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Nationalism and Multilateralism in Chinese Foreign Policy: Implications for Southeast Asia

Christopher R. Hughes

Abstract One of Michael Leifer's main fears for the future role of ASEAN arose from the spectre of a rising nationalistic China. This article assesses whether recent developments have borne out those fears by looking at the nature of Beijing's evolving multilateral approach towards the region. Agreeing with Leifer that nationalism is an important influence on Chinese foreign policy, the article explores the complex relationship between domestic politics and the discourse of multipolarity in China to propose that multilateralism is an effective way for Beijing to increase its regional power while avoiding confrontation with the United States or regional powers like India and Japan. However, Beijing's multilateralism is still premised on hard conceptions of state sovereignty and has to be developed in the context of a nationalistic political culture that prevents the achievement of regional stability through compromise on issues such as the South China Sea disputes and the Taiwan question. China's continuing economic growth also means that its multilateralism in Southeast Asia will unavoidably be shaped by issues such as the role of the ethnic Chinese as economic bridgeheads and the realities of an increasingly asymmetrical balance of power. Meanwhile, the relative economic weakness of the Southeast Asian states also means that nature of ASEAN-style regionalism will continue to be determined by the extra-mural balance of power, with China as one of the major actors, as Michael Leifer predicted.

Keywords Leifer; China; ASEAN; ARF; nationalism; multilateralism; multipolarity.

Introduction

Michael Leifer observed in 1996 that ASEAN would be preoccupied in future years by external security threats as it faces the 'disturbing geopolitical fusion' of the extension of its would-be security community from its Southeast Asian origins to Northeast Asia (1996:17,48; 1999: 34). Many of these problems are driven partly by the dynamics of the domestic politics of ASEAN's neighbours, whether it be the territorial disputes in the South China sea, the divided nation issues of Taiwan and the Korean peninsula, or the changing balance of power between the established major states and rising powers like India and China.

Highest amongst Leifer's concerns in this respect was the impact of Chinese nationalism on Beijing's regional policy. As Leifer himself puts it:

The rising power in Asia-Pacific as the twenty-first century approaches is China, whose leaders harbour a historical resentment of national humiliations inflicted on their weakened state by a rapacious West. China's successful post-Cold War economic reforms have provided it with a historic opportunity to realise a sense of national destiny, which many regional states view with apprehension (1996: 54).

It is beyond the competence of this paper to add anything to what Leifer and others have already said about ASEAN's policy towards China, other than to note that he described this in terms of a wary acceptance of the need to accommodate a rising China, while not taking its leaders' assurances of peaceful and good regional intent at face value (1996:54). Since 1996, however, there have been some significant developments in Beijing's policy towards ASEAN that deserve further exploration in order to assess whether Leifer was right to be so wary about the impact of Chinese nationalism.

Of particular significance is China's gradual acceptance of a multilateral approach towards Southeast Asia. This has now developed to a degree where Beijing is beginning to set the regional agenda, most recently reflected in the plan for a China-ASEAN Free Trade Area and its accession to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. With the view of China as an anti-status quo power also being challenged by some outstanding new work on Chinese foreign policy (Johnston 2003), now is a good time to ask whether Leifer's assumptions about the link between Chinese nationalism and Beijing's foreign policy needs to be moderated or developed further.

Nationalism and Chinese foreign policy

For the sake of analytical clarity, this paper will treat nationalism as an ideology of mass mobilisation that is distinct from the much broader policy-related activities of nation building or state-building. In this sense nationalism constitutes one of the main dynamics of modern Chinese political culture and an important resource for the political elite, being 'a kind of thought, a kind of faith, and a kind of power' (Sun 1969: 1) (to borrow from Sun Yatsen's definition) that can be used to mobilise the population. Beyond making the specific claim to statehood on behalf of a putative nation that is common to all nationalisms, it can be deployed as a political resource in many forms and for many different purposes. As recent surveys of Chinese nationalism demonstrate, its constituent themes and aims thus vary considerably over time and place, depending on who is making them and in pursuit of what political strategy (Fewsmith 2001: 132-220; Hughes 2005; Zhao 1997; Zheng 1999).

