy as the return to Jacksonian tradition, a foreign policy characterized by the principles of populism, individualism, honour, and courage (Clarke & Ricketts, 2017: 369). This argument is based on several explanations. First, Trump's decision to withdraw from Paris Climate Agreement indicates that the new government intended to merely focus on conducting its own domestic affairs. Second, Trump's refusal to endorse Article V of the NATO agreement that binds member states to defend one another if one comes under attack and its decision to send 5000 troops to Afghanistan is the sign of Jacksonian policy to protect "the honour of the country" (Clarke & Ricketts, 2017). In addition, while endorsing this argument, this thesis claims that the decision to withdraw from several international commitments and the refusal to acknowledge

certain agreed-upon articles of a treaty also indicate that the United States is losing its ability to maintain its superpower status. Moreover, Trump's claims on how the international commitments have burdened the American budget confirms Gilpin's theory about how maintaining the hegemon status would be costly and may cause the disequilibrium of the system.

It is important, however, to confirm that these events are not merely seasonal due to a shift of power in government. Subsequent to the election that brought the Democratic Party President Joe Biden to the White House, it is expected that Biden would fix American international reputation as the hegemon power, which was challenged by the Trump administration. Yet, the elect-president has not confirmed that he will consider joining TPP and RCEP for its economic existence in East Asia. Richard Fontaine, a former staff of the National Security Council during the George W. Bush administration, argues that Biden and his team will enter an era where the U.S will neither be the party of the TPP nor the RCEP (Choudhury, 2020). Biden's persistence not to join either agreement is rather a sign that America's protectionism on trade policy will continue. Moreover, Biden's administration also did not immediately change its policy regarding import tariffs on Chinese products, especially after the meeting between the officials of the two countries in Alaska did not end well.<sup>9</sup> This indicates that both the Republicans and the Democrats agreed upon the decision. Thus, it is not a seasonal one that belongs to a particular administration, but rather explains how America approaches its trade policy in general.

China, in contrast, currently devotes all the efforts to promote a free market, which is a typical characteristic of a counter-hegemon. With its enormous project of Belt and Road Initiative, China aims to control not only Asia but also the world economy. This section will exclusively focus on how China promotes Belt and Road Initiative among its neighbouring East Asian nations as the alternative to United States' increasing protectionist policy.

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<sup>9</sup> BBC reported that during the meeting of the high-level officials between the two countries was held, China was accused of human right violation regarding the Uighur case and the Chinese officials responded it with a harsh comment about America's treatment of black Americans in the country. More information: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56452471>

Firstly introduced in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative is a part of five of China's mega economic projects. It goes along with ASEAN Connectivity Initiative, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation, Greater Mekong Sub-Region Cooperation program, and South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation Program. It focuses on advancing infrastructure development and accelerating the economic integration of countries along the route of the historic Silk Road. The mega project falls into two categories. One is the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt and the other is the maritime Silk Road. Taking into consideration the comprehensive nature of the project, this thesis argues that the Belt and Road Initiative is a crucial instrument for China to establish its hegemony in East Asia.

First of all, this argument relies on the philosophy of the initiative. It is inspired by the historic Silk Road that was established during the Han Dynasty around 2000 years ago (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, n.d.). In its official document (2017), it is stated that China is concerned about the condition of the current world, in which globalization is facing new difficulties with ideas of openness and cooperation in line with human interest are under threat. China also claims that the global economic governance system fails to adapt to objective changes and institutional reforms make slow progress. These claims are exceptionally tenacious as the economic activities are currently undertaken following the American liberal order, China attempts to demonstrate that the American economic hegemony is obsolete due to its failure to adapt to objective changes. In addition, the same document also states that a mutually beneficial global value chain has not yet taken shape, with many countries still suffering from inadequate infrastructure and challenges in regional development. In this matter, China once more addresses the inequality of the current economic system. By underlining the "mutually beneficial global values" and recognize challenges faced by developing countries, China clearly pursues a mega objective to be considered as the alternative to the American economic hegemony by introducing co-operations that favour mutual benefit and developments. It is stated in the document: "the Belt and Road Initiative is a Chinese proposal whose aim is to promote peaceful cooperation and common development around the world" (Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017: 4).

