

A stylized globe with colorful continents in shades of blue, yellow, and pink, set against a light blue background. The globe is the central focus of the cover.

Peace Forum 2021

*Building a Better East Asian World Order in the
Aftermath of the Pandemic*

online meeting

10th December 2021

Hosted by Chinese Culture University

International Symposium

Co-sponsored by Chinese Culture University and Soka University and Kyungnam University



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Peace Forum 2021

Building a Better East Asian World Order in the Aftermath of the Pandemic

An online meeting

10th December 2021 (Taiwan Time)

Hosted by Chinese Culture University

Program

08:30 **Opening Ceremony** (15 minutes)

- Greeting from Dr. Wang, Shu-Yin (王淑音) (Acting President, Chinese Culture University)
- Opening Remarks from Baba, Yoshihsa (Presidnet, Soka University)
- Opening Remarks from Park, Jeong-Jin (Vice President, Kyungnam University)

08:45 **Keynote Speech** (30 minutes)

- Dr. Yang, Philip (楊永明) (Former Deputy Secretary-General, National Security Council;
Adjunct Professor, National Taiwan University)
“Testing Time for Asia: Great-Power Competition and Economic Integration”

09:15 Break (5 minutes)

09:20 **Session I “Perspective from Taiwan”** (50 minutes)

Moderator: Dean Chao, Chien-min (趙建民) (Chinese Culture University)

- Presentation (15 minutes)

Professor Lin, Hsuan-Hsiang (林炫向) (Chinese Culture University)

“Hegemonic Rivalry and East Asian Order: Revisiting Robert Gilpin's Theory of Hegemonic War”

-Comments (10 minutes for each)

Discussant: Professor Lenz, Hartmut (Soka University)

Discussant: Professor Chung, Jaewook (Kyungnam University)

-Panel Discussion (15 minutes)

10:10 Break (10 minutes)

10:20 **Session II “Perspective from Japan”** (50 minutes)

Moderator: Professor Tamai, Hideki (Soka University)

- Presentation (15 minutes)

Professor Sasaki, Satoshi (Soka University)

“Lessons from Response to COVID-19 in Japan and Contribution to Improving Global Health”

-Comments (10 minutes for each)

Discussant: Professor Kim, Jung (University of North Korean Studies/Kyungnam University)

Discussant: Associate Professor Wang, Shun-Wen (王順文) (Chinese Culture University)

-Panel Discussion (15 minutes)

11:10 Break (10 minutes)

11:20 **Session III “Perspective from Korea”** (50 minutes)

Moderator: Professor Moon, Miri (Kyungnam University)

- Presentation (15 minutes)

Professor Lee, Byong-Chul (Kyungnam University)

“The Perils and Opportunities of Competitions between U.S. and China: From South Korea's Perspective”

-Comments (10 minutes for each)

Discussant: Professor Chen, Wan-Jiun (陳宛君) (Chinese Culture University)

Discussant: Associate Professor Dr. Hanssen, Ulv (Soka University)

-Panel Discussion

12:10 **Closing Ceremony and Co-Host Meeting for the next year forum**

Resume of All Participants

Yang, Philip (Keynote Speaker)

Prof. Philip Yang is a well-known professor, commentator, and former governmental official in Taiwan. He was former deputy secretary-general of the Taiwan's National Security Council and former Minister of Governmental Information Office, a cabinet member of Taiwanese government. Prof. Yang is currently an adjunct professor of International Relations at National Taiwan University, and he is also the Chairman of the International Committee of the Taiwan Federation of Industry and Commerce, and advisor for the National Association of Industry and Commerce. In addition, Prof. Yang is an influential scholar in Asia-Pacific economic and security issues and Japanese studies. He was a Fulbright Scholar and received the prestigious Nakasone Yasuhiro Award in 2008. Prof. Yang publishes extensively in English, Japanese and Chinese, including *US-China Trade War and Tech War* (2019) *Rise of Asia* (2018) and *History of Japan-Taiwan Relations 1945-2020* (University of Tokyo Press, 2021). He received his B.A. and M.A. from National Taiwan University and a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia.

Chinese Culture University

Chao, Chien-min (Chinese Culture University)

Dr. Chien-min Chao is a Distinguished Chair Professor at the Graduate Institute for National Development and Mainland China Studies, and also Dean of the College of Social Sciences at the Chinese Culture University. Between 2008 and 2012, Dr. Chao served as a Deputy Minister for the Mainland Affairs Council in the ROC government. Dr. Chao was a visiting Distinguished Professor at the George Washington University and visiting teaching professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Chao has written and edited thirteen books, including *Decision-making in China: Leadership, Process and Mechanism* (in Chinese) (Taipei, 2014). The book has won him a distinguished award here in Taiwan and has been translated into Korean in 2018 by 學古房. Other publications include *Introduction to China and Cross-Strait Relations* (Taipei, 2010); *Lee Teng-hui's Legacy* (M.E. Sharpe, 2002); *Rethinking the Chinese State* (Routledge, 2001); *Analysis to Contemporary Chinese Politics* (Taipei, 1997); *Authoritarian Politics* (Taipei, 1994). Dr. Chao has also produced over 100 articles in academic journals such as the *Asian Affairs*, *Asian Survey*, the *China Quarterly*, *Journal of Contemporary China*, *Pacific Affairs*, *Issues & Studies*, *Chinese Law and Government*, *Zhongguo dalu yanjiu*.

Lin, Hsuan-Hsiang (Chinese Culture University)

Hsuan-Hsiang Lin is a professor at the Department of Political Science at Chinese Culture University, Taipei, Taiwan. He is currently also serving as the chair of his department. He received his Ph.D. from Josef Korbel School of International Studies at University of Denver in 2006. His doctoral dissertation, *Constructing a Genuine Realistic Utopia: Reconstructing John Rawls's The Law of People*, was published by Verlag Dr. Müller in Germany in 2008. His academic expertise was mainly in the areas of international relations and political theory,

with particular focus on the ethics of international relations and the historical sociology of international relations. His research interest is now turning to developing a cultural approach to the study of politics and international relations, on the basis of the study of comparative civilizations. In addition to his interest in theory building, in recent years he has also been interested in the question of the rise and fall of hegemony, particularly the current hegemonic competition between China and the United States. He currently tackles this issue by employing and defending Graham Allison's "Thucudides' Trap" and Robert Gilpin's theory of hegemonic war. But since he is more interested in the relationship between culture and politics, in the future he will expand his field of study to include the rise and fall of civilizations and hegemony from the perspective of civilizational competition.

Wang, Shun-Wen (Chinese Culture University)

Associate Professor Shun-Wen Wang is a faculty member of Department of Political Science at Chinese Culture University. He received his Ph.D in Political Science from National Taiwan University. His main research interests lie in the fields of the Middle East (especially focus on Turkey and Iraq), Cross-Strait Relations, and conflict resilience and has published some papers related to these subjects. Dr. Wang got projects from the Ministry of Science and Technology and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was also a visiting scholar at AVIM center in Ankara under MOFA's project "Turkey's reaction on the Chinese 'One-Belt-One-Road' policy". His recent research project is related to Turkish foreign policy on Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Current course offerings range from International Relations, BRI and RCEP, Islam and the Middle East Politics, and post-conflict reconstruction.

Chen, Wan-Jiun (Chinese Culture University)

Dr. Chen is a Professor in Department of Economics, Chinese Culture University. She holds a bachelor's degree in Forest Management from National Taiwan University, and master and doctor degrees in Agricultural and Resource Economics from Colorado State University, USA. She studies and teaches issues of Environmental Economics and Ecological Economics in Chinese Culture University. She ever visited as researcher or scholar at the School of Economics, University of British Columbia, Canada in 2015, at Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies, Kyoto University, Japan, in 2017, and at Faculty of Food and Land System, University of British Columbia, Canada, in 2019. She regularly joins the domestic and international associations of environmental economics. She currently serves as Executive Director of TAERE (Taiwan Association of Environmental and Resource Economics). She was Supervisor of TAERE, Director of TAERE, and Director of EAAERE (East Asian Association of Environmental and Resource Economics; currently AAERE, Asian Association of Environmental and Resource Economics).

Soka University

Lenz, Hartmut (Soka University)

Hartmut Lenz joined Soka University in 2014 and currently holds the position of Professor of International Relations. Previously he has been a lecturer and Leverhulme Fellow at the London School of Economics, a John F. Kennedy Scholar at Harvard University, and a Nuffield Fellow at Oxford University. His current research

includes two main projects: "Domestic Constraints on Bargaining on the Intergovernmental Treaty Negotiations", which examines the impact of public opinion on intergovernmental negotiations, and a second project with the title "How stable is Government? Institutional Accountability, and the Survival of Semi-Presidential Democracies", which is a comparative analysis of the impact of institutional structures on survival of semi-presidential and presidential democracies", the project has won a Kakenhi (C) grant in 2019. Recent publications include articles in *World Affairs*, *Review of International Organizations*, *European Union Politics*, and *Politics & Policy*. Hartmut Lenz has won several grants including a Grant-in-Aid Kakenhi (C) grant from the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS, 2019-2023 Project No. 19K01512), Leverhulme grant – London School of Economics (2011-14, UK), Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, UK) Ph.D. Scholarship, 2005–07.

