

Research on the Evolution of Asian Mechanism of Regional Security Governance under the Background of Chinese Modernization

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Abstract: Chinese-style modernization offers innovative theoretical paradigms and practical pathways for regional security governance in Asia. At its core, it transcends the confrontational security mindset of Western centrism with the concept of "harmony and coexistence," reconstructing the dialectical relationship between security and development. The Asian security mechanism has evolved from an interdependent structure during the Cold War period to a multi-faceted cooperation in the post-Cold War era, and by the 21st century, it has formed a multi-layered nested composite governance system. Through the "Asian Security Concept" and the path of "development-oriented security," China is promoting a transformation of regional order from hegemonic stability to inclusive consultation, emphasizing common security, institutional innovation, and the compatibility of diverse civilizations. This process not only highlights the subjectivity of non-Western civilizations in the reconfiguration of modernity but also provides a reference for the transformation of global governance systems with Eastern wisdom.

Keywords: Chinese-Style Modernization; Asian Security Concept; Harmony and Coexistence; Institutional Flexibility

1. Introduction

The concentrated manifestation of the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics is based on "Chinese-style modernization," which provides an observational perspective and practical reference for China's regional security governance; the diversity, heterogeneity, and rapid evolution of Asia endow its regional security governance mechanisms with uniqueness. Under this theoretical reference point, this paper explores the historical logic and

structural patterns of the evolution of Asian regional security mechanisms, analyzes their functional transformations, and investigates the practical convergence points between Chinese concepts and Asian regional security governance. It aims to support the construction of a more equitable and balanced Asian regional security order from an academic perspective.

2. Theoretical Connotation of Chinese-Style Modernization and Security Governance

2.1 The Chinese-Style Modernization Transcends the Traditional Development Model in Terms of Civilization

In the sense of civilization, Chinese-style modernization transcends traditional models of modernization by constructing a fundamentally transformative paradigm of Chinese-style modernization. This paradigm redefines the theoretical and practical significance of traditional modernization through the concept of "another kind of modernization" it heralds. Chinese-style modernization rejects the Western-led model dominated by capital logic, hegemonic logic, and linear progression. Instead, it promotes the development of civilization through a model that balances material and spiritual progress, thereby overcoming the inherent polarization, exclusivity, and imbalance of traditional modernization. It fosters a global development wisdom characterized by inclusiveness, mutual generation, and harmonious coexistence; it replaces the Western-centric notion of "civilizational harmony" with the idea of "civilizational integration," and substitutes the traditional security theory's "zero-sum game" perspective with a shared security concept, adding new civilizational qualities to existing global governance configurations[1]. It also replaces the traditional Western security and development paradigms with the dialectical

unity principle of "development and security," which relies on intrinsic development processes and security advancements, and is grounded in the intrinsic environment providing security. This approach transcends the traditional passive security view, exploring how proactive construction and development can create new relationships between development and security, evolving and generating security stability. It addresses regional development security issues at the community level, resolving security dilemmas through development and cooperation, advancing collaborative security through institutional building, and promoting cultural construction of community security through civilizational exchange. The wisdom of Chinese governance embedded in China's modernization not only provides a theoretical basis for exploring a more inclusive security order in Asia but also, through the re-interpretation of the dialectical relationship between development and security, autonomy and inclusiveness, differences and consensus, offers significant ideological insights and practical references for the transformation of global governance systems. This has become a manifestation of the subjectivity and creativity in the process of non-Western countries reconstructing modernity[7].

2.2 Theoretical Contribution of the Concept of "Harmony and Coexistence" to Regional Security Governance

"Harmony in Diversity" is a unique paradigm innovation value embodied in the governance of regional security in Asia, reflecting both China's traditional culture and the wisdom of the New Silk Road. From a cultural perspective, "Harmony in Diversity" is an innovative security ideology and principle that integrates with modern international relations rules, building upon the Chinese concept of "harmony in diversity." It differs from the adversarial security mindset prevalent in other countries, especially Western powers. On a theoretical level, "Harmony in Diversity" approaches international security issues through relational rather than instrumental rationality, emphasizing mutual understanding among stakeholders. Therefore, it does not rely on means such as power or force to resolve conflicts but instead constructs dialogue and consultation mechanisms to mitigate tensions and contradictions. In practice, "Harmony in Diversity" manifests at three levels:

at the principled level, it requires adherence to core values of international relations law, such as sovereign equality, non-interference in internal affairs, and mutual non-interference, providing institutional rules and fundamental guarantees; at the path level, it leverages platforms like the CICA and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to build cooperative networks among different countries based on shared common interests, thereby addressing security issues through institutional frameworks rather than distinguishing them by ideology, ethnicity, or nationality, thus reflecting a "Westernized" characteristic that differs from Western security concepts; at the value orientation level, it unifies traditional and non-traditional security perspectives into a comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security ideology. This governance model, compared to the exclusivity of Western "collective security" or the hierarchical nature of "hegemonic stability," better aligns with the geopolitical reality of Asia, characterized by diverse civilizations and varying levels of development. Its innovative aspect lies in its comprehensive approach to ensuring security through development, which dismantles the structural causes of security dilemmas; it fosters strategic trust among member states through gradual institutional construction; and it establishes flexible normative consensus based on respect for civilizational diversity. Currently, through practical efforts in specific areas such as counter-terrorism cooperation, cybersecurity, and energy security, it has facilitated a shift in Asia's security architecture from a "center-periphery" dependency model to a multi-node, networked resilient governance system. This transformation plays a crucial role in providing important ideological resources and institutional templates for building new international relations.

2.3 The Influence of China's Plan on the Evolution of Asian Security Mechanisms

The "Chinese Solution" is precisely an analytical approach that integrates the dialectical unity of "development and reform" with an innovative development perspective. It has comprehensively restructured the logical starting point and development path of regional security governance in Asia, reshaping a new paradigm for Asian security governance[6], achieving breakthroughs at three levels: conceptual logic,

practical actions, and development paths. First, in terms of conceptual logic, the "development-security" dialectical logic proposed by the Chinese Solution dismantles the theoretical logic of simply separating security and development within the Western traditional international community-centric view. It incorporates economic and social development into an organic whole that ensures security and stability, no longer treating security as a prerequisite for development. Second, in terms of practical actions, China has promoted cooperation and development among Asian countries through initiatives such as the "Belt and Road" for developing and constructing regional connectivity channels, energy transmission corridors, and infrastructure. This initiative elevates cooperation and development among Asian countries to a new form of cooperative governance in Asia, promoting security through development and fostering development through security, thereby reducing the security challenges in the region. In the context of China's "Belt and Road" initiative, the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor helps alleviate the security challenges in South Asia, successfully realizing a new model of regional security governance that promotes security through development. Third, in terms of development models, the new Asian security concept proposed by China's solution abandons the form of bilateral military alliances and instead advocates for equal consultations and development initiatives among Asian countries. For example, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Meeting of Asian Cooperation and Confidence Building Measures, and the leaders of developing countries within the "Belt and Road" framework have established a new model of Asian security governance. The cooperation on Asian security governance has shifted from the U.S.-dominated "center-periphery" model to a multi-country cooperative "multi-node-network" model [2]. The development ideas and forms of ASEAN (ASEAN) 10+1, ASEAN+8, and the cooperative governance mechanisms based on power relations in international security frameworks are different. The latter encourages joint participation from all parties rather than maintaining continuous cooperation only on specific issues, opposing the exclusion of any country, transforming public goods into public items, reducing political interference in regional

security governance cooperation, enhancing transparency, and improving the fairness of public policy decisions. The deeper significance of this paradigm innovation lies in: it maintains the stability of regional security order while reserving space for innovation through institutional flexibility to address emerging security challenges; it respects the diversity of Asian civilizations while fostering a sense of a regional security community through norm diffusion, contributing Chinese wisdom to building a more resilient and inclusive global security governance system [3].

3. Historical Evolution and Structural Stratification of Regional Security Mechanisms in Asia

3.1 Path Dependence of Alliance System and Security Dependence in the Cold War Period

After World War II and during the Cold War, East Asia's structure was characterized by a bipolar system. The structural features of this bipolar system can be understood from at least three aspects. At the institutional level, both poles primarily relied on bilateral military alliances, supplemented by semi-military security arrangements, known as "hub-and-spoke" security mechanisms. The United States, through treaties such as the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (1951) and the Mutual Defense Treaty between the U.S. and South Korea (1953), constructed an East Asian "hub-and-spoke" system. The Soviet Union, by extending the Warsaw Pact (with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Vietnam in 1978) and adopting special military arrangements with India and North Korea, formed a strategic counterbalance. This dual nature of the system led to three key characteristics in East Asian security: first, the militarization of security issues, dominated by conventional armed deployments and nuclear deterrence; second, the instrumental role of security actors, where regional countries generally became pawns in great power competition; third, the external nature of security decisions, with the available space for East Asian countries continuously shrinking. However, within this seemingly solid system, there were internal factors that could alter the situation. Southeast Asia sought to break free from Cold War thinking through proposals like the Non-Aligned Movement (Belgrade