Second, taking into consideration several main objectives of the initiative, it can be concluded that China's intention is not merely to promote equal development, but also to create a system in which China can dominate in accordance with its model and regulation. The country aims to promote financial integration through common financing institutions, people-to-people bonds through cultural and academic exchanges, regional economic integration through the reduction of trade barriers, and intergovernmental policy coordination (Office of the Leading Group for the Belt and Road Initiative, 2017). In attempts to reach these goals, China uses its unilaterally composed rules and regulation, for example, Action Plan on Connecting the Belt and Road by Standards (2015-2017), Vision and Actions on Jointly Promoting Cooperation of Certification and Accreditation in Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road, as well as Belt and Road Vision and Actions for Cooperation in Metrology. Moreover, China also released Guidelines on the Implementation of Promoting International Road Transport Facilitation in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative. These examples indicate that China is in an active attempt to promote not only a common economic project but at the same time also attempts to introduce the model of its own to be accepted and applied by the world.

Currently, around 140 countries are involved in the project. Among them are 10 countries from the ASEAN member states, while Japan and South Korea have not yet decided to participate (Wang, 2021). Myanmar is one of the ASEAN states that appears to be the most eager to benefit from the project due to the size of their economy that requires more capital to grow. Myanmar embraced the BRI project to develop China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, which route extends from Yunnan Province to Kyaukphyu in Rakhine State with gas and oil pipelines built in 2013 and 2017 (Devonshire-Ellis, 2021). A Special Economic Zone is also expected to be built to allow China's faster transfer of less expensive goods and resources. In addition, the gas and oil pipelines project provided an opportunity for the biggest companies of the two countries, China National Petroleum Cooperation and Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, to cooperate and share benefits (Devonshire-Ellis, 2021). The BRI project, for Xi Jinping, marks the new era of bilateral relations between the two countries. He stated that the project is the future roadmap of bilateral relations based on brotherly and sisterly closeness, while Myanmar's State Counsellor Suu Kyi

called China a great country with an important role in world affairs and economy (Aung, 2020).

Singapore also demonstrates a positive approach to the Belt and Road Initiative. In April 2019, China and Singapore signed two new partnerships. In one, the officials agreed to establish a ministerial level of the Singapore-Shanghai Comprehensive Cooperation Council. Six areas including the BRI, financial service cooperation, technology and innovation, business easiness, urban governance, and people-to-people exchanges are the main focus. The other agreement is formed under the memorandum of understanding to identify logistics, e-commerce, infrastructure, and professional services for the Belt and Road Initiative. Singaporean Minister of Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing further addressed that the agreements will strengthen Singapore's participation in China's new strategy and secure the country's engagement to China's business hub and economic integration (Wei, 2019), emphasizing the importance of being involved in Chinese economic projects.

Other influential ASEAN countries such as Thailand and Indonesia exhibit a similar positive approach. China and Thailand are currently constructing a high-speed rail line from Bangkok to Nong Khai. The railway bridge will be built across the popular Mekong River for the transit of goods and people between China and Southeast Asia. Thailand is optimistic about the benefits that the country will earn from the project as it will strengthen bilateral ties and promote economic prosperity (Hart, 2021). Indonesian President Joko Widodo in 2017 Belt and Road Forum expressed his entire trust in the initiative as an important project that will bring more cooperation opportunities for Indonesia and China, further addressed his country's readiness to work under the framework to upgrade bilateral trade and investment (Bo, 2017). President Xi Jinping was also aware that his Belt and Road Initiative wouldn't be possible without Indonesia since the country controls the Strait of Malacca, which is the world busiest shipping route that can connect China to Middle Eastern markets. Thus, there was no accident that Xi Jinping unveiled his plan of this 21<sup>st</sup> Silk Road project firstly to the Indonesian Parliament in 2013 (Coca, 2019).

In addition, the case of Malaysia, South Korea, and Japan is an important part of the discussion. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad used to go against the idea

of letting Malaysia be under China's hegemony during Najib Razak's leadership. However, subsequent to his arrival at the office, he expressed his full support for the initiative (Nambiar, 2019). Undoubtedly, one of the most important factors for his behaviour shift is the anxiety to be excluded from the project. As ASEAN became China's biggest trading partner and some regional economic initiatives were established, Mohamad was aware of the profits Malaysia would lose if he stays persistent on his policy concerning China. Moreover, there is no doubt that China is a growing economic superpower, and refusal to admit it will only result in vain.