Tamai, Hideki (Soka University)

Hideki Tamai is a Professor of Peace Studies, International Relations at Soka University and Director of Soka University Peace Research Institute (SUPRI). He earned BA (Sociology) at Soka University in 1985 and MA (International Relations) at Soka University in 1989. He started to work at Soka University Peace Research Institute in 1990. He was appointed director of SUPRI and Associate Professor of Faculty of Letters at Soka University in 2008. His research examines and promotes Human Security in terms of norm entrepreneurship and in terms of policy making and implementation [‘Development of Japanese Government Strategy of Peacebuilding in Post-Cold War era’ (2010); ‘Issues with Human Insecurity in Japan: the Case of US Military Bases in Okinawa’ (2015)] He has been studying also Global Governance for Human Security, for example his analysis of the UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) presented it uniquely as a novel type of international regime from the perspective of constructivism [‘Forming of a Human Security Regime and International Organization’ (Yamamoto et.al. eds., *International Organizations and International Institutions*, Shigakusha, Inc. Tokyo, 2017)]. He is also very experienced in leading many international conferences, such as the International Symposium “Human Security in Asia”, “Global Governance for Human Security”, and “Building a Peace Community in Asia in 2017”.

Sasaki, Satoshi (Soka University)

Dr. Satoshi Sasaki is a Professor of Faculty of Nursing, Soka University. He received his MA degree in Law from Soka University and Ph.D degree in Medicine from Niigata University, Japan. His research interests include infectious disease control and prevention of infant and maternal mortality in developing countries. He was involved in Japanese ODA project to mobilize local community to improve infectious disease morbidity in Africa for ten years. He published his research paper in the *American Journal of Public Health*, the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* and the *Tropical Medicine and International Health*.

Hanssen, Ulv (Soka University)

Ulv Hanssen is an associate professor at Soka University's Faculty of Law where he has been teaching since 2018. He is mainly teaching courses in the fields of politics and international relations. Hanssen, who is from Norway, is especially interested in Japan-North Korea relations. In 2017, he graduated from the Graduate School of East Asia Studies at the Free University Berlin. His PhD dissertation used discourse analysis to analyze the

Japanese Diet debates on security policy in the postwar period. It investigated how national identity constructions have changed over time in these debates and how different security discourses have used different identity constructions to justify their preferred security policies. The dissertation was turned into a book and published by Routledge in 2019 under the title *Temporal Identities and Security Policy in Postwar Japan*. He is currently researching the phenomenon of anti-Korean 'hate books' in Japanese bookstores. He is also part of a Scandinavian research team that has received funding from Korea Foundation to analyze the history of Sweden-North Korea relations.

Kyungnam University

Chung, Jaewook (Kyungnam University)

Dr. Jaewook Chung is a Professor at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies of Kyungnam University, Lecturer at Kyonggi University, and Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of International Studies, Seoul National University. He received his B.A. and M.A. in Political Science from Seoul National University and earned his Ph. D degree in Political Science from Rice University, Houston, Texas. His research interests include international security, especially military alliances, Northeast Asian security affairs, international political economy, quantitative research and game theory. His research appeared in the *Korean Journal of International Studies* and the *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*.

Kim, Jung (University of North Korean Studies/Kyungnam University)

Dr. Jung Kim is an Associate Assistant Professor at the University of North Korean Studies and Visiting Professor at Yonsei University, South Korea. He is currently a member of Policy Advisory Committee of Ministry of National Defense and of Defense Intelligence Agency Ministry of Unification. He is also a regional coordinator of Asia Democracy Research Network. Prior to this, he was a Chief Researcher at East Asia Institute and Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University. He received his B.A. and M.A. in Political Science at Korea University and his Ph.D. in Political Science at Yale University. His research interests include Comparative Politics and International Relations in East Asia.

Moon, Miri (Kyungnam University)

Miri Moon is assistant professor at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies(IFES), Kyungnam University, Seoul, Korea. Professor Moon is serving as advising professor of the fellowship programme for international scholars at IFES. Dr. Moon received her BA in Media and Communications from Goldsmiths, University of London and MA in Journalism from the University of Westminster, London, UK and she holds a PhD in Communication from Brunel University London, UK. Miri Moon published her first monograph, "International News Coverage and the Korean Conflict: The Challenges of Reporting Practices" by Palgrave Macmillan and co-translated the book "Celebrity" by Chris Rojek in 2019.

Lee, Byong-Chul (Kyungnam University)

Dr. Byong-Chul Lee is Assistant Professor at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies of Kyungnam University.

His research interests include North Korean denuclearization, nuclear non-proliferation and policies on the ROK-US relations. His recent research has focused primarily on “What explains variation in South Korea’s commitment to the nuclear nonproliferation regime?” Before joining the IFES, Dr. Lee worked as an aide to the Presidential Senior Secretary for Foreign and National Security Affairs and served as foreign and national security policy planning staff member at the Presidential Office of South Korea from 1993 to 1999. He also served as a special aide and policy planning secretary to the Speaker of National Assembly from 2015 to 2016. He received a Ph.D. in North Korean Studies from Korea University. His op-ed pieces and comments have appeared in The New York Times, 38North, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, YaleGlobal, Project Syndicate, The South China Morning Post, among other publications.

Session I

“Perspective from Taiwan”

Hegemonic Rivalry and East Asian Order:

Revisiting Robert Gilpin’s Theory of Hegemonic War

Hsuan-Hsiang Lin

Professor, Department of Political Science, Chinese Culture University

Since the Obama era, the U.S. has taken a defensive attitude toward the “peaceful rise” of China, hence the Pivot to Asia or rebalancing strategy. Later, China proposed the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as well as the 2025 Made in China, which made the U.S. feel more threatened than ever. The Trump administration then began a trade war and technology war against China, and proposed the Indo-Pacific strategy to encircle China. Before the Biden administration took office, there were expectations that his policy toward China would be moderated. The Biden administration may not have been as extreme in its approach as Trump, but the bipartisan consensus on China has made it difficult for the Biden administration to adopt a more compromising policy. As a result, the trade and technology wars that began under Trump have not been fully relaxed. In addition, the Biden administration has opened up new fronts, namely playing the human rights card on Xinjiang and Hong Kong, and repeatedly testing China's bottom line on Taiwan.

On the surface, Antony Blinken declared that the U.S. attitude toward China is “competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be and adversarial when it must be.” But on the Chinese side, the constant use of the human rights and Taiwan cards to irritate China does not seem like a cooperative gesture at all, and therefore it is difficult for Beijing to completely abandon its “war-wolf” posture to counter the US. Liberals tend to think that the threats posed to humanity by major global crises (such as climate change and epidemics) will force the two powers to sit down and negotiate. But from a realist standpoint, peace may not always be the first priority, and national interests may still be paramount. If both sides still consider their own national interests first, we can hardly expect the two powers to put the interests of humanity first and try to solve common human problems. It is even possible that the friction and confrontation will be further intensified due to the selfishness of both sides, bringing the world to the brink of war.

Since about 2015, Graham Allison has proposed “Thucydides Trap” as a way to study U.S.-China relations,¹ which has generated much controversy. Many argue that war between the two

¹ Graham Allison, “The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?” *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2015. Available at: <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/thucydides-trap-are-us-and-china-headed-war>. Graham Allison, *Destined for War?: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

countries is unthinkable under the constraint of nuclear weapons and economic interdependence. However, the concept of imaginability in political psychology suggests that just because something is unthinkable does not mean it will not happen, but people tend to underestimate the risk of the “unthinkable”.² The author has been trying to defend Allison's warnings since the Peace Forum of 2018. In my 2018 paper,³ I followed David P. Rapkin and William Thompson in arguing that even with nuclear weapons, economic interdependence, and international organizations, there is no guarantee that there will be no war between the United States and China.⁴ Later, it was discovered that Henry Kissinger also considers “Thucydides Trap” as the best “lens” for understanding the dynamics of the relationship between the two powers.⁵ This observation gave the author more confidence, so I published another paper based on it, which explored in more depth why economic interdependence does not necessarily prevent war. The paper cites many papers on the causes of war to show that economic interdependence does not only fail to prevent war, but may even induce new frictions and conflicts.⁶ Among these pessimistic theories, it is worth noting Dale Copeland’s trade expectation theory, according to which trade helps to reduce the chance of conflict when both trading partners expect to continue to benefit from the trade relationship in the future; conversely, trade increases the chance of conflict when one partner begins to expect that the trade relationship between them will become increasingly unfavorable to them.⁷ Moreover, the fundamental interest of the state is its long-term security and status, and the expectation of trade is only one important factor affecting its long-term security and status. He argues that actors have a deep-seated fear of long-term decline, and once this sense of decline is present, it may prompt the actors to wage costly preventive wars or take risky preventive actions.⁸ This latter claim, that declining powers may wage preventive war out of fear, is not an invention of Copeland’s own. In fact, some power transition theories have similarly argued that expectations of future changes in the distribution of power may induce the dominant power to prefer pre-emptive attacks now.⁹ This prompts the author to further explore whether it is possible for a declining power to avoid war with a rising power. In the course of my research, I found that Robert Gilpin has already proposed

² Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, “Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases,” In Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic and Amos Tversky, eds., *Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 12-13.