Conference in 1961) and the Declaration on Peace, Freedom, and Neutral Zones (1971). China, using the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (1954), proposed new rules for an international order for late-developing countries. This systemic interaction between dependency and autonomy is the way ASEAN and other regional blocs have risen since the Cold War. The two governance logics that have persisted in Asia, Africa, and Latin America since the post-Cold War era—maintaining stable military alliances to uphold hegemony or establishing multilateralism to build an inclusive order—this fundamental tension has shaped the continuous path and transformation logic of the security structure in post-Cold War Asia, both its changes and constants.

3.2 Practical Breakthroughs in Cooperative Security and Institutional Diversification in the Post-Cold War Era

The second paradigm of transformation is characterized by its phased and process-oriented nature, and logically can be divided into three progressive levels of constituent elements. Firstly, in terms of historical appearance, with the decline of institutionalized ideological disputes between the US and the USSR during the Cold War era, the historical task for all of Asia to escape the security dilemma posed by the confrontation between the two major blocs has become particularly significant. Therefore, efforts at the regional level in the Asia-Pacific aim to overcome the security challenges of nuclear deterrence and great power competition. Secondly, in terms of institutional discourse, the emergence of the ASEAN Regional Forum further illustrates this point. As one of the core concepts of the "Big Four" East Asian cooperation model established in December 1994, the ASEAN Regional Forum is a forum mechanism based on a "gradual approach" decision-making mechanism and a "consensus-building" deliberation procedure. It applies principles such as coordination of various levels of relations, building confidence and trust mechanisms, seeking alternative mechanisms, and considering the activation of corresponding mechanisms within its interactive framework. This also opens up a new situation in Asia-Pacific regional cooperation emphasizing the establishment of a series of confidence-building measures, marking a breakthrough from the existing security

cooperation and mutual restraint model, thus being of great significance. On the other hand, in 2001, under the consideration of regional power dynamics, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, grounded in the geopolitical landscape of Eurasia, attempted regional security cooperation with a new regional security concept of "mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and consultation," introducing the agenda of combating the "three forces" into an institutional framework. This has played a crucial role in promoting regional cooperation, making the "Shanghai Spirit" widely recognized as a core framework structure. The "Shanghai Spirit" largely aligns with the propositions of American scholar Samuel and others: to establish a supranational regional economic zone, or "free" market, open to all Asian countries and capable of heterogeneous processing by member states, as the foundation for regional security cooperation. Thirdly, in terms of institutional characteristics, the ultimate goal of transformation is to form a beneficial complementary structure of various institutions and systems for regional security governance in Asia. The ASEAN Regional Forum guides the leadership of cooperation throughout East Asia, while the SCO, guided by pragmatic cooperative security, holds significant leading influence. The establishment of the Meeting on Measures for Mutual Assistance and Confidence Building in Asia seeks a normative basis for preventive diplomacy. This institutional arrangement, which appears uncoordinated but is actually highly coordinated, is a combination made by Asian countries based on an uneven geopolitical landscape. It "rejects both Western standardized security models and institutional fragmentation," opting instead for a system that "builds a layered nested security governance system with Asian characteristics." This represents a new mindset in Asian security governance that transcends Western centrism, offering a new option for global security governance.