Nevertheless, China still has a big homework to finish in persuading Japan and South Korea to join the mega project. In 2019, China is reported to exclusively call for Korea to join the initiative to expand their economic cooperation. By highlighting the contribution that China has made, such as creating more than 200.000 jobs abroad and the investment worth more than 700 billion USD, the official emphasized that China has done more contribution to economic growth than the United States and Japan combined (Whan-woo, 2019). Although American influence in South Korea is still present, which may become an important element of South Korea's refusal to join the project, the country's President Moon Jae-in already declared that his country is willing to participate. The reason behind it relies not only on the economic benefits but also his expectation for the initiative to mitigate the tension between South Korea and North Korea (Jang, 2019). In the case of Japan, the circumstances are more complex. Considering that the United States has gradually lost its influence in the region, Japan has no choice but to look up to China as an alternative. However, it is clear that the country's hesitance still exists when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed his opinion that the Belt and Road Initiative shall possess transparency and the loan should not burden the countries' finance (Pollman, 2017). Nevertheless, two years after his statement, Shinzo Abe has not made any decision to join the BRI while instead decided to sign a connectivity partnership with the European Union. The project that has similar programs with China's BRI, including providing assistance to build infrastructure and setting development standard in Europe and Asia. Japan's action is rather firm. However, it doesn't necessarily mean that Japan will stay away from regional development. If China accomplishes its attempt to make South Korea officially join the initiative, Japan will automatically be excluded from

the biggest economic development in the region. When this happens, Japan will need to reconsider its policy.

### **6.2.3 Conclusion**

This section provides a comprehensive discussion regarding the economic dimension of hegemonic competition between China and the United States by focusing on two main points. One is America's economic leadership decline in the region and the other is China's mega-project of Belt and Road Initiative as the alternative to America's growing trade protectionism. The analysis that involves the observation of trade activities between the USA and the regional states, as well as China and the regional states, concludes that the USA indeed faces an inevitable decline as the regional economic leader. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the country's decision to adopt a trade protectionist policy to restore its trade deficit. Meanwhile, China appears to provide an alternative by promoting the Belt and Road Initiative that is particularly appealing for the majority of the countries in the region. However, Japan and South Korea still show resistance to officially join the project. This thesis argues that this is merely a matter of time that the countries realize the consequence of being isolated in the region if such resistance prolongs.

### **6.3 Ideological Contest between the USA and China: The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence vs Liberal Norms**

There are two mainstream approaches that a major state tends to embrace concerning the position of its ideology in the international system. The first is to revise its native ideology following the principles of the dominating order, as many countries including Japan do in order to be accepted as a part of the liberal international order. The second is to promote its native ideology to be recognized and accepted globally, regardless of the intention of whether to challenge the dominant order or not (Yan, 2018: 21).

China, in this regard, has shown the tendency to choose the second. Deliberately or not, the patterns of its behaviour demonstrate the effort of China in promoting and legitimizing its values, norms, and principles to East Asian politics, shaping the

regional order to operate accordingly. Furthermore, the discussion regarding the ideological contest between China and the United States itself has been centered on the competition between liberal order vs China's traditionalism<sup>10</sup>, this thesis will exclusively analyse the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence in terms of how it challenges the norms introduced by the liberal order and China's effort to globalize it in the regional sphere.

The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence was firstly introduced in 1954 when China started to build its relation with non-communist countries in the region. In contemporary period, the principles are written in China's constitution and serves as the main framework of its foreign policy. The long-standing principles include 1) mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, 2) mutual non-aggression, 3) non-interference in each other's internal affairs, 4) equality and mutual benefit, and 5) peaceful coexistence.

It is crucial to note that one of the most prominent characteristics of this principle is it introduces a new ideological framework as the alternative to the liberal international order. It possesses four core values as its foundation: sovereignty, peace, win-win progress, and justice. First of all, liberal international order possesses particular kinds of the accepted political and economic system, so-called democracy and free-market system. It praises the spread of democracy and sees it as the only well-established model of government. Similarly, for the economic matter, the free market capitalist system has been introduced to be the most appealing one as the key to reaching a certain level of prosperity. However, the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence promotes the idea that the sovereignty of all states should be honoured; all states should respect the inherent right to maintain unity and territorial integrity, social system, ideology, and the path of development (Zhenmin, 2014: 478). In this regard, the Five Principles propose an alternative design of the world order with equal sovereignty as its core feature, in which states are capable of choosing either to be democratic or authoritarian, socialist or capitalist, and all states are equal whether they are large or small, rich or poor, and Western or non-Western. It is certain that to

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10 See, for example, a paper written by Yan Xuetong: Chinese Values v.s Liberalism: What Ideology Will Shape the International Normative Order? Published by The Chinese Journal of International Politics, 2018, 1-22.

live in harmony despite the differences is one of the core values the Five Principles are attempting to promote. It is stated that the Five Principles are willing to seek common ground while reconciling differences (Zhenmin, 2014: 478). Moreover, the principle also condemns the act of overthrowing governments for the sake of changing their systems by affirming it to be the reason for the chaos (Zhenmin, 2014: 479). Similarly, the core values of peace and win-win solution also advocate that peace can only be achieved when there is respect for each other's right to choose peaceful means for conflict settlements, as well as the establishment of a community of common destiny to reach the ultimate objective of win-win progress. However, this community can solely be possible if countries eliminate the thinking of clash of civilizations and replace it with the promotion of exchanges among cultures.