³ Hsuan-Hsiang Lin, “Averting War across the Taiwan Straits: Lessons from the “Thucydides Trap,” Taiwan/Japan/Korea Peace Forum, 2018: Prospects of Cross-strait Relations and East Asian Developments. Taipei, October 7, 2018.

⁴ David P. Rapkin and William R. Thompson, *Transition Scenarios: China and the United States in the Twenty-First Century* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁵ Graham Allison, “Could the United States and China be Rivalry Partners?” *The National Interest*, July 7, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/could-united-states-and-china-be-rivalry-partners-65661> .

⁶ 林炫向，〈米中関係は「ツキディデスの罠」を回避できるか？－理論的検討－〉，《問題と研究》，第50巻2号（2021年6月），頁1-39。

⁷ Dale C. Copeland, “Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations,” *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (April 1996), pp. 5~41.

⁸ Dale C. Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 3.

⁹ A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958); A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

an enlightening theoretical or analytical framework that can help to explore and answer this question. Therefore, this essay takes Gilpin's theory as the object of study and explores what it can tell us about the current situation.

In International Relations, Gilpin is often regarded as one of the theorists of hegemonic stability theory. However, he is in fact dissatisfied with the bias for "stability" in international relations theory, and therefore prefers to explore the dynamics and mechanisms of "systemic change". In his view, "systemic change" is often accompanied by wars, especially hegemonic wars, which often result in reshaping the international order, he therefore called his theory Hegemonic War Theory.¹⁰ Although it is called a theory, it is important to note that it is not prophetic (i.e., it does not assume that a hegemonic war will inevitably occur), but rather an explanatory theory.¹¹ Therefore, the purpose of this paper is not to use it to predict the inevitability of a hegemonic war between China and the United States, but to use it as an "analytical framework" to assess the possibility of a hegemonic war in our time.

Gilpin's theory is based on several hypotheses and presents a number of theses; due to time constraints, only those parts that are useful for exploring the current situation will be discussed here. One of the most important theses is:

According to realism, the fundamental cause of wars among states and changes in international systems is the uneven growth of power among states. Realist writers from Thucydides and Mackinder to present-day scholars have attributed the dynamics of international relations to the fact that the distribution of power in an international system shifts over a period of time; this shift results in profound changes in the relationships among states and eventually changes in the nature of the international system itself."

He called this thesis the law of uneven growth, and attributed this finding to Thucydides, and argued that the same observation was made from Thucydides to Mackinder and on to the contemporary so-called power transition theory.¹² But they do not offer a theoretical explanation of the mechanism behind the law, and so Gilpin's theory could be said to fill this gap.

A major feature of Gilpin's theory is that it presents a very large analytical framework for the factors that contribute to the uneven growth of power among states. These factors can be divided into three main categories: environmental, international, and domestic factors. Environmental factor includes demographic change, technological, military, or economic changes, etc.. The most notable of these is the economic factor. As Gilpin points out, "Changes in three broad categories of economic factors tend to encourage a state to expand and to attempt to change the international system." The three broad categories include economies of scale, internalization of externalities, and the law of diminishing rate of returns.¹³ Of these three types of factors, the law of diminishing rate of returns is particularly important because it plays a significant role in Gilpin's

¹⁰ Robert Gilpin, "The Theory of Hegemonic War," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Spring, 1988), pp. 591-613.

¹¹ Gilpin's theory is largely a structuralist one, but he does not subscribe to a deterministic view. He argues that in social science we cannot have any prophetic theory of social change. The final outcome depends on the behavior that individuals choose. See Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 47.

¹² He quotes Halford Mackinder who said in 1919 that "The great wars of history - we have had a world war about every hundred years for the last four centuries - are the outcome, direct or indirect, of the unequal growth of nations." *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

explanation of the decline of hegemony, as we will explain later.

What the author wants to emphasize here is that, although his theory has a strong structuralist overtone, his analytical framework is quite complex and definitely not reductionist. In other words, if we want to analyze the root causes of the current uneven growth of power, all these factors cannot be ignored. In the case of the U.S.-China hegemonic rivalry, we can speculate that, in the long run, China has a considerable advantage over the US in terms of economic scale due to its huge population size. In addition, China has been catching up in technology, and in some areas (such as AI and quantum technology) it is even said to have taken the lead. If this trend continues, it will be difficult for China's expansionary drive not to clash with the US dominance. In fact, another important thesis of Gilpin asserts that the realist law of uneven growth implies that as the power of a group or state increases, that group or state will be tempted to try to increase its control over its environment. In order to increase its own security, it will try to expand its political, economic, and territorial control; it will try to change the international system in accordance with its particular set of interests. Therefore, the differential growth of power among groups and states is very important to an understanding of the dynamics of international relations.¹⁴

Now, we have indeed seen that China has tightened its territorial control in the South China Sea. On the other hand, while China may think it has no ambition to challenge the status quo, in the eyes of others, China's attempt to create the AIIB and promote the BRI implies that it wants to set new rules that challenge the existing liberal international order (at least in the eyes of the United States). These trends are arguably within the scope of Gilpin's theory.

Another key point of Gilpin's theory is his theoretical explanation of why hegemony is inevitably on the decline. The basic argument is this:

Although control over an international system provides economic benefits (revenues) to the dominant power or powers, domination also involves costs in manpower and material resources. In order to maintain its dominant position, a state must expend its resources on military forces, the financing of allies, foreign aid, and the costs associated with maintaining the international economy. These protection and related costs are not productive investments; they constitute an economic drain on the economy of the dominant state. Domination, therefore, requires the existence of a continuing economic surplus.¹⁵

Behind this argument is the following assumption: "Once an equilibrium between the costs and benefits of further change and expansion is reached, the tendency is for the economic costs of maintaining the status quo to rise faster than the economic capacity to support the status quo."¹⁶ This hypothesis can be divided into two parts. One is that because the hegemonic state must provide international public good, there is a huge cost to maintaining hegemony, but this cost will increase over time. On the other hand, the hegemonic state faces the dilemma of insufficient resources due to its internal problems, including the aforementioned slackening in economic growth caused by the law of diminishing rate of returns, and "the rising cost of protection, the increase in private and public consumption, the structural shift to services, and the corrupting effects of affluence and

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 94-95.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 156-157.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 156.

preeminence”, all these factors contribute to the internal decay of the hegemonic state.¹⁷ On the other hand, as far as external factors are concerned, with the development of military technology, the growth in the number and strength of adversaries, and the free-riding of protected countries, the costs of dominance tend to be increasing. “Eventually the revenues generated by continuing political, territorial, and economic expansion are insufficient to underwrite the costs of an imperial or hegemonic position. With increasing costs and decreasing revenues, empire and hegemony become decreasingly profitable.”¹⁸ Moreover, world history demonstrate that “a principal advantage of an expanding state has been its military and/or productive capabilities, especially its technology. In time, however, this technological advantage disappears. As this superiority decreases, the costs of domination increase.”¹⁹ However, as many observers have noted, there is a historical tendency for the military and economic techniques of the dominant state or empire to be diffused to other states in the system or, more especially, to states on the periphery of the international system in question (Clough, 1970; Cipolla, 1970; McNeill, 1974). That is to say, through a process of diffusion to other states, the dominant power loses the advantage on which its political, military, or economic success has been based. Thus, by example, and frequently in more direct fashion, the dominant power helps to create challenging powers.²⁰

This paragraph is especially important and is worth quoting in length because this is what exactly happens between the US and China. According to Michael Pillsbury, the United States transferred a great deal of military technology to China during Carter’s and Reagan’s administrations in order to use China to balance against the Soviets.²¹ This classic case of “digging one’s own grave” can lend support to Gilpin’s theory.

The importance of the effect of technology diffusion cannot be overemphasized. Gilpin even posits that “The diffusion of military and economic technology from more advanced societies to less advanced societies is a key element in the international redistribution of power.”²² Unfortunately, efforts to prevent the diffusion of technology to military opponents or economic competitors fail over the long term...At best, states can only slow the diffusion of the technology underlying their military or economic power; they cannot prevent it, especially today in a world in which technology rests on easily accessible scientific knowledge.²³

To make things worse, “less advanced societies frequently enjoy what Alexander Gerschenkron (1962) called the advantages of backwardness,” which often results in new centers overtaking and surpassing the original center.²⁴ This logic explains a “universal law” discovered by Arnold Toynbee: “the tendency for the locus of power to shift from the center to the periphery of an international system.”²⁵ Whether or not this regularity can

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 159-166.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 175.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 176.

²¹ Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (N.Y.: Henry Holt and Company, 2015), ch. 3.

²² Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, p. 177. See also p. 180.