In assessing the impact of nationalism on China's policy towards Southeast Asia, however, it is important to note that the resurgence that has occurred since 1989 has been accompanied by a growing multilateralism that is not normally associated with a revisionist kind of foreign policy. In the economic field, the origins of this regional multilateralism can be traced as far back as China's 1986 membership of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), followed by its role as a founding member of APEC in 1989. Rather than being set back by the nationalist fervour of the 1990s, it was extended to regional security through China's role in the 1994 establishment of the ARF. As the division between traditional security and economic stability has become blurred after the Asian Financial Crisis and with the increasing international concern over 'non-traditional security' threats, the trend towards multilateralism has continued with China's active role in the ASEAN+3 (ASEAN plus China, Japan and the Republic of Korea) since 1997 and ASEAN+1 (ASEAN plus China). Most recently, Beijing's proposal to develop an ASEAN-China Free Trade Area by 2015 was enshrined in the November 2002 Framework Agreement on Comprehensive

Economic Cooperation, and the following year the PRC signed up to the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (Haacke 2002: 13-52).

It might be possible to explain this parallel development of nationalism and multipolarity by proposing that the former now has a relatively weak impact on China's foreign policy making. The long historical perspective seems to go against such a conclusion, however, given that the country's leaders have frequently resorted to nationalistic foreign policy issues to promote their domestic agendas. From Sun Yatsen and Chiang Kaishek through Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin, all of China's leaders have mobilised the population at times by stressing their nation's glorious cultural tradition, large population and territory as reasons for the country to play a special international role. Within the CCP tradition, Mao used the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis and the 1959 Sino-Indian border conflict to mobilise the population behind the Great Leap Forward and then divert attention away from its failure. Mao also believed that tension over the former should be maintained indefinitely as 'a means of education all the peoples of the world, first of all the Chinese people' (Mao 1958, 1959). When Deng Xiaoping faced a crisis of legitimacy after the 1979 'Beijing Spring', he attempted to delegitimize dissidents by linking them with the evil machinations of external powers and then focused attention on the Taiwan problem by elevating national unification to the status of one of the three main tasks to be completed in the 1980s (Deng X. 1979, 1980). The post 1989 leadership also attempted to rebuild the legitimacy of the CCP as the party of national salvation through a patriotic education campaign that stimulated anti-American and anti-Japanese sentiments and accused the democracy movement of being supported by external powers. Deng himself linked international affairs with domestic nationalism at this time when he called on the country to prepare to resist invaders (1989a) portraying a post-Cold War order in which China would be the victim of aggression as the prospect of war between the superpowers was replaced by conflicts between the North and the South and a war against socialism (1989b).

Events in the 1990s also show that China's political elite is not always always able to control the mass movements that are stimulated by their deployment of nationalism, which is why it is often referred to as a 'double edged sword' in Chinese texts. From the 1919 May 4 Movement, through the civil war and up to 1989, revolutionaries and dissidents alike have been able to use nationalism to deligitimize the ruling elite. Under the policy of 'reform and opening' since the late 1970s, this dynamic has been increasingly hard to manipulate as society has become more pluralistic and aware of international affairs. At times of heightened tension, such as the 1995-6 Taiwan crisis and the 1999 Belgrade incident, the Cox Report and the growing use of military intervention by the United States and some of its allies in Iraq and the Balkans, the leadership appears to have faced a real crisis of legitimacy.

The same elite-popular dynamic of nationalist politics can be seen occurring with respect to Southeast Asia. When news of atrocities against the ethnic Chinese community in Indonesia during the fall of the Suharto regime spread via the Internet, the government eventually gave in to demands for Beijing to take strong measures and departed from its policy of non-interference by voicing its concern (Hughes 2000). While it is true that the South China Sea disputes have not been used by either the elite or popular nationalists to mobilise the crowds in Chinese cities, even those who take an optimistic view of Beijing's tentative movement towards acceptance of a

code of conduct do not rule out that this could mask the postponement of a revisionist agenda to threaten the international status quo once China has the military capability to do so (Johnston 2003: 27-28). Similarly, given that acceptance of the 'one-China principle' by ASEAN was made the condition for the deepening of China's multilateralism in Southeast Asia, the Taiwan issue is certainly the rule that governs Beijing's behaviour in the region rather than the exception that it might appear to be when viewed from a broader perspective.

Given the enduring nature of the problems of the South China Sea and Taiwan, the sensitive position of the ethnic Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, and the continuing uncertainty of China's domestic politics, it is hard to sustain the view that Beijing's multilateralism in Southeast Asia can be entirely separated from the politics of Chinese nationalism. Indeed, some of these problems may become even more complex for the Beijing leadership to handle as multilateralism develops. Economic integration under the China-ASEAN Free Trade area, for example, is creating a different kind of pressure to depart from its established policy of non-interference in the internal affairs Southeast Asian states, as the possibility is now raised of using the ethnic Chinese in the region as an economic, political and cultural interface between China and ASEAN (Deng S. 2003). A more detailed exploration of the relationship between multilateralism and nationalism thus seems to be required before Leifer's scepticism can be allayed.