Justice, the last core value of the principle, stands even in a more crucial position. The term represents equality in terms of interaction, obligations, and responsibilities in the international system. It is functioning vis-a-vis the liberal internationalism that justifies interventions of powerful states in many secondary states with excuses to bring democracy or to protect human rights. The Five Principles, on the other hand, oppose any type of intervention regardless of its justification and suggest that no state shall put itself above international law or adopt double standards in its application. As a matter of fact, the Five Principles are the direct response to powerful countries' opposition against imperialism and colonialism and represent their aspirations for independence, autonomy, and self-improvement. For this reason, the Five Principles actively advocate the establishment of a fair new international political and economic order in which the voices of developing countries are equally heard. This point also highlights that the Five Principles are not merely China's foreign policy framework, but also an attempt to create alternative values to the liberal ones. It is clearly stated that the Five Principles were intended not only for Asia but also for the world at large (Zhemin, 2014: 477). In addition, Zhemin declared the principles as the pioneer in the history of international law and international relations. Such a determined declaration demonstrates how China sees the current order as corrupted and deficient, thus, needed to be changed.

China's willingness to make the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence as the core framework of regional ideology can also be seen by its efforts to legitimize the

values with bilateral and multilateral cooperation, which will be analysed in detail in this section under China-Japan, China-South Korea, and China-ASEAN relations.

### **6.3.1 Sino-Japan Relations and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence**

Sino-Japan relations did not reach the normalization period until Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka fulfilled an official invitation sent by Chinese Premier Chou En-lai in September 1972. The official visit that also includes Prime Minister Tanaka's meeting with Chinese President Mao Tse Tung resulted in both countries' agreement regarding the necessity to restore their abnormal state of affairs. With the so-called Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of PRC, both countries decided to establish their diplomatic relations and to enter negotiation of the treaty of peace and friendship. China also successfully convinced Japan to accept its one-China policy by recognizing the PRC as the only legal representative of China and that Taiwan is a part of the territory of the PRC. In article 6 of the joint communiqué, it is stated that Japan and China agreed to establish relations on the basis of the principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1972). Since these are exactly the articles of the Five Principle of Peaceful Coexistence, China has indeed begun its effort to legitimize these values since the very beginning of their normalized relation. The same Five Principles also took place in the first article of the latter agreement between the two countries, the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the PRC that was signed in August 1978. Its placement as the first article rather explains that the principles were accepted as the very basis of the relation between the two.

### **6.3.2 Sino-ROK Relations and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence**

The end of the Cold War hostility between China and the Republic of Korea was marked by the beginning of their diplomatic relations in August 1992. The Republic of Korea that previously recognized Taiwan as a legal representative of the Chinese changed its direction by accepting the PRC's one-China policy. Since then, China

has demonstrated its effort to legitimize its ideology preferences to the Republic of Korea through institutions and cooperation.

One of the most important documents to support the practice of the principles is the Joint Declaration on the Promotion of Tripartite Cooperation that was officially signed in 2003 between China, ROK, and Japan. The declaration emphasized several main points of the principles such as mutual trust and respect, as well as equality and mutual benefit in the second section of the document (ASEAN Secretariat, 2012). The principles of mutual respect and understanding can also be found in the Joint Press Statement on the Seventh Summit Meeting among the three parties in 2007. Furthermore, in 2009, the three parties celebrated the anniversary of the trilateral cooperation and asserted the above-discussed principles to be the key success of their trilateral cooperation. It is stated that mutual respect, equality, common interest, and respect for diverse cultures became the foundation of the affiliation (The Foreign Ministry of the PRC, 2009). Certainly, the word “diverse culture” that is used to explain the cooperation doesn’t merely mean that East Asian countries are a multicultural society, but it also asserts the idea of equality in the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. It emphasized that the parties will persevere in their cooperative relations regardless of their different political, cultural, and social structures. In 2011, the three countries decided to institutionalize their cooperation based on these values by establishing the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat. Moreover, the relation between China and ROK has improved significantly in accordance with how China would favour it to be. Not only that the countries signify their trading activities, but they also enhance their mutual understanding with academic activities, yearly diplomatic forum, and cultural and people exchanges to make sure that the principles above are mutually understood and implemented.

### **6.3.3 Sino-ASEAN Relations and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence**

Although Sino-ASEAN relations started in 1991 when Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen attended the 24th ASEAN Foreign Minister’s Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, the negotiations concerning the relations between the two carried on until the early 2000s. After China became a full dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1996, China's effort to engage more with the association reached a new phase in 2002 when

the parties signed a framework agreement on comprehensive economic cooperation and the declaration on the conduct of parties in the South China Sea. While the former marks the establishment of the Free Trade Agreement between China and ASEAN member states, the latter holds a particularly crucial development in their political affairs, especially since the South China Sea is a disputed zone among China and several member states of ASEAN.