²³ Ibid., p. 177.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 178.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 183.

be called a “law”, there may be room for discussion. But if history is any guide, the importance of this regularity cannot be underestimated. Perhaps the U.S. political elite has discovered that the spread of technology to China has undermined the foundations of U.S. hegemony. If the historical record shows that blocking technological diffusion is as difficult as Gilpin suggests, then China, which enjoys the advantage of backwardness and the economies of scale, will still be able to outpace the U.S. in the long run even if the U.S. does a technological decoupling with China. Of course, we cannot say that this will be the final outcome, but the possibility cannot be underestimated.

The most compelling but also very controversial part of Gilpin’s work is his theory of hegemonic war. According to Gilpin, disequilibrium in the international system arises when there is “disjuncture between the existing governance of the system and the redistribution of power in the system.” He posits that “If the disequilibrium in the international system is not resolved, then the system will be changed, and a new equilibrium reflecting the redistribution of power will be established.”²⁶ This process may unfold in the following manner:

*As its relative power increases, a rising state attempts to change the rules governing the international system, the division of the spheres of influence, and, most important of all, the international distribution of territory. In response, the dominant power counters this challenge through changes in its policies that attempt to restore equilibrium in the system. The historical record reveals that if it fails in this attempt, the disequilibrium will be resolved by war.*²⁷

Gilpin certainly does not mean that war is an inevitable destiny. Before resorting to war, a declining hegemon may be able to increase its efficiency and resources at its disposal through organizational and technological innovation.²⁸ The Biden administration is currently embarking on a massive infrastructure project, which could be considered a response of this type. In addition, the hegemonic powers have another option, namely, cost reduction:

*This can be attempted in three general ways. The first is to eliminate the reason for the increasing costs (i.e., to weaken or destroy the rising challenger). The second is to expand to a more secure and less costly defensive perimeter. The third is to reduce international commitments. Each of these alternative strategies has its attractions and its dangers.*²⁹

The first option mentioned above, which is to launch a preventive war to eliminate or weaken the rising challenger while the military advantage is still with the declining power, is according to Gilpin, “the most attractive response”. But this option is very risky in the nuclear age, and so it is often regarded as an unimaginable option. Even so, there is another way to reach the same goal by using a proxy state to launch a proxy war against the rising power. I shall come back to this in a moment.

The second option discussed by Gilpin is to “reduce the costs of maintaining its position by means of further expansion.” The problem with the option is that “it can also lead to further overextension of commitments, to

²⁶ Ibid., p. 186.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 187.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 188-189.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 191.

increasing costs, and thereby to acceleration of the decline.”³⁰ Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the US makes this choice. The third option is to bring costs and resources into balance by reducing foreign-policy commitments. This is the so-called “retrenchment” strategy, which also may take many forms. “The most direct method of retrenchment is unilateral abandonment of certain of a state's economic, political, or military commitments.”³¹ The US’s withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan are examples of this sort. “A second standard technique of retrenchment is to enter into alliances with or seek rapprochement with less threatening powers.”³² In my opinion, the American alliances with Japan, Australia and India can be interpreted to be an example of this kind. The third option is “to make concessions to the rising power and thereby seek to appease its ambitions.”³³ Even though there were successful examples of this option, the most notable of which is the retrenchment of the British empire in the face of the challenge of a rising Germany before WWI. But since today this option often reminds people of the failure of the Munich Agreement, the prospect of taking this option is very low in the current situation.

Even though there are so many options of increasing resources and reducing costs, Gilpin argues that, most frequently, however, the dominant state is unable to generate sufficient additional resources to defend its vital commitments; alternatively, it may be unable to reduce its cost and commitments to some manageable size. In these situations, the disequilibrium in the system becomes increasingly acute as the declining power tries to maintain its position and the rising power attempts to transform the system in ways that will advance its interests. As a consequence of this persisting disequilibrium, the international system is beset by tensions, uncertainties, and crises. However, such a stalemate in the system seldom persists for a long period of time.³⁴

In the current situation, the international system is indeed suffering from “persisting disequilibrium”, and the relationship between China and the United States is beginning to be “beset by tensions, uncertainties, and crises”. But Gilpin does not explain why “such a stalemate in the system seldom persists for a long period of time.” He even jumps to the conclusion that “Throughout history the primary means of resolving the disequilibrium between the structure of the international system and the redistribution of power has been war, more particularly, what we shall call a hegemonic war.”³⁵ This inference seems to jump a little boldly. If we look at the current situation, it seems that both China and the United States have no intention to let the friction between the two countries escalate or even get out of control, so many people think that the two countries will continue to maintain a “struggle but not break” situation, and there is no need to be too pessimistic.

Nevertheless, the author personally believes that if there is no Taiwan issue between China and the United States, China can maintain its “strategic determination” (「戰略定力」) and wait for the right time, despite the constant provocations by the United States through measures such as the Asia-Pacific rebalance, trade wars, technology wars and the Indo-Pacific strategy. In that case, the contest between the two countries for hegemony

³⁰ Ibid., p. 191.

³¹ Ibid., p. 192.

³² Ibid., p. 192.

³³ Ibid., p. 193.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 197.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 197.

may be prolonged for a long time. However, the Taiwan issue adds a highly unstable, even explosive, element to the U.S.-China rivalry. This is because the Taiwan issue belongs to the very core interest of China, and losing Taiwan could undermine the legitimacy of Communist China's rule. On the other hand, the loss of Taiwan could be a fatal blow to U.S. hegemony, as Taiwan's strategic position becomes increasingly important in terms of geopolitics and semiconductor supply-chain. In other words, on the Taiwan issue, both China and the United States cannot afford to lose, so the Taiwan issue is particularly explosive, and there is a risk of war if the situation gets out of hand. Unfortunately, the Biden administration is still promoting military ties with Taiwan through arms sales and military training, and even hinting that it will use military means to defend Taiwan if necessary, which amounts to elevating U.S.-Taiwan relations to the level of a quasi-military alliance. From the Chinese standpoint, this is already a violation of China's red line. So how much longer can Beijing tolerate it? This is a very serious issue for East Asian security (and even world security).

Finally, Gilpin's exploration of the preconditions associated with hegemonic war is also worth discussion. The first precondition is "the intensification of conflicts among states is a consequence of the 'closing in' of space and opportunities."³⁶ This idea is similar to the extrusion of tectonic plates. Borrowing from E. H. Carr, Gilpin points out that there was a harmony of interest among European countries in the 19th century because there were still vast territories and markets to be explored. However, once the "closing in" of political and economic space occurs, the struggle between nations will intensify. The importance of this idea lies in the fact that economic interdependence is not in itself a decisive factor of war and peace between nations.³⁷ Therefore, even if there is intensive economic interdependence, war may still break out when political and economic space "close in". The second precondition is "the realization that the law of uneven growth has begun to operate to one's disadvantage". This means when a declining hegemon finds that time is beginning to work against it, it may launch a preemptive war while the advantage is still on its side.³⁸ This thesis is largely supported by Dale Copeland's theory of trade expectations about war,³⁹ which I have also discussed elsewhere.⁴⁰ The third precondition is that human decision is not always based on rational calculation, but is often swayed by passion. In Gilpin's words, "Leadership, calculation, control over events - these are merely the illusions of statesmen and scholars. The passions of men and the momentum of events take over and propel societies in novel and unanticipated directions." In addition, unexpected events often cause events to spiral out of control, which testifies to the vast influence of accident in war.⁴¹ This phenomenon is well captured in the phrase "fog of war", and is also emphasized by Graham Allison,⁴² so I shall not discuss it further here. In terms of the current situation of Sino-American hegemonic rivalry, Gilpin's second precondition and Copeland's theory both suggests that it is possible that the US might launch a preemptive war against China. The presence of nuclear weapons may make this option too risky, but there is another option

³⁶ Ibid., p. 200.

³⁷ I have discussed elsewhere the relationship between economic interdependence and war in more detail. See footnote 6.

³⁸ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, p. 201.

³⁹ See footnote 7.

⁴⁰ See footnote 6.

⁴¹ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, p. 202.

⁴² Graham Allison, *Destined for War?*, pp. 162-164.

available to the United States, which is to use Taiwan to provoke a proxy war against China. Gilpin's third precondition makes this possibility impossible to rule out, because no matter how rational and self-controlled Beijing is, nationalistic passions on the Taiwan issue could get out of hand. Therefore, the author has always believed that we should never underestimate the risk of war in the Taiwan Strait.

Now, is there no possibility of peaceful change? Gilpin points out that there is a dilemma of peaceful change: *Until a state is pressed by others, it has little incentive to make concessions for the sake of peace; it gives highest priority to its own security and economic interests. However, once the challenging state is in a position to make its demands effective, it demands greater concessions than would have been deemed acceptable earlier; for its part, the challenged state now dares not meet these demands. Appeasement, it is feared, will only whet the appetite for still greater concessions.*⁴³

Because of this logic, “peaceful international change appears to be most feasible when it involves changes in an international system and to be most difficult when it involves change of an international system.”⁴⁴ In addition, historical records show that “there do not appear to be any examples of a dominant power willingly conceding dominance over an international system to a rising power in order to avoid war. Nor are there examples of rising powers that have failed to press their advantage and have refrained from attempts to restructure the system to accommodate their security and economic interests.”⁴⁵ As far as the hegemonic rivalry between China and the US is concerned, Hugh White once advises that the US should consider sharing power with China, and Graham Allison also suggests that the US should contemplate on the need of negotiating a long peace with China.⁴⁶ But judging from the Biden administration’s current policy toward China, the United States does not seem to have any intention of sharing power with China. Therefore, the author is not optimistic about the possibility of a peaceful change.