Nationalism and multipolarity

An alternative way of interpreting the relationship between Chinese nationalism and Beijing's multilateralism in Southeast Asia is to view the latter as effectively strengthening China's presence in the region in the face of competition from the United States and Japan. Such a view is proposed by Haacke, who interprets Beijing's policy as a way of promoting the Chinese ideal of a post-Cold War multipolar international order (Haacke 2002: 13-52). This is also problematic, however, given that there has been a significant decline in Chinese discussions of multipolarity of late (Johnston 2003: 34), just when Beijing's multilateralism has been accelerating and deepening.

China's multipolarity discourse, moreover, actually appears somewhat later than Beijing's practice of regional multilateralism. Although Chinese analysts trace the origins of multipolarity to Mao Zedong's Theory of the Three Worlds, given that the term 'multipolarity' (duojihua) only took on its current post-Cold War meaning after Deng Xiaoping advocated it in a speech of March 1990 (1990: 353-56) this view should be treated as a retrospective imposition on the past. It was only after Deng deployed the term in 1990 that it was able to become a formal element of the Party line, included in the work report presented by General Secretary Jiang Zemin to the 14th CCP Congress in October 1992. The inclusion of Deng's speech in the third volume of his *Selected Works*, published in 1993, also made it the key reference point for policy-makers and academics concerned with analysing the foreign policy crises of the late 1990s. Given that China joined the ADB in 1986 and APEC in 1989 and that Jiang Zemin point out in his 1992 work report that it had already established close relationships with 77 groups of states (qishiqi guo jituan), it is doubtful whether multilateralism can be seen as merely a product of multipolarity.

The vital clue to the relationship of multilateralism with nationalism lies in the way that the traditional form of power balancing through alliances is entirely absent from Chinese discussions of multipolarity. This can be seen when Chinese commentators claim that poles are centres of international power that are not necessarily alliances and do not need to have 'subsidiary' states or engage in adversarial power politics in order to influence the world (Qiao 2002: 12). The closest that academics and official policy statements have come to recommending anything like an alliance system since the end of the Cold War is to call for the formation of 'strategic partnerships', the paradigm for which was developed with the 'strategic partnership of equality, mutual confidence and mutual co-ordination toward the 21st century' established with Moscow in 1996 (Joint Declaration 1996) and extended to various states and organisations since then, including ASEAN in October 2003 (Joint Declaration 2003). These, however, explicitly state that such partnerships are not to be directed against any third party state. Moreover, the formula has even been extended to China's relations with the United States. Multipolarity, therefore, cannot be seen as power balancing in the sense of China's history of statecraft stretching from *Sun Zi* to Mao's 'leaning to one side' and playing the strategic triangle, the European tradition from Renaissance Italy to the post-Westphalian settlement in Europe, or contemporary American neo-realism. Chinese academics are fully aware of this crucial distinction of the post-Cold War version of multipolarity, when they distinguish it from older versions of multipolarity that are based on the balance of power (Qiao 2002: 12).

One way to explain this lack of power balancing in China's current version of multipolarity is to point out that nearly all its allies happen to be weak and failing states, such as North Korea, Myanmar and Pakistan. Even those commentators who want to present China as trying to balance US power have to admit that none of these states can really be considered to be 'allies' operating in a balance against the United States (Roy 2003: 57-78). Such a view is supported by Chinese analysts of the international situation, moreover, who point out that even a 'united front' with India and Russia would be woefully insufficient to balance US power (Chu and Wang 1999; Yan 1999). Yet this realisation of the limitations for China to engage in power balancing does not explain why multipolarity should play such a prominent role in Chinese discussions of foreign policy and why it should have been articulated so extensively since 1990.

To understand this, it is necessary to view multipolarity as an essentially domestic discourse that is designed primarily to soothe nationalist pressures, rather than as a foreign policy prescription. In this respect Johnston rightly points out how multipolarity discourse has been used for a whole range of political strategies, ranging from fear-mongering by 'conservatives' to its deployment by moderate voices trying to head off 'hard liners who believe that the unipolar moment requires more vigorous balancing against the United States' (Johnston 2003: 33). Even Deng Xiaoping was more concerned about maintaining the domestic reform programme than providing positive advice for foreign policy making when he made his March 1990 speech, two thirds of which is concerned with explaining that China has to have more rapid domestic economic development if it is to become a pole in the new world order. This promise that economic development would make China a pole in the new world order can be understood as subsidiary to his more pressing concern of keeping the reform process on track. It is an argument that reached its full form and final political victory when Deng made his Southern Tour speeches in the winter of 1992. When Jiang

Zemin presented multipolarity to the 14th Party Congress the following year, it was thus part of a much larger work report that enshrined the consolidation of Deng's market-orientated reforms.