3.3 Institutionalization of Compound Governance and Multi-Layer Nested Structure in the 21st Century

The richness of the new security mechanisms in Asia in the 21st century is summarized from four aspects. First, at the structural level, a "three-dimensional nested" regional security mechanism has emerged in the Asian region, such as the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN

Regional Forum, which manage geopolitical risks through diversified and inclusive platforms. Second, at the meso-level, the ASEAN-centered "ASEAN+" mechanism system ensures the voice of smaller countries and prevents hegemony by major powers. Third, at the micro-level, various functional mechanisms like the AIIB and the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation aim to achieve precise governance goals. Fourth, at the level of mechanism logic, a multi-layered structural system reflects a strategy for Asian countries to resolve security dilemmas. This mechanism includes "institutional hedging," providing different countries with varying degrees of flexibility to avoid large-scale confrontation. Additionally, through concrete and practical constructions, such as China's proposal of the "Asian Security Concept" in 2011, and President Xi Jinping's introduction of the "Global Security Initiative" in October 2022, a further ideological influence has been formed, promoting innovation in Asia's security order. These mechanisms demonstrate a certain institutional resilience, respecting the diversity of civilizations on one hand, and fostering an awareness of an Asian security community on the other, "providing ideas and paradigms for addressing global security issues today" [2].

4. Paradigm Innovation of Asian Security Governance with China's Participation

4.1 The Transcendence of the "Asian Security Concept" over the Western-centric Governance Model

Common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable are the principles of the "Asian Security Concept" advocated by the Chinese, fundamentally overturning the Western-centric and exclusive security governance. The classic Western approach to security governance is represented by military alliances and hegemonic stability, adhering to bloc divisions and zero-sum games. In contrast, the "Asian Security Concept" advocates for an open regional order built on equal dialogue and consensus [5]. This governance philosophy transcends the Western-led approach, not only rejecting the notion that security issues are related to military force or institutional export but also viewing security as a systemic issue, a result of development. On the practical level, China has advanced this governance concept in Asia through multilateral practices such as the CICA

and the SCO, fostering a new understanding among Asian countries about security cooperation: security should be negotiated by most major powers, not monopolized by a single power, and shared through security cooperation. This shift in governance not only changes the normative significance of security governance in the Asian region but also serves as a resource for other non-Western countries to participate in global governance reform.

4.2 Innovation in the Path of Non-Traditional Security Cooperation and Development-Oriented Security

China, as a participant in the construction of Asian security mechanisms, has introduced development issues into non-traditional security governance processes, charting a new path of "development-oriented security." While traditional security frameworks focus more on sovereignty or conventional threats such as security, China extends regional cooperation into non-traditional security areas, including counter-terrorism, cyberspace, public health, and climate change. Through the "Belt and Road" initiative, it enhances capacity cooperation and strengthens infrastructure connectivity, using economic security to mitigate security crises. The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation integrates water resource security and development across the six countries, while the Shanghai Cooperation Organization proposes combining counter-terrorism with economic cooperation. This indicates a comprehensive approach to security governance, addressing not only traditional security issues but also emphasizing economic cooperation alongside security collaboration. By promoting economic cooperation, it aims to enhance regional development and governance levels, thereby resolving security crises. China's choice of a "win-win cooperation and stability through cooperation" security logic offers new insights for southern countries exploring their own paths to security governance.

4.3 Dynamic Balance Mechanism of System Elasticity and Norm Diffusion

China's practices in the model of Asian security governance demonstrate a certain institutional flexibility, which involves spreading Eastern rules as an incremental strategy while maintaining open mechanisms. The gradual consultation process in the Asian Security

Forum (ARF) and the Global Security Initiative (GSI) follows the logic of consensus (informal and consensual), allowing members the flexibility to participate voluntarily and avoiding deadlock that could undermine the rules [4]. On the other hand, China's implementation of the Global Security Initiative incorporates Chinese security governance norms such as "respecting national sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression," and "resolving disputes in international affairs through peaceful means" into regional security mechanisms, enhancing their acceptability (adopt). The dynamic balance lies in two aspects: first, there is still "full freedom" in the mechanism to accommodate various interests of countries; second, the dissemination of norms adopts a "practical accumulation" approach rather than a "forced dissemination," for example, the SCO has naturally fostered member states' recognition of a shared security perspective through "counter-terrorism training exercises."

5. Conclusions

The above conclusions also indicate that, in the Chinese way of modernization, China is attempting to redefine the relationship between security and development, self-sufficiency and inclusiveness, thereby providing new evolutionary dynamics for Asian security practices. Asian countries are increasingly showing a trend toward forming an elastic security governance system based on diverse actors. This practice itself offers new perspectives and theoretical support to the global security theory framework, demonstrating the significant exemplary role of Chinese wisdom in building a community with a shared future for mankind. In the future, further impacts can be explored on regional security governance

patterns in the digital economy era and the climate change era.

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