This essay utilizes Gilpin’s theory of hegemonic war to assess the hegemonic rivalry between China and US today. The conclusion is that the possibility of a hegemonic war cannot be ruled out, and the prospect of peaceful change is not very high. This is a rather pessimistic assessment. But as an old Chinese saying goes, “It is in the hands of the people that make things happen.” If both China and the United States are willing to do their best for peace, war may be avoided and peace may still be possible. It should be kept in mind that this essay uses Gilpin’s theory merely as a framework for analysis or a guide for research, not as a truth or a prophecy.

⁴³ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, p. 207.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 208-209.

⁴⁶ Hugh White, *The China Choice: Why We Should Share Power* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 56; Graham Allison, *Destined for War?*, pp. 221, 225-227.

Session II

“Perspective from Japan”

Lessons from Response to COVID-19 in Japan and Contribution to Improving Global Health

Professor Sasaki, Satoshi (Soka University)

The pandemic has affected many key aspects of life around the world. Government policies and personal behaviors in coping with the pandemic have varied greatly across countries and regions, and the resulting infection and death rates have differed correspondingly.

This is the agenda of my presentation. I am going to talk about lessons learned from Japan’s COVID-19 response and control and offer some suggestions through the review of data and literatures. In this presentation, I used two methodological frameworks for review the response and control. One is Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker to evaluate the Japanese government responses to the COVID-19. Another is Health System Resilience which is used to discuss their implementations.

Even though we have so much uncertainty over this pandemic how it plays out, we can better prepare ourselves with some effective responses to protect the population.

The next several slides are to show the trend of the current pandemic in the world. As of November 30, the total number of people who were infected reached around 2,620,000,000 (two hundred sixty million). In Asia the pandemic has been controlled since October. On the other hand, in the Europe, the number of newly infected people has been increasing and especially with the emergence of Omicron variant becoming threats to all us.

With the next several slides I would like to explain the overview of COVID-19 pandemic in Japan. On January 15, 2020 the first case of COVID-19 was reported. Then, so far as of October 8, 2021, about 1.7 million confirmed cases were reported. Blue line indicates daily confirmed cases and red dot line is cumulative cases. Japan has experienced five virus infection waves which were vertically highlighted in pink in the graph. As the virus continued to spread, the length of waves

got longer. On the other hand, days between periods became shorter.

Daily reported and cumulative death in Japan are shown in this slide. Both were also adjusted by seven day moving average. The number of reported deaths was about 17,800. The peak of the fifth wave was lower compared to the third and the fourth and that was attributed to increase of coverage of the vaccination and consequently the numbers fell amongst high-risk elderly population.

In this slide, I made a comparison of the magnitude of the pandemic in Japan among the world. This scatter plot shows the cumulative cases on the horizontal axe and cumulative deaths on the vertical axe. Each dot represents country and Japan is highlighted in red. The closer to the top-right corner, the heavier the magnitude of the pandemic. On the contrary, the closer to down-left corner, more controlled and less impact of the infections received. Population size is not taken into account in this plot; however, Japan has relatively severe damage caused by the pandemic.

Now I would like to introduce evaluation framework called Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker and the government response index.

Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker provides a systematic way to track government responses across countries and developed several indexes to compare response of the countries.

The government response index is one of them. It is used to describe variation in government responses, explore whether the government response affects the rate of infection, and identify correlates of more or less intense responses. It is composed with three domains such as containment and closure, economic response and health systems. In total 16 items shown in this slide are used to calculate government response index. The index range between 0 and 100 and higher score indicates more response activities government took.

Using government response index, this figure shows the Response-Risk Ratio which indicates the maximum level of government response compared to the total number of cases in each country.

Each dot represents country. Red dot line is an approximate straight line among the countries. Countries above the line can be interpreted as having more stringent measures than the average

country. Conversely, countries below the line show a lower level of policy action than the average country. The index of Japanese government response was 62 points and below the line. It implies still more response activities have to be done.

In order to evaluate the response activities of the government, I have selected five indicators. They are mobility restriction, surveillance, vaccination, capacity of healthcare facilities, and protection of the vulnerable. I would like to review them closely how well the government responded to those indicators.

First, I would like to focus on the mobility restriction. The Japanese government did not implement any comprehensive and intensive mobility control measures such as lockdowns due to the constitutional restrictions. Instead, they declared a “state of emergency” in several prefectures and at the national level. Most mobility restrictions and physical distancing measures were voluntary rather than mandatory.

Second, regarding surveillance measure、PCR testing were only available to people with potential symptoms, close contacts of confirmed cases, and inbound travelers. In the early stages of pandemic when infection was not so much spread, PCR testing was used for only cluster identification, but soon the infection became wide spread and cluster identification became no longer critical. But, testing was limited and restricted in Japan which was very controversial and then after the third waves, the number of PCR tests increased according to spread of infection.

Third, I would like to mention about vaccination. We have first started distributing in March initial target was health personnel, subsequently elder and high-risk people. Compare to other countries in Europe, Japanese government late starting the vaccination, however, progress of full vaccination is relatively faster, compared to other European countries and reached to coverage of 60% in 6.8 months.

Please take a look at the next slide, the government prioritized vaccination for elder people and high-risk groups that has an impact on reduction of death cases in the fifth wave of infection. This figure shows daily deaths and coverage of vaccination. Even though magnitude of the infection was much huger than that of in the fourth wave because of the rapid growth of vaccination coverage, the number of daily deaths remained low. This was also explained by the proportion of infected age groups. The percentage of infected elders, 60s, 70s, and above 80s became smaller compared to other age groups. The government vaccination strategy contributed to protect high risk populations.

The next one is about capacity of health care facility. I would like to particularly focus on the threat to the Human Security.

In the fourth and fifth waves of infection, the number of patients were beyond capacity of health facilities and patients could not be admitted to medical facilities. This figure shows bed occupancy rates of COVID 19 care units and admission rates of infected people of Tokyo, Osaka and entire Japan. Bar charts indicates bed occupancy rate beyond 50% of which is threshold level. Line chart is admission rates to healthcare facilities that indicates percentage of patients who can be admitted to health facilities. The threshold level is below 25%. In April and May, in Osaka, and in August in Tokyo and Osaka, both bed occupancy and admission rates reached far beyond the thresholds. Bed occupancy of high care units of COVID 19 patients went up beyond 90% in Tokyo.

As a result of hospitalization surge, a huge number of patients were required to stay home and in many cases it became difficult to find a hospital bed even when they became critically ill. To respond to the situation, some primary care physicians in the communities were asked to become workforce; however, in reality it was very overwhelming demand that primary care physicians were not available enough to take care of acute care patients at home.

This table displays reported cases of death with COVID19 at home or before hospital admission from April to August 2021. The highlighted cells in pink are, as I mentioned before, acute strain on health system. The number of patients were reported to die at home or even before reached to hospitals.

Now, I would like to review on the protection of the vulnerable. Many studies indicated that the vulnerable populations may suffer from subsequent effects which threaten their lives and human well-being, and thus human security.

There is increasing concern that the pandemic could harm psychological health and exacerbate suicide risk. More than 600 research articles have been published after the pandemic to assess the impact of the COVID 19 on mental health.

Also in Japan, several articles indicate that suicide cases in 2020 have increased from late July to November for women in all ages and men in some age groups. Notably, suicide risk in Japan is statistically correlate unemployment rates. Prolonged crisis has had a larger effect on female-

dominant industries and stay-at-home orders magnify the working mother's burden. The Japanese labour market also showed the decrease in female employment was more pronounced than the decrease in male employment. These factors may have contributed to harming women's psychological health. Therefore, targeted interventions based on age and gender might be more effective in reducing suicide during the pandemic.

At this last section, in order to discuss the government responses, I use "Health System Resilience framework."

Before talking about health system resilience, let's see what is the resilience?

Resilience is a core concept in disaster risk reduction, its application to health systems has been defined as institutions' and health actors' capacities to prepare for, recover from and absorb shocks, while maintaining core functions and serving the ongoing and acute care needs of their communities.

The conceptual framework is composed of seven elements, community engagement at the core, governance and financing, health service delivery, health workforce, public health functions, medical products and technologies surrounded by collaboration across sectors.

By using the concept of health system resilience, a research conducted in 28 countries to evaluate each response and control of COVID-19.

First is Active surveillance, testing and contact tracing mechanisms supported by networks of laboratories

Second is adapt health system capacity, that is, reallocation and recruitment of health workers, including retired or foreign-trained health workers and trainees, and Creation of temporary healthcare facilities or adaptation of existing civic facilities.

Third is preserve health system functions and resources; support primary care for response activities and ongoing routine and acute care.

Lastly, reduce vulnerability includes financing mechanisms to provide relief for businesses, individuals and families.