In the context of China's domestic debates, therefore, the discussion of multipolarity in the 1990s can be seen as an attempt to maintain Deng's line of not taking a leading role in international affairs. This is why it is defined in the essentially negative terms of anything that is opposed to the unipolarity ascribed to the United States, while China itself is said to be able to do little in terms of balancing other than developing its economy and upholding Deng's line of 'not taking the lead' (bu dang tou). In the meantime historical forces will push the world towards an increasing number of poles of power, expanding to include not just China the United States and Russia but also the Third World, Western Europe, Canada, Australia, Japan, India and the EU. Beijing will not need to do much while such states and blocs oppose the attempt of the US to consolidate its economic and technological superiority. Comfort can also be taken from the observation that the limits of American power have been revealed by the crumbling of sanctions on China and the over-extension of its forces in the Balkans and Iraq (Chu and Wang 1999:1-3).

Multilateralism as power balancing

Given the primary domestic purpose of multipolarity discourse, it is quite feasible to dismiss its relevance to Beijing's multilateralism, let alone any kind of challenge to the international status quo. This is especially true for Southeast Asia, where Deng never listed ASEAN as a pole. It could certainly qualify as one, given that his original list of the United States, China and the Soviet has since been expanded to include not only large states like India and Brasil but also a bloc (jituan) like the EU (Qiao 2002: 12-13). It is not hard to fathom the reason for this exclusion of ASEAN from multipolarity discourse, when treating it as a pole would detract from the possibility of using regionalism as an alternative method for projecting China's international influence when faced by the rise of post-Cold War American supremacy.

Johnston's remark that 'moderate' commentators on international relations in China advocate the use of multilateralism to constrain US behaviour thus deserves more attention than he gives it. This is because even those figures who argue for caution in standing up to the US, and counsel against the formation of alliances and 'united fronts' are still very clear that war cannot be avoided if there is a threat to core national interests, such as an invasion of Chinese territory or the movement of Taiwan towards independence (Chu and Wang 1999: 6; Yan 1999: 11). Moreover, they cannot ignore the concerns of more hard line nationalists over the possibility that the development of the US doctrine of humanitarian intervention, or 'human rights above state rights', poses a direct threat to China's national national unity by encouraging independence movements in Tibet and Xinjiang. Even Lee Teng' hui's 'two states theory' has been portrayed as an attempt to use the 'Kosovo effect' to Taiwan's advantage. This encouragement of secessionist sentiment is also seen as having important implications for China's regional policy, as Pakistan is perceived to have been encouraged by the new US doctrine to try to gain Nato support for the Kashmir muslims as part of its conflict with India, and the maritime clash between North and South Korea had been caused by the increased confidence of the latter. Meanwhile the return of the US military presence in Southeast Asia, accompanied by the

strengthening of Washington's alliance with Japan and its intervention in Central Asia, is seen as part of an attempt to build a firewall around China (Chu and Wang 1999: 5).

To understand why multilateralism is used to defend China against such threats, it is necessary to go back to the way in which developed out of Deng Xiaoping's failure to play the balance of power. This began just as he was consolidated his leadership position in December 1978, when Washington failed to support the Chinese attack on Vietnam and then went on to continue to guarantee the security of Taiwan by passing the Taiwan Relations Act. It was following this that the PRC formally announced that it had renounced alliances in favour of a policy of diplomatic self-reliance in 1982. When Mikhail Gorbachov came to power in Moscow in 1985, Deng continued to express his aversion to alliances when he warned that China was sufficiently aware of its own limits not to try to play the strategic triangle (Deng X. 1985). It was in the following year that the PRC began down its path towards regional multilateralism by joining the ADB. It was also during the 1980s that Deng began to voice his belief that the developing states of the South were emerging as an international force for peace and stability that would work on China's behalf, without China having to take a leading role.