In the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence were written in the first article as the basic norms to guide state-to-state relations in the region together with several other prominent principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, as well as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. The fact that the Five Principles were set together with these important treaties demonstrates them to be equally influential and are qualified to rule the regional inter-state relations. The second article of the declaration validates this idea by guaranteeing that the parties will explore ways to build trust and confidence following the principles mentioned in article one and based on equality and mutual respect (ASEAN Secretariat, 2002).

Correspondingly, China's effort to legitimize its norms persists with the 2003 China-ASEAN Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity. This joint declaration focuses on a wide range of cooperation from political and economic to social, security, and regional co-operations. Point number five of the declaration states that ASEAN-China cooperation will continue to take Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, along with the UN Charter and other universally recognized norms as the guidance in conducting activities. Moreover, in the section of regional and international cooperation, China once again successfully asserts the principles of equality and respect of sovereignty by guaranteeing that ASEAN members will respect the differences that exist in the Asia Pacific. According to this article, the parties will recognize the differences in many areas such as development path, security concerns, values, cultures, and traditions (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003). Instead of interfering or subject any state to be intervened, this article encourages states to create an environment of tolerance for their cooperation. Similar values were also promoted through MoU between the two parties on cooperation in the field

of non-traditional security issues signed in Bangkok on January 10th, 2004. In fact, what brings these values to another dimension is that the MoU demanded the involved parties to encourage each other the fullest law enforcement in accordance with these principles, especially respect for sovereignty, equality, and mutual benefits<sup>11</sup>.

#### **6.3.4 The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence vs Liberal's Human Rights**

Another important subject to discuss in this section is the relation between this ideology and the matter of human rights. Liberal international order introduces the concept of human rights as a legitimate reason for the liberal hegemon to interfere with other states that do not meet the universal standard of practice. This universal standard has been institutionalized through the World Conference of Human Rights in 1993 by establishing the interdependence of democracy, economic development, and human rights. In this matter, the liberal international order has successfully connected the values of democracy and human rights. However, this declaration is rather bitter for China and other Asian states, not only because Asia and the West possess different values, but Asian states also came to realize that they will soon be the subject of interference. China is the most vocal in this subject. In a speech made by the leader of the Chinese Delegation, Liu Huaqiu, he asserted that the concept of human rights is the product of historical development and is inevitably associated with a particular history, culture, and values of a particular country. Since countries went through different historical development, it is as a consequence, not a wise action to take a particular country's human right standard as a proper model that the others should accord (Davis, 1996: 227). He further emphasized how interference with the alibi of human rights may cause political instability and social unrest. Recently, during the meeting between the high-level Chinese and American officials in Alaska, the delegation from the Biden Administration took the chance to condemn China's policy in Xinjiang, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Such a policy, according to them, threatens the rules-based order that maintains global stability. In response,

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<sup>11</sup> The above-mentioned encouragement is stated in the second article of the MoU. Not only that China demanded ASEAN states to enforce their law accordingly, but China will also be the responsible actor to conduct a workshop to promote the exchange of law enforcement experiences and hold training courses. The MoU is available on their website.

China accused Washington of violating the principle of national security by using its military might and financial supremacy, and that the United States also holds a bad human rights record, especially regarding their treatment towards Black Americans (BBC News, 2021). This clash, undoubtedly, shows China's firm stance of the belief that a state's sovereignty should be the basis of the realization of citizens' human rights.

China's effort to make this perspective universal in the regional sphere came into realization with the Bangkok Declaration that was held within the same year. The meeting was not only attended by the ministers of ten ASEAN member states together with Japan, China, North Korea, and the Republic of Korea, but also several other South Asian states including Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. In this declaration, China once again successfully institutionalized its Five Principles by convincing the involved parties to reaffirm the respect for national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in the declaration. Moreover, it is also written that:

- The parties discourage the use of human rights as the conditionality for extending development assistance
- The parties emphasized the non-use of human rights as an instrument of political pressure
- The parties reiterate that all countries regardless of their size have the right to determine their political systems and developments
- The parties stress the avoidance of the application of the double standard in the implementation of human rights and the acceptance of objectivity and non-selectivity
- The parties recognize the significance of national and regional particularities in the implementation of human rights
- The parties stress that the right of self-determination applies only to peoples under colonial domination or foreign occupation. Thus, it should not be used to weaken a state's territorial integrity and national sovereignty<sup>12</sup>