Session III

“Perspective from Korea”

The Perils and Opportunities of Competitions between U.S. and China: A

Perspective from South Korea

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Introduction

The anarchy-like international system is, to be sure, a competitive place, where rising and declining powers are tempted to use force to flex their respective muscles. When the global distribution of power is in flux, the world is up for grabs. In particular, a greater power tries to get the top by being aggressive, repressive and impudent. When its influence weakens, yet, the present dominant power tends to retain what made it great (or dominant). Maintaining the existing influence, albeit far from expanding it, during decline demands unsustainable burdens, which could lead the declining power to choose tighter alliances or an unwanted retrenchment.¹ When a declining state judges that it has no more resources to sustain itself, preventive war as the last resort could be the only option that can maximize the state's expected probability of survival.² Otherwise, there could be a rare possibility that a rising power will embark on changing the status quo in order to gain hegemony.

Not surprisingly, China is displaying a superpower's ambition. It is a cliché to say that China would reconcile itself to a cooperative role in the global order. Many observers, myself included, predict correctly that Xi Jinping's China would pursue an expanded role. That said, the evidences that China is ramping up its power to contest America's global leadership are easily found. There is China's bid for chip-sector dominance, which certainly complicates America's efforts to preserve the lead in the critical technology. Militarily, China is aggressively controlling the crucial waterways off China's coast while creating a chain of bases and logistical facilities farther afield with the view of converting economic influence into economic coercion throughout the Asia-

¹ Unlike decline, retrenchment means an intentional reduction in the overall cost of a state's military and foreign policy. Because of this, a declining power usually tends not to pursue the retrenchment. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp.193-194.

² Dale Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p.53. See also Jack Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War," *World Politics*, Vol.40, No.1 (October, 1987), pp.82-107.

Pacific and beyond. Most recently, a secret Chinese military facility in the United Arab Emirates was allegedly stopped by Washington's intervention.³ The question of whether stable, constructive U.S.-China relations are possible is difficult to answer, even if there are many IR theories to explain the power politics.

Why do IR scholars assume that the decline of great powers will be dangerous? Is this because decline invites preventive war and domestic dysfunction? Before answering the question, it is necessary to discuss over how we should define or conceptualize the term decline. In general, there are two kinds of decline: one is absolute decline and the other relative decline. The 'absolute decline' refers to a dominant power rapidly losing its influence in every area ranging from military to economy and to culture, all of which has nothing to do with those of any other rising power. The relative decline is primarily based upon the status of a rising state outperforming the existing great power in major fields, inter alia, economy, before overtaking it. To this end, it may be easily assumed that the existing great power (the U.S., for example) is fundamentally concerned about relative, rather than absolute, power.

In addition, the great power, in the event of being faced with diminishing resources (or the public goods), is required to moderate its foreign policy and to compromise its upper hand in areas of lesser strategic interests. In truth, a Brookings report shows that the United States does not maintain a significant lead in overall national power any longer.⁴ If true, Americans may not do a victory lap that they did when the Soviet Union crumbled in the 1990s. In short, the declining power will face a tough decision of rebalancing its commitments through bargaining or concession, rather than confrontations.

In terms of U.S.-China relations, at first glance, hegemonic stability theory and power transition theory look like they're contradicting one another. But most IR scholars seem to agree that the logic of each theory reinforces each other. They also contend that with the rise of China, the international pecking order will be reshaped in the coming decades.

In this article, I question the logic and evidence of the American decline and the Chinese rise, instead of eloquently espousing a certain theory. To date there has been neither a comprehensive and detailed study of the US-China strategic competition nor a bird's eye study that lays out the case for a new Cold War as a practical or probable policy. This article fills some pieces of the great puzzle by examining the fluctuating dynamics between the two great powers and explores ways for South Korea to strategically respond to unexpected conflicts.

America's Decline: True or False

Since the financial crisis in 2008, there have been hot debates about whether the United States

³ *The Guardian*, November 19, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/19/chinese-military-base-uae-construction-abandoned-us-intelligence-report>. (Accessed November 20, 2021)

⁴ John R. Allen and, Ryan Hass, and Bruce Jones, "Rising to the Challenge: Navigating Competition, Avoiding Crisis, and Advancing US Interests in Relations with China," *Brookings Report*, November 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/rising-to-the-challenge-navigating-competition-avoiding-crisis-and-advancing-us-interests-in-relations-with-china/> (Accessed November 18, 2021)

is in decline. Fareed Zakaria pointed out that “the distribution of power is shifting, moving away from U.S. dominance.”⁵ The National Intelligence Council contended that one of the most important global trends will be the shift of power “to networks and coalitions in a multipolar world.”⁶ However, Joseph Nye contended that reports of America’s demise have been greatly exaggerated, describing the twenty-first century as “one of American decline is likely to be inaccurate and misleading.”⁷ Some American pundits warn that “if American power declines, this world order will decline with it.”⁸ And Charles Kupchan concurs that “U.S. leadership has always faced resistance, but the pushback grows in proportion to the diffusion of global power.”⁹

In retrospect, as U.S. President Richard Nixon told *Time* magazine five decades ago,¹⁰ the world would be safer and a better one if the United States could be a strong, healthy Europe, Soviet Union, China and Japan, each balancing the other. In fact, the United States is increasingly aware that China will resume the center stage in Asia. One reason why this is happening now is that Chinese people’s minds have re-awakened. They are asking many questions.

While there are some disagreements about the symptom of American decline like a half-full or half-empty glass, there seem to be fewer disagreements about its potential decline. As aforementioned, it seemed to China’s leaders that the global financial crisis in 2008 exposed the frailties of democratic capitalism led by the United States, and the moment was opportune for China to begin its push for a leading role on the global stage.

In addition, there is a broad consensus that if the United States declines, this will bring about greater uncertainty, unpredictable danger and super-size chaos in world politics, simply because any great power facing decline would be reluctant to initiate or expand militarized disputes overseas. Still, the prospects of a war between the U.S. and China are low.

In sum, declinist writings offer three core propositions. First, the U.S. is declining economically. They focus on economic performance and on scientific, technological and educational factors. Second, a decline in economic power eventually affects the other dimensions of national power. Third, the relative economic decline of the U.S. is forcing to cut the budget for military purposes.

China’s Peaceful Rise or Fall

⁵ Fareed Zakaria, “The Future of American Power: How America Can Survive the Rise of the Rest,” *Foreign Affairs* vol.87, no.3 (May/June 2008), pp.18-43.

⁶ National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternate Worlds* (December 2012), p.7. See also pp.9-12, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/GlobalTrends_2030.pdf. (Accessed November 10, 2021).

⁷ Joseph Nye, *Is the American Century Over?* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), p.116.

⁸ Robert Kagan, “Not Fade Away: The Myth of American Decline,” *New Republic*, January 11, 2012, pp.19-25.

⁹ Charles Kupchan, “The Decline of the West: Why America Must Prepare for the End of Dominance,” *Atlantic* (March 20, 2012), <https://www.atlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-decline-of-the-west-why-america--must-prepare-for-the-end-of-dominance/254779>. (Accessed November 10, 2021).

¹⁰ *Time* magazine, January 3, 1972, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/printout/0,8816,879011,00.html>. (Accessed November 10, 2021).

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has ruled China since 1949---longer than any other surviving political party on earth, except for North Korea’s Worker’s Party. China’s leaders have long thought of its security environment in concentric rings. The CCP’s primary goal is to keep the defense of China’s territorial integrity intact, both from external enemies and from internal separatist movements and instability. This requires China to ensure stability along its borders, in its western province Xinjiang, and in Tibet and Hong Kong. It also confirms to the world that Taiwan should be prevented from achieving independence. China is no longer a sleeping lion. Nor is a sick man of Asia.

When the CCP took over China, only about 20 percent of the communist country could read and write. As of 2018, 97 percent of Chinese adults are literate.¹¹ Flush with a high-speed economy, China will be drawn to the myth of empire it once enjoyed. Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) already grew over \$10,000,¹² from less than \$90 in 1960. As shown in the table below, China’s economic power is even more formidable. China has quietly become the biggest lender in the world, surpassing the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund combined.

China’s Economy (Source: IMF)

2021 Projected Real GDP (%)	8.0
2021 Projected Consumer Prices (%)	1.1
Country Population	1,418.106 million
Special Drawing Rights (SDR)	37,858.56 million

China’s 2021 defense budget was set at 1.36 trillion yuan (approximately \$209.16 billion), a 6.8 percent increase from the 1.27 trillion yuan budget set last year.¹³ Needless to say, the rate of growth in China’s defense budget is closely linked to its robust economic development and aims at strengthening national security. Beginning in 2009 China adopted a much more forceful stance toward maritime and territorial claims in the East and South China Seas.

Having tipped the balance in the South China Sea, Xi Jinping launched, in 2013, his vision for China called the Belt and Road initiative (BRI). Through the BRI, China seeks to keep growing economically by exporting excess labor and capital and generating profits for state-backed firms. After all, it is presumed that China attempts to transform ports and other sites for military use, which may eventually help China avoid being encircled by rivals.

Likewise, the rise of China as a global power has given the U.S. a headache. The Biden administration has made it clear that it sees China as the greatest geopolitical challenge of the 21st century. On October, President Joe Biden suggested to Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain that the big Western democracies work together to counter China’s ambitious efforts to build trade

¹¹ *Macrotrends*, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/CHN/china/literacy-rate> (Accessed November 15, 2021).