During the 1980s, regional multilateralism was thus gradually replacing alliances and alignments as a way to enhance China's regional influence and promote its national interests without confronting the superpowers, and China's natural support was to come from the developing world. With the foreign policy crises of the 1990s, this movement began to be expressed in the dilemma presented by the task of protecting China's core national interests in somewhat nebulous descriptions of policy towards the United States, such as 'some struggle, some peace; struggle but do not break' (you dou you he, dou er by po). What this means is that a balance has to be struck between facilitating a stable and peaceful relationship with the US on the one hand, to ensure that US policy continues to serve China's domestic and foreign policies of modernisation and national unification, while Washington also needs to be warned against deploying the methods it used to destroy the Soviet Union at the same time. Central to this strategy is the strategic art of 'making people yield without fighting' (bu zhan er qu ren zhi bing), which can foil the US and Western plans to contain China, while still maintaining the strategic partnership for the 21st Century with the US so long as this serves the national interest (Chu and Wang 1999: 6).

Because Beijing's use of alliances as part of this formula for protecting the national interest would only lead to a new Cold War, and possibly even a hot war, the only alternative for balancing US power is to reduce bilateral frictions and raise China's status in the international mainstream by winning the support of the majority of states for the international norms that it advocates. In this way Beijing can manage China's relations with the superpower and work towards building the rules of a 'new international order' through multilateral security dialogue and with the cooperation of organisations like the ARF (Yan 1999: 11). This policy orientation has direct implications for regional policy because it is premised not only on the acknowledgement that China is an economically and technologically backward country that is unable to confront the United States and has a natural alignment with the South, but also on the realisation that many of China's neighbouring states are suspicious of its intentions (Chu and Wang 1999: 6). The search for a way to protect

core national interests thus provides a strong impetus for Beijing to accelerate its regional multilateralism.

It is within this context that the movement that had already been advanced by membership of the ARF in 1994 was accelerated with the establishment of the ARF+3 in 1997 and premier Zhu Rongji's first proposal for an ASEAN-China free trade agreement at the ASEAN+China meeting in November 2000. The immediate impetus for these developments was to respond to the Asian Financial Crisis and to allay regional concerns over the impact of China's imminent WTO membership. Yet they also arose out of an acute sensitivity towards the need to maintain relations with as many states as possible in order to constrain American power under a global system defined by the struggle between 'one superpower, many great powers'.

Multilateralism after 9.11

While multipolarity is an essentially empty concept for the making of foreign policy, then, regional multilateralism presents an effective way to protect China's core national interests. This trend has been strengthened by developments since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on the United States (the '9.11 Incident'). Since then China has continued to shy away from directly confronting the United States over issues outside its immediate vicinity, such as the US-led invasion of Iraq. Moreover, ASEAN is still not defined as a 'pole' of international power, and its commentators continue to hope that the EU will be able to stand up to an American hegemony that has not gone into the decline that was expected in the early 1990s (Qiao 2002: 10-13). Meanwhile, the use of regional policy as a way to protect China's core national interests from the expansion of US power has continued to take an increasingly prominent position in Beijing's diplomacy. Knowing that cooperation with Japan remains tightly constrained and regional cooperation in Northeast Asia has stalled, Southeast Asia is presented as the region where political breakthroughs are most likely to be made on the back of economic integration. The economic slow down in the US, combined with the continuing post-1997 malaise of the Southeast Asian economies, has also provided the conditions for ASEAN to adopt a more positive attitude towards the proposal for a free trade agreement with China that had been coolly received in the region only the previous year (Deng S. 2003: 65).

In some respects the conditions for China's multilateralism in Southeast Asia have also been partly put in place by the shift in Washington's priorities away from normative issues of human rights and trade in favour of the War on Terror. In this climate, Beijing's attempt to shape the rules of international behaviour appear to be somewhat less of an open challenge to US power than did the coalition of Southern states that formed around a communitarian interpretation of human rights standards under the Bangkok Declaration in 1993 (UN General Assembly 1993), or the debate on 'Asian values' triggered by some of the ASEAN leaders. In Chinese foreign policy thinking this shifting in the ranking of international norms is reflected in the way that concerns that once arose over the Clinton administration's increasing tendency towards humanitarian intervention have now largely been suppressed in favour of the argument that a new international ethics and culture of 'peace and righteousness' has developed. Even comparatively weak states are able to increase their power by upholding such standards because they are based on opposition to

invasion, racism and terrorism. Meanwhile, a 'democratisation' of international politics is said to be taking place as the states of the South find their voice, a trend to which the PRC is urged to pay great attention as the biggest developing state (Qiao 2002: 12).