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12 All articles above are paraphrased from the official document of the Bangkok Declaration. To see the complete version of the document, please visit: <file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/bangkok-eng.pdf>

The last article mentioned above is exceptionally particular for China since the country holds several autonomous regions that have been the center of attention of the Western states. Tibet, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang have been fighting for their independence and it makes China's position vulnerable to liberal intervention. However, with the Bangkok Declaration and another institutionalization effort of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, China has won in its struggle to tackle the liberal order in the regional sphere. The evidence can be seen from the most current development concerning the Uighur problems. An attempt at a joint statement took place with a total of 22 countries jointly urged China to stop its human rights violation of Uighur people in the province of Xinjiang. The letter isn't solely a superficial condemnation. It is a form of a collective movement, aimed at criticizing China and seeking support from the most responsible world institution concerning human rights.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the Canadian parliament became the second after the United States to recognize the event in Xinjiang as genocide, an action that was followed by the Dutch parliament within the same week<sup>14</sup>. However, the main characteristics to be implied from the two joint statements and the condemnations are: 1) the involved countries are all western ones, and 2) there is no participation from Asian countries.

The absence of Asian countries in signing the letter shows as a pattern of collective behaviour that can only be explained as the outcome of China's fruitful effort to institutionalize its Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. Furthermore, it also demonstrates that Asian countries favour the values introduced by China rather than the dominant values of liberal international order. Thus, it remarks on China's early victory in the struggle against mainstream liberal values.

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13 With this letter, the party urged China to 1) maintain the highest standard in the promotion and protection of human rights, 2) carry on its international obligation to respect human rights and fundamental freedom, 3) abstain from practicing restriction on freedom of movement in Xinjiang, 4) allow independent international observers including UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to access the region. The full version of the declaration is available at [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting\\_resources/190708\\_joint\\_statement\\_xinjiang.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting_resources/190708_joint_statement_xinjiang.pdf).

14 However, it is stated that the decision to label the action as genocide was supported by all opposition parties while Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and most of his cabinet members decided to abstain. The news regarding the decision is available here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56163220>. For the one concerning the Dutch parliament, the information is to be found here: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/26/dutch-parliament-says-chinas-treatment-of-uighurs-is-genocide>.

### **6.3.5 The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the Change in Power Relations**

In international politics where the hegemonic competition is at stake, two kinds of behaviour attach with the involved actors. One is the ruling actor with the manner towards the maintenance of stability and order. Second is the counter-hegemon with the tendency towards promoting freedom and equality. In this matter, China has been using the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence as its main ideological base to challenge the current status quo by promoting freedom and equality. However, when the power relation changes in favour of China's interests and goals, and that China's position changes to be the newly established hegemon in the region, how long will China maintain its freedom and equality rhetoric?

The above-addressed question is crucial not only because the current ideological contest between Washington and Beijing is indeed steadily occurring and that only one party will secure the victory, but it is also the fact that once a state becomes the hegemon, it will gradually give up on its discourses about equality. This action is rather necessary since its function as a hegemon is to maintain its position in the hierarchical order, thus, requires it to follow the policies and establish institutions that will favour the maintenance of its hierarchy. One of the most lingering debates concerning this issue is whether China will set up its dominated international order around the concept of tributary system.

The tributary system is a term to describe China's foreign relation as the hegemonic power that started during the Ming dynasty and especially gained its momentum during the Ch'ing dynasty. The system required states to recognize Chinese superiority in terms of politics and civilization with expected gifts and benefits in return. The tributary system is used as the means for the Chinese Emperor to legitimize his hegemonic claim as the Son of Heaven and that China is chosen to rule the world. The way the tributary system maintained stability and order during that period is rather unprecedented. It was required for the barbaric states to acknowledge China's supremacy in order to be able to establish relations with China (Khong, 2013). In return for their acknowledgment, China would send them gifts that were

normally valuable and open the door for the establishment of trade activities that benefited Chinese merchants (Fairbank & Teng, 1941).

There are three main characteristics of the Chinese tributary system. One is that the status of hegemony is secured not by political and military advancement, but by culture and civilization. As Khong (2013) mentions that China saw itself as the Middle Kingdom or Central Country, its Confucious ideology, monarchy and bureaucracy, as well as its size, age, and wealth made China the natural center of the East Asian world. Since its first initiative in 2004, China has made a remarkable effort to rebuild the prestige that Confucianism once possessed in history. The latest data shows that the Beijing government has established a total of 548 Confucious Institutes all over the world with approximately 1193 classrooms to provide education in the Chinese language and culture (Jung, Wang, & Cho, 2020).