¹² *Xinhua*, January 18, 2021. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-01/18/c_139677413.htm; International Monetary Fund, <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/CHN> (Accessed November 20, 2021).

¹³ Matthew P. Funaiole and Brian Hart, *CSIS*, “Understanding China’s 2021 Defense Budget,” March 5, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/understanding-chinas-2021-defense-budget> (Accessed November 20, 2021).

routes around the world, a project called the Belt and Road Initiative.¹⁴ Plus, the 30-nation Western Alliance NATO summit addressed China's "growing influence" as a challenger for the alliance.¹⁵

Clash or Cooperation?

The frosty exchange with Chinese diplomats in Anchorage in March, 2021 was one of the scenes to show that the Chinese were so confident that the U.S. is in decline that they're pushing the limits. In November, Biden and Xi pledged at a virtual summit to improve cooperation, but offered no concrete action after three and a half hours of talks with no joint statement. Xi cautioned that American support for Taiwan was "playing with fire," warning that that dividing the world into alliances or blocs---a pillar of the new administration's strategy for challenging China by teaming up with its neighbors---would "inevitably bring disaster to the world."¹⁶

Are we, then, correct to say that either the United States is declining of itself or being outpaced by China, the rising power? As Graham Allison called the "Thucydides Trap," will one state overtaking another make war highly likely?¹⁷ When and how will the two giants will fight or compete each other?

Before answering these questions, it is important to assess how the United States and China see things and think about the nature of things called perception. In particular, a country's culture powerfully influences its people's perceptions. A culture determines much of what the people take to be factual knowledge. A country's culture constitutes a prism that slants, distorts and colors how its people see the other country, as if the U.S. believes that China craves world hegemony, whereas China sees the U.S. as trying to block China's way forward. It now seems that both sides are convinced it is always the other party that is in the wrong. For example, the BRI, which China campaigns as a global public good to promote more growth, is interpreted by the U.S. as a strategy for geopolitical dominance. It was not like this five decades ago.

The bilateral relationship between the U.S. and China had been largely stable since President Richard Nixon's 1972 trip to Beijing and President Jimmy Carter's decision to recognize the People's Republic diplomatically. U.S. leaders and pundits hoped that China could be guided into the international system as a "responsible stakeholder," despite Beijing's human rights violations such as the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. Their optimism was based on the hope that the would persuade China that its interests lay in adapting to and preserving the international system

¹⁴ *The New York Times*, October 26, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/26/us/politics/biden-china-democracy.html> (Accessed November 20, 2021).

¹⁵ *The New York Times*, October 18, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/14/world/europe/biden-nato-china-russia.html> (Accessed November 20, 2021).

¹⁶ *Washington Post*, November 16, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/biden-to-meet-with-chinese-president-in-virtual-summit/2021/11/14/6f59b36c-45bb-11ec-973c-be864f938c72_story.html (Accessed November 19, 2021).

¹⁷ Graham Allison, "The Thucydides Trap: Are the U.S. and China Headed for War?" *Atlantic* (September 24, 2015), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/> (Accessed November 20, 2021).

rather than challenging it on the one hand and on the other, China's growing economy would inspire a kind of political liberalization.

It goes without saying that such engagement-like projection had something to do with American exceptionalism. Preserving a pristine image of America's being better than any other nation has worsened American misperceptions of the others. Seen from the Chinese people's eyes, Beijing has been wronged by the Western colonial powers in the nineteenth century and again in the post-World War II settlement. For example, China was included as a founding member of the UN Security Council, but much of the world excluded Beijing from many aspects of international affairs until 1970s.

Now China is not just doing more, but it is building better as well. Beijing already began investing in a high-tech fighting force, with a focus on precision weapons. Moreover, China is rapidly challenging U.S. dominance in space exploration. In 2020 alone, China has returned soil samples from the moon, set down a rover on Mars and launched two crews of astronauts to the country's new space station.¹⁸ In truth, China's investments in ballistic missiles, anti-ship missiles, land-attack cruise missiles, air-defenses, cyber warfare capabilities, and communications and sensor technology all appear to constitute a central strategic goal. These advanced military resources would, for instance, make it much harder for U.S. forces to join a conflict to defend Taiwan, a non-treaty ally of America. It is not difficult to imagine that because Taiwan, the hottest of the hot-button issues between the U.S. and China, is just a hundred miles from the mainland China, Beijing may be able to retain air superiority before U.S. forces stationed in South Korea, Japan, Guam and Hawaii reached the area. For China, these *anti-access / area denial* (A2 / AD) capabilities offer a relatively low-cost means of bewildering U.S. alliance strategy.

Given that great powers are primarily concerned about what threatens their current positions, it is not quite wrong to assume that the U.S. should engage China in one way or another. Felt by the past humiliations and hungered for future glories, by the same token, China will attempt to undermine and overturn the U.S. At a 2014 regional conference, Mr. Xi called for an "Asia for Asians," which addressed an end to America's alliances and the birth of a regional security system centered on China.¹⁹

China is now powerful enough in conventional and nuclear terms that escalation could be incredibly costly.²⁰ Would the United States really be willing to get involved into an unwanted conflict on behalf of an ally, fully expecting that the consequences could be a full-scale war with the well nuclear-armed adversary?

The possible scenario that China might overtake the United States will certainly raise the

¹⁸ *The New York Times*, October 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/19/science/china-orbital-weapon.html> (Accessed November 26, 2021).

¹⁹ *BBC*, May 21, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-27498266> (Accessed November 27, 2021).

²⁰ Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, "Chinese nuclear weapons, 2021," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol.77, 2021, pp.318-336. [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00963402.2021.1989208#:~:text=The%20Pentagon's%202021%20report%20to,.%E2%80%9D%20\(US%20Defense%20Department%202021](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00963402.2021.1989208#:~:text=The%20Pentagon's%202021%20report%20to,.%E2%80%9D%20(US%20Defense%20Department%202021) (Accessed November 25, 2021).

destined conflict. The intensification of U.S.-China competition has emerged as an increasingly global concern in foreign policy circles where this phenomenon is seen as signs of a general power transition away from the United States. Leading structural realists such as John Mearsheimer have maintained that China cannot rise peacefully, clashing with the United States as the current dominant power.²¹ In contrast, however, one Chinese scholar argued that China's rise would be more peaceful than that of the West, since China is an average achiever, unlike the United States and previous hegemony that were high achievers.²² The wide-ranging and open conflicts the great powers have been embroiled in are more profound, more intense and more enduring than even many pessimists anticipated. In particular, the confrontations have reached a peak during the Trump administration,²³ which expediently extrapolated China's security behavior into a broad argument that Beijing has been bent upon seeking power transition.²⁴

In the first telephone conversation with President Joe Biden of the U.S. in February, President Xi Jinping underscored the principle of "no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation." The Biden administration asserted, in its Interim National Security Strategic Guidance released in March 3, 2021, that China "is the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system."²⁵ A few weeks after that, on March 18-19, the diplomatic feud between representatives of the United States and China at a contentious high-level meeting in Alaska obviously shattered any illusions of a reset in U.S.-China relations after the more aggressive U.S. policy during the Trump administration.

The conventional wisdom in Washington holds that the communist China is the greatest external threat to America's national security. American pundits and policy elites now believe that Xi's autocracy will not be easily deterred by Biden's rule-based democracy, claiming that Xi wants to secure geopolitical gains for China in Northeast Asia in a quest for a sphere of influence.

As if he seemed determined not to openly oppose China, President Biden, in his second call since his inauguration with his counterpart Xi in three months ago (September) this year, insinuated

²¹ John J. Mearsheimer, "Better to Be Godzilla than Bambi," *Foreign Policy*, January-February, 2005, p.47.

²² Wang Ming, "Back to Nature: An Achievement-based Structural Assessment of the Modern International system," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol.6, 2013, p.402.

²³ Binyamin Appelbaum, "Trump Wanted to Punish China. We're Still Paying for It," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/24/opinion/trucking-trump-biden-tariffs.html> (Accessed November 27, 2021).

²⁴ In general, power transition theorists measure power as GDP, whereas the proponents of balance of power focus upon military capabilities. A.F.K. Organski considered the determinants of national power as population size, policy efficiency, and economic growth. See A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, Second Edition, 1968). Plus, Organski and Kugler examined five major wars: the Napoleonic Wars, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, World War I, and World War II. Except for the case of the Napoleonic Wars, they scrutinized the remaining four cases, demonstrating a strong causal tendency towards war during power transition periods. For more in detail, see A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp.46-63.