That the move towards multilateralism in Southeast Asia is designed to protect China's core national interests can also be seen in the way that Beijing deploys what it calls the 'New Security Concept' in the region. The genesis of this idea is held to have had close links with the region as Chinese scholars trace its key elements back to the principles contained in the report delivered by China to the 1996 ARF Inter-Sessional Support Group on Confidence-Building Measures in Tokyo, when the PRC is said to have begun to accept that engaging with multilateral security organisations, formal dialogues and track two dialogues are all ways to protect national security. Such is the origin of the formula that was presented in full as the New Security Concept to the ARF Foreign Minister's conference at Bandar Seri Bagawan on 31 July 2002 (Lu, Z. 2003: 56).

Although the meaning of the New Security Concept remains nebulous, like the ambivalent foreign policy formulae that were floated at the end of the 1990s, it is not hard to see that the intention behind it is to protect China's core national interests from the hegemonic power of any other state, be it the United States, Japan or India (Lu, G. 2003). In evaluating the nature of China's multilateralism in Southeast Asia, it is important to emphasise how the New Security Concept also manages to encapsulate a fairly realist, state-centric understanding of multilateralism. Drifte, for example, summarises the main themes of the 1996 document as being resistance against the external imposition of values and ideologies, the splitting of China, indiscriminate sanctions against China on international issues, conflicts and wars in some regional countries, encroachments on China's sovereignty, and defence of maritime rights and interests (Drifte 2003: 36). There are also a number of essentially neo-realist elements in Alagappa's distillation of the document, which include pursuit of a balance among the major powers in Asia, building up military strength, along with a good-neighbour policy with all Asian neighbours, the mobilization of international support for economic modernization, and the projection of China as an indispensable and responsible regional player (Alagappa 1997: 70-72).

In the post-9.11 climate of non-traditional security threats, Chinese commentators also stress that the inclusion of the principle of 'equality' in the New Security Concept amounts to ruling out the use of such threats by 'powerful states' as an excuse to interfere in the domestic affairs of weaker states. It is further added that the formula pays little attention to the role of non-state actors. Underlying the concept there is thus said to be a fundamental difference between developed and developing states over the nature of the new security agenda: while the developed more readily emphasise the impact of 'non traditional security' threats such as environmental problems on non-state referent objects, such as human health and welfare and the global ecology, such issues are seen by the developing to be more of a threat to their own survival as states (Lu, Z 2003: 57).

It is, of course, no coincidence that this emphasis on state sovereignty in the New Security Concept is fully in harmony with ASEAN's principles, as enshrined in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation to which China has now signed up. While it has

been argued that the New Security Concept has little appeal in the Asia Pacific region (Johnston 2003: 40), this is somewhat beside the point given that it has been devised in a way that makes it compatible with the state-centric principles so dear to ASEAN. In this respect, both China and the ASEAN states share the view that there need be no direct clash between multilateralism, maintaining statehood, and dealing with transnational threats such as terrorism. This is just as true of Beijing's other regional initiatives as it is of its policy towards Southeast Asia. The participating states of the Shanghai Five/SCO have thus signed numerous agreements on reducing the military presence in the border areas, and combating terrorism, splittism and extremism. These have allowed the SCO to defend the national interests of its members by joining the regional and global struggle against terrorism, and to promote regional economic cooperation, while not antagonising the US by appearing to be the formation of an alliance or opposition to any third party state.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this tactical unwillingness to engage in alliance politics is the same as the absence of a strategic goal to establish regional or even global hegemony, as Johnston infers (Johnston 2003: 38). It is true that we do not find Chinese policy makers or academics talking directly about China playing an active role in balancing US power in a way that can be remotely compared to the behaviour of the Soviet Union in the Cold War, and neither is China building bilateral alliances with regional powers. However, to equate this lack of alliance systems with the absence of a desire to enhance China's international influence can only be sustained in isolation from the larger picture of Beijing's foreign policy thinking, where the hole left in multipolarity by the absence of power balancing is filled by the convergence of developing states around a state-centric version of multilateralism that serves its own national interests well.

China and ASEAN in the extra-regional context

At the global level it is already possible to see some inklings of the ways in which China is using its relationship with ASEAN to develop a counterweight to US power. Witness, for example, the 2004 agreement for their respective representatives to the UN to engage in regular consultations, their joint position that the UN should play a leading role in the reconstruction of Iraq, and the statement of support for China's role in working towards a resolution of the North Korean nuclear weapons issue (ASEAN China Foreign Ministers' Press Release 2004). Moreover, while the furthest that multipolarity discourse has been able to impinge on the China-ASEAN relationship has been in the form of the joint declaration on a strategic partnership for peace and prosperity, both sides have expressed the hope that the ASEAN+3 mechanism can lead to the development of an 'East Asian community' (Joint Declaration 2003).