The second characteristic of the tributary system is equality in hierarchical order. During its historical hegemonic period, sovereign equality was not the case to be implemented as states who wished to establish relations and trade with China were required to accept their secondary status (Khong, 2013). The hierarchical relation can be seen from the regulations implied for the tribute countries when they wished to pay a visit to China. For example, it is stated that the number of delegation of a tribute visit shall not exceed a hundred men, the ships must not be more than three, and that the allowance of these ships to enter the Chinese territory is limited and regulated carefully (Fairbank & Teng, 1941). Fairbank's comprehensive study also revealed that in terms of trade, on the other hand, the tribute countries were allowed to conduct trade within the Chinese land for three to five days. But Korea and Liu Ch'iu (now: Liuqiu Islands in Taiwan Strait) were not subjected to this time limitation. Moreover, foreigners were also prohibited to sell their products privately by visiting people's homes and the foreign traders were also expected to leave the country soon after their activities ended as they were not allowed to linger within.

Several articles of the regulation above showed how China favoured hierarchical relations with its tribute countries in dealing with every aspect of relations, from diplomacy to trade. The debate in the current world politics, inevitably, corresponds to this historical account. Many studies have been conducted to evaluate how China

will shape its hegemonic order under the modern tributary system (Perdue, 2015; Spruyt, 2017) and one cannot resist thinking whether the hierarchical system will be as peaceful as the current liberal international order. Undoubtedly, although powerful states tend to promote freedom and equality at the beginning of their hegemonic struggle, they tend to give up on the discourse after the position is attained. To worry about how China will shape the world into a hierarchical order means to overlook how liberal international order is a hierarchy system itself. The United States has, in practice, conducted the system of inequality in maintaining its hegemonic status. Consider, for example, how the US military allies give up partially on their sovereignty to let the US establish its military bases within their territories, or how power in the United Nations is unequally distributed with only five countries are recognized as the permanent members of Security Council with their exclusive veto rights, and how the US set terms and conditions that each state needs to follow to benefit from the liberal institutions such as IMF and World Bank. Thus, distressing the Chinese-led international order to be problematic based on its possibility to possess hierarchical character is rather a bias.

The last characteristic of the Chinese tributary system is benevolence and non-coercion. Khong (2013) described it as a system that carries with itself prestige and moral recognition, thus, the force was to be avoided. Fairbank (1941) endorsed a similar claim by stating that the relationship between the Son of the Heaven and the tributes were reciprocal; they were conducted on an ethical basis with the Emperor's compassionate and condescending nature and supplemented by the imperial hospitality and valuable gifts. The principle of non-coercion can be seen from how the tributary system was based on voluntary values. Countries who paid tributes to the Chinese Emperor did so with their own will, and no foreign peoples outside the Chinese world were forced to align (Fairbank & Teng, 1941). Hence, it is appropriate to say that instead of being violent, the system sought peace and security. Looking at the Five Principles, point four mentions that China and other states shall reach mutual benefit to attain peaceful co-existence as the fundamental goal mentioned in the fifth point. These two objectives prominently correspond to the values introduced by the historical tributary system.

### **6.3.6 Conclusion**

As a counter-hegemony, China is required to stand firm on its position to offer an alternative ideological framework to the world. The analysis conducted for this study, correspondingly, shows that China has been doing so with its Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. The Five Principles escalated its significance from being a foreign policy framework to rule China's international relations to become universally accepted values that successfully challenge liberal norms, especially in East Asia. China's remarkable accomplishment in legitimizing the principles is proved with its serious attempt in assuring them to be written in every conduct, joint-declaration, and agreement that regulate all aspects of relations between itself and East Asian countries. However, the debate concerning the ideological contest between the Five Principles and liberal values extends to whether China will establish a tributary system after securing a hegemonic position. Although that it is still early to predict the possibility, the last discussion of this section has demonstrated that the Chinese tributary system is not a threat to the peaceful and stable international order.

### **6.4 A Distinctive Hegemonic War and What the Future Holds**

Traditional war is obsolete. While bloody conflicts still occur throughout the world in particular places, it is not a characteristic of the modern political phenomenon anymore for modern states to join in a traditional war. However, it doesn't merely mean that a hegemonic duality is no longer the case of international politics. China and the United States are currently in their hegemonic duality, particularly in East Asia. China's demurral towards direct confrontation with the United States has been the major reason why scholars are neglecting the fact of the existence of a hegemonic war. Some even associate it with America's successful attempt in spreading liberal values and that it indicates the triumph of the liberal international order. This thesis argues differently. Rather than China's inclination to accept liberal values, it is the characteristic of China's politics that hinders this hegemonic war to occur as a form of traditional war. Currently, China's politics focuses on cooperation and economic developments (Yaqing, 2010). Yet, China has been using this as its strategy to reach its main goal to be the hegemon in the region.