Such balancing of US power remains light so long as China is unable to explicitly treat ASEAN or the ASEAN+3 as a 'pole' of global power. This needs to be judged in light of the fact that Beijing has taken all the most recent significant initiatives leading to regional integration, however, with ASEAN sometimes grudgingly accepting this as its relative economic power has declined since 1997. If Beijing was to express this development in terms of multipolarity, this would of course set alarm bells ringing in Washington about its policy in Southeast Asia, which is already being described as 'aggressive' by figures such as Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly (House Committee 2004). Moreover, if China was to project its economic power too far and

too fast, it would do little to allay the fears that it acknowledges exist in the capitals of the region, where the US presence is still valued as a force for external security (Haacke 2002: 36). China has thus gone to great lengths to reassure ASEAN that it will be the major driving force behind the regional project. In this respect, Leifer is still correct in concluding that the corporate identity of ASEAN within the wider changing international dispensation in Asia endures primarily 'because it is in the interest of China, in particular with Russian and Indian support, to support the sustained diplomatic centrality of ASEAN within the ARF as a way of promoting greater multi-polarity, defined with reference to the post-Cold War standing of the United States' (Leifer 1999: 34).

While China's use of multilateralism to expand its international influence thus faces the constraints of the extra-ASEAN balance of power, its recent initiatives do show how its leaders have already departed substantially from Deng's principle of not taking a lead in relations with the developing world. Multilateralism is a much safer way to do this than traditional power balancing through alliances against a far more powerful United States. While the changing priorities of international society since the 9.11 Incident have provided new opportunities for a convergence with the ASEAN states, the same can be said of the broader processes of globalization which feature so much in the agreements between ASEAN and China.

From this perspective, rather than seeing globalisation as displacing a declining multipolarity discourse (Johnston 2003: 56), it is probably more accurate to understand it as being brought into Chinese foreign policy rhetoric to complement multilateralism in articulating the kind of power balancing that multipolarity has never been able to provide. When President Jiang Zemin described the world situation as characterised by 'political multipolarity, economic globalization' in his work report to the 16th Party Congress in November 2002, he was thus juxtaposing two discourses in a way that makes them compatible with the pursuit of China's national interest (Jiang 2002). From Jiang's point of view, the transnational problems of economic integration, the environment, international terrorism and arms proliferation that are addressed jointly by ASEAN and China might be forcing relations between states to be characterised by 'constructiveness' 'cooperation' and 'partnership', but neither side confuses this with the idea that globalization weakens the power of authoritarian states that is so popular in American foreign policy thinking. Instead, the Chinese attitude to globalisation is encapsulated in Jiang's theory of the 'Three Represents', a kind of developmental techno-nationalism that offers the prospect of 'leap-frogging' the advanced industrial economies and balancing the danger that the United States might use its economic power to gain political control over the world. In fact, if Mao's Three World's Theory is relevant in the global era, so far as China's Ministry of Information Industry (MII) and the CCP's Central Policy Research Office are concerned it is in the sense of a struggle against the 'information hegemony state' to assert its control over the 'information sovereign states' of Japan and Europe and the 'information colonial and semi-colonial states' of the South (Hughes 2003: 141).

This challenge to the view of globalisation promoted by much American foreign policy rhetoric and academic literature of a 'hyperglobalist' inclination is very much in sympathy with views of state sovereignty that are dominant in the ASEAN model of regionalism. It is a version of globalization that has arisen out of a reaction to events such as the decision of the G7 to reduce the debts of the world's poorest states

on condition that they should meet Western human rights standards, the establishment of the International Criminal Court and the arrest of General Pinochet in London, and the promotion of a doctrine of 'human rights before sovereignty' as a way to justify military intervention around the world that has not been legitimated by the UN Security Council (Chu and Wang 1999: 4; Yan 1999: 7-11). On closer analysis, then, globalization supports multilateralism in playing the power balancing role that China's version of multipolarity is unable to perform.