Thanks to the liberal international order that has established institutions as the fundamental part of the world order, China simply does not need to cost its security to create a traditional war. On the contrary, China has been using institutions to create its own hegemony. As previously discussed, for example, China together with other regional states currently established the most comprehensive economic integration in the world. It also created a mega-project called Belt and Road Initiative with its own financial institution such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Moreover, China also uses agreements and treaties to promote its Five Principle of Peaceful Co-existence as a new universal value that will shape international relations. This indicates that while China wisely uses the existing system to counter the US hegemony, the liberal international order is currently undermined by its own foundation.

It is only a matter of time that the regional system will enter its new equilibrium, most likely with China as its new hegemon. The established regional organizations will be stronger with China as its leader, trade activities will be conducted according to rules and regulations that favour China's rising power, and the liberal values will gradually be replaced by the new ones introduced by China. Nevertheless, Japan and South Korea will be Beijing's biggest homework. Their well-established relations with the United States are the main obstacle that China has to overcome. Certainly, it is only a matter of time for Japan and South Korea to realize the consequence of being excluded in the region if they carry on refusing to accept the new order.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

This thesis attempts to contribute to the existing literature on the study of the US-China competition, particularly in East Asia. While finding that liberal thinkers do not sufficiently discuss the topic and are utterly biased, this thesis attempts to take a stance with the realists who are proven to have explained the topic in a comparatively more convincing manner. However, there is one thing missing from this camp; while the current developments accurately match the prediction of the realist thinkers such as Mearsheimer and Scheweller, they do not provide a comprehensive discussion on how the exact process of the competition would occur. Thus, attempting to fill this gap, this thesis evaluates the reason behind the unsettled conflict between China and the US by explaining the process of the hegemonic war between the two in East Asia.

The hegemonic war is explained under Robert Gilpin's grand theory by looking at the three perspectives of political, economic, and ideological competition. These three are the major factors to focus on while evaluating whether a contestation between the two countries is to be classified as a hegemonic war. This study finds that the current developments in the region indicate phase three of the hegemonic war or so-called “the disequilibrium of the system”, in which the counter hegemon’s uneven growth of power provides a new alternative system and is actively introducing it to its to-be hegemonic sphere. This thesis elaborates the dimension of the hegemonic war as follows:

- Political competition: the US-led regionalism vs China-led regionalism
- Economic competition: the US trade protectionism vs China's Belt and Road Initiative
- Ideological competition: the values of US-led liberal international order vs the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence

The political competition focuses on evaluating the political leadership of the respected states with their regionalism agenda. This study finds that while the United States could not successfully convince the East Asian nations to join its initiated regional organization TPP, China together with the regional actors have recently established the world's most comprehensive economic integration. In terms of economic, especially exacerbated with the decision from Trump's administration, the USA enters its defensive position by choosing to pursue a trade protectionist policy. This is one of the main characteristics of the behaviour of a declining hegemon. China, on the other hand, is using this power vacuum by actively persuading East Asian nations to join its mega-project called Belt and Road initiative. Lastly, this study finds that the ideological competition between the two is currently occurring between liberal values vs China's Five Principle of Peaceful Co-existence. Until today, the Five Principles is not commonly studied because it is expected to merely be Beijing's foreign policy principles. However, this thesis proves that China has been actively attempting to make it accepted as the new ideology that will shape the relations among states in the region.

While the major characteristics of their competition actually match with Gilpin's grand theory, scholars tend to avoid the word "hegemonic war" to explain the circumstances. They instead tend to describe it merely as a competition of the superpower, particularly with the liberals predict that the US will secure its victory in the end. However, it is important to acknowledge that the current development of international politics deters the traditional war to occur, such as the existence of nuclear weapons. Yet, when the hegemonic war does not occur as a traditional war, it doesn't mean that it is not happening. The current trade war between the USA and China is a part of it. Moreover, as previously explained, this thesis provides an alternative way for China to counter the US hegemony: using the institutions. In this sense, the liberal international order has its own strategy attack and undermine its foundation.

To sum up, it is important to note that liberal thinkers, especially Ikenberry's study about the US-China duality are highly appreciated. However, the current developments appear to go against his hypothesis and thus, favour realism in many ways. This thesis suggests that following the over-optimistic view of the liberals may

instead lead us to believe that a particular system is unshakable, which is the opposite of the character of international politics. Changes are a natural phenomenon and a hegemon will eventually collapse. It is for everyone to be concerned that while attempting to ignore the reality, we might be neglecting the important historic phenomenon currently occurring before our eyes.



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