Conclusion

Leifer's scepticism towards the ARF and his concerns over the rise of Chinese power derive from his English School belief that it is folly to ignore the realities of power balancing in international relations. There is no need to indulge in hawkish visions of China as a revisionist power in pursuit of a new-sinocentric order in order to do justice to the diplomatic realities and political context which determine how Beijing uses multilateralism to protect and promote interests that are defined in the context of a highly nationalistic political culture. An increasingly wealthy China already represents the reality that the balance of power in China has changed, and that it makes little sense to talk of challenging a 'status quo' that has already ceased to exist (if it ever did exist). From this perspective, rather than being an anti-status quo power, China has been socialised into the realism of international society all too well insofar as its leaders accept that working through multilateral regional organisations is a good way to engage in the power balancing that makes diplomacy possible.

Maintaining a stable balance of power, however, is inevitably complicated by the realities of China's economic growth. Chinese observers who are aware that China's GDP could overtake that of the US around 2017 continue to make reassuring noises that can engage those calling for more defiance against the United States by restating Deng Xiaoping's optimistic view that their country's rise to power will lead not only to multipolarity, but also to the eradication of war when accompanied by the development of the EU and the Third World. But they are also aware that economic strength alone is not enough to guarantee that a state becomes a pole. What is important is comprehensive national power, as shown by the ability of the Soviet Union to balance the much wealthier US in the Cold War and the continuing inability of an economically powerful Japan to play a political role (Qiao 2002: 13). Russia also stands out as an example of the limits of power balancing through the formation of peaceful alliances, given Moscow's failure to halt the Nato campaign against Yugoslavia and the eastward expansion of Nato and its acceptance of Washington's renunciation of the ABM Treaty. The roots of this weakness are attributed to the failure to develop national power, the overestimation of one's own importance, weakening oneself through domestic political disunity and daring to take a lead. In short, China has to avoid becoming another Russia by not over-estimating the extent of its comprehensive national power when using multipolarity to promote its own interests (Xu, X. 2002: 33-37).

The Asian Financial Crisis and the War on Terror have, however, strengthened the argument that China has the opportunity to avoid Russia's fate by extending its influence through a multilateralism that does not directly challenge the United States or ruffle the feathers of its neighbours. Similarly, the increasing deployment of the concept of globalisation indicates not so much a movement away from the state-

centric focus of Chinese foreign policy thinking, as a rearticulation of power balancing that is derived from an essentially nationalistic discourse.

The resulting deployment of regional multilateralism to expand Chinese influence in the context of US global preponderance has particularly important implications for China's relations with ASEAN. In relationship to China's claims in the South China Sea, the need to reassure the Southeast Asian states with whom it hopes to work to increase its regional influence mitigates against deploying such an issue to enhance the CCP's claims to be the party of national salvation, in the way that relations with Taiwan, Japan and the United States are used in domestic politics. In this respect, maintaining Deng Xiaoping's principle of shelving the issue of sovereignty over such disputes is seen as a way not only to avoid international conflict but also a method for soothing heated popular emotions over historical issues that exist in China and its neighbours (Cui, X. 1996: 256). Yet, so long as China's political culture remains highly nationalistic, it will continue to constrain the country's leaders from taking multilateralism so far that it might appear to be offering a compromise to other states on an issue that can be defined as a core national interest. This is even more so in the case of Taiwan.

The South China Sea disputes thus remain unresolved, while ASEAN's acceptance that Taiwan is a part of China is the fundamental principle on which the relationship with ASEAN has been established. Moreover, economic integration can add a new complexity to old nationalistic problems. Maintaining a hands-off policy towards the ethnic Chinese populations of Southeast Asia, for example, is already becoming more complex as their economic role offers both a tempting resource for expanding China's influence in the region under multilateralism, which could resurrect questions over their loyalty and protection both inside China itself in their countries of residence.

In conclusion it could be said that Michael Leifer was right to be highly critical of the proposal that the extension of the ASEAN model of peace-making beyond Southeast Asia could address core issues of regional security (Leifer 1999: 38). Moreover, as China's growing economic power enables Beijing to take more of a lead in setting the agenda in Southeast Asia, the limits of its influence will continue to be defined more by the external balance of power than by the states of the region themselves, bearing out Leifer's observation that the structural problem of the ARF 'is that its viability seems to depend on the prior existence of a stable balance, but it is not really in a position to create it' (Leifer 1996: 48). As for the impact of Chinese nationalism, it has been argued above that Beijing's multilateral turn does not represent a departure from its state-centric understanding of international relations or a dilution of the nationalistic issues that are so vital to the legitimacy of its leaders. The question remains, therefore, as to what China's political culture will make of the logic of international anarchy in Southeast Asia as its economic power continues to grow.

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