²⁵ *The White House*, March 3, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/03/interim-national-security-strategic-guidance/> (Accessed September 11, 2021).

the policy change in favor of a more friendly gesture toward Beijing. Being a seasoned politician with deep and wide foreign policy experiences,²⁶ the 78-year-old president “underscored the United States’ enduring interest in peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and the world, and the two leaders discussed the responsibility of both countries to ensure competition does not veer into conflict.”²⁷

Few denies that it would be a tragedy of the world if the two giants moved toward unstoppable confrontation based on misperceptions. The confrontation needs to be cooperatively well-managed. Nicholas Burns, Biden’s nominee to be U.S. ambassador to China, told a Senate panel on October that if he’s confirmed he would help Mr. Biden pursue a strategy of competition and cooperation with China. The life-long diplomat also asserted that the U.S. should continue to support Taiwan’s self-defense against a potential Chinese attack, denying that East is rising and the West is in decline.

Thaad, Indo-Pacific Strategy, and ROK-US alliance

From geostrategic vantage points, U.S. interests in Asia are fundamentally defensive. The U.S. has no desire to defeat China in the region. U.S. goals are glued to preventing China from becoming an Asian champion, since this would harm America’s core interests. The U.S., therefore, seems to want other states to join an anti-hegemonic coalition. But China is an independent actor with a degree of power ranging from economy to military, at least in Asia. Instead of adapting an effective strategy, ignoring what China will do certainly worries America’s allies.

As U.S.-China frictions, it seems, intensify, South Korea is increasingly concerned about being entangled in great power competition. This has been especially true since 2017, when China launched a campaign of economic coercion in retaliation for President Moon’s decision to allow the deployment of a U.S. missile defense system in South Korea.²⁸ Seoul experienced firsthand Beijing’s willingness to weaponize economic ties to influence its strategic decisions. Most recently, South Korean drivers have been panic buying urea, an additive used in diesel vehicles to reduce emissions, after China tightened exports, prompting the Blue House to set up a taskforce to negotiate supplies from producer states.²⁹

The Moon government’s New Southern Policy (NSP) aims at its goal to elevate South Korea’s relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states and India in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. The NSP is known to be an extension of the Seoul

²⁶ Joshua Shiffrin and Stephen Wertheim, “Biden the Realist,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 9, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-09-09/biden-realist> (Accessed September 13, 2021).

²⁷ *The White House*, September 9, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/09/readout-of-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-call-with-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china/> (Accessed September 11, 2021).

²⁸ *BBC*, May 11, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-39883804> (Accessed November 18, 2021). The Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (Thaad) deployment was initially agreed by Moon's predecessor, conservative leader Park Guen-hye, who is currently in prison on corruption charges after an unprecedented impeachment.

²⁹ *Reuters*, November 11, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skorea-rations-urea-supply-amid-shortage-leading-drivers-panic-buy-2021-11-11/> (Accessed November 26, 2021).

government's need to diversify its economic and strategic relationships amid the uncertainty created by a fierce competition between its traditional ally, the United States, and largest trading partner, China. And South Korea seeks to expand its diplomatic horizon while improving ties with India and ASEAN countries.

Given that the U.S. should balance competition with China on issues North Korea's nuclear program and its influence in the Indo-Pacific, South Korea's foreign policy, which has inertially centered on the U.S., China and Japan, may be challenged. In other words, South Korea should prepare itself for greater difficulties in its relations with the U.S. or China. Some pessimists tell in private meetings that we South Koreans would feel squeezed between a rapidly expanding China and a shrinking U.S. No one believes that the alliance will remain 'permanent,' although, at best, it will last longer than people expect. For South Korea, whether the U.S. is in an ordinal transition is an important indicator of whether the alliance will wither any time soon. The depth of an alliance's weakness is the single best indicator of how much the U.S. will strategically change its policies.

In fact, there are signs that retrenchment has already started. During the Obama administration, policymakers emphasized the need to reduce the burden of U.S. foreign policy. In his 2009 inaugural address, Obama argued explicitly that "[U.S.] power grows through its prudent use."³⁰ In his introduction to the 2010 National Security Strategy, the president declared, "The burdens of a young century cannot fall on American shoulders alone.... Our adversaries would like to see America sap our strength by overextending our power."³¹ As Colin Dueck observes, "American grand strategy under Barack Obama [emphasized] international retrenchment and accommodation."³²

South Koreans' Perception on China

South Korean political elites are usually careful not to antagonize China, the country's largest trading partner. But last August, a presidential hopeful, Yoon Seok-young, pointed out that China should stop complaining over the deployment of Thaad, unless it wanted to remove its own radar systems near the Korean Peninsula. Mr. Yoon's blunt rhetoric allegedly reflected a new phenomenon: a growing antipathy toward Beijing among South Koreans, particularly young voters.³³ Unsurprisingly, anti-Chinese sentiment has grown so much this year that China has replaced Japan as the country regarded most unfavorably in South Korea, according to a joint

³⁰ White House, "President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address," January 21, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/01/21/president-barack-obama-inauguraladdress> (Accessed November 20, 2021).

³¹ White House, *National Security Strategy*, May 2010, p.ii, <https://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2010.pdf>. (Accessed November 20, 2021).

³² Colin Dueck, 『The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today』 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.14.

³³ Choe Sang-Hun, "South Koreans Now Dislike China More Than They Dislike Japan," *The New York Times*, August 20, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/20/world/asia/korea-china-election-young-voters.html?searchResultPosition=1> (Accessed September 7, 2021).

survey by the polling company Hankook Research and the Korean newsmagazine *SisaIN*.³⁴ In the survey, 64.5% of the respondents revealed that South Korea should live with the U.S. more favorably than China, whereas only 11.0% of the respondents with China. Overall, in the same survey, South Koreans said they favored the United States over China six to one.

According to *The New York Times* which quoted the survey results, in the meantime, over 58 percent of the 1,000 respondents called China “close to evil” while only 4.5 percent said that it was “close to good.” In addition, among the 14 nations surveyed in 2020 by Pew Research Center, South Korea was the only one in which younger people held more unfavorable views toward China than previous generations.³⁵ Paradoxically, China frightens South Korea and pushes it toward the U.S. (only if America’s alliance is not hindered by its political disarray) whenever it becomes stronger and stronger.

In a Carnegie poll conducted in November 2019,³⁶ almost three-quarters of the citizens in Seoul replied that they did not trust China very much at all. More than half regarded China as a unified Korea’s biggest threat. By comparison, just 8.3 percent said the U.S., even though the irony is that people’s perceptions and policy do not match well, as shown by the case of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), whose member states are the U.S., Japan, Australia and India.

Conclusion: Policy Recommendations

How does South Korea respond to a fierce competition between the U.S. and China? What should South Korea, a relatively weak state, do? Now that China’s nonmilitary coercion turns to economic pressure against South Korea by refusing to import or export key products and cutting off tourism, what many of South Koreans feel over China is that Beijing’s assertive posture has left them feeling wary about China. Prior to this, it is also true that Donald Trump’s erratic foreign policy led South Koreans to suspect the future of the distrust the alliance. The seven-decades-long alliance has been founded on trust. When that goes, the alliance begins to dissolve. Namely, America, under Trump, has lost the credibility and legitimacy that were cornerstones of its influence. Still, many of IR scholars, under Biden, jokingly say how America has returned. They are pessimistic about how the values of liberty, democracy, freedom of expression and rule of law could be mended in the United States, given the domestic dysfunction. Shocked that Trump is comfortable with autocrats like Vladimir Putin of Russia and Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany once said that Europeans must “take our fate into our own

³⁴ Lee Oh-Seong, “Who Are the Core Members That Dislike Everything of China,” *SisaIN*, June 17, 2021, https://www.sisain.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=44821&utm_source=pocket_mylist (Accessed September 7, 2021).

³⁵ Laura Silver, Kat Devlin and Christine Huang, “Unfavorable Views of China Reach historic Highs in Many Countries,” *Pew Research Center*, October 6, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/> (Accessed September 8, 2021).

³⁶ Chung Min Lee, “A Peninsula of paradoxes: South Korean Public Opinion on Unification and Outside Powers,” *Unification Blue Book*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 13, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/05/13/peninsula-of-paradoxes-south-korean-public-opinion-on-unification-and-outside-powers-pub-81737> (Accessed November 20, 2021).

hands.”

Trump’s rule has left an anchorless international order, in which much of U.S.-led system and norms have been deeply damaged. How far the Biden administration could reverse the broken rules and values is an open question. It could be very difficult to keep the status quo. America’s poor management of the global leadership would be pregnant with the global or regional uncertainty. History tells us that decline, which sometimes triggers short-lived disputes in the hottest flashpoints, is a leading contributor to major wars. In particular, proponents of power transition theories claim that big “system changing” wars should be inevitable.

Obviously, China is not only a regional competitor of the U.S., but a nascent giant that many experts predict is supposed to overtake the U.S. economically by the 2040s. To that end, it is commonly shared to say that an early decision to ‘flock to’ either of them certainly creates more problems than it cures. Some are also raising the possibility that an overdue decision, which of course smacks of weakness, may cause far bigger problems than people expect. The prevailing solution among us is by no means optimistic. The war-like competition makes South Korea harder to make any decision. South Korean think as if they’re living on the slope of two volcanos, one from North Korea and the other from the U.S.-China confrontations.

From South Korea’s perspective, there are two issues to prevent competition from becoming catastrophe in the Asian field of U.S.-China relations. The first is, with no question, North Korea. The U.S. considers the denuclearization of the nuclear-armed Kim regime as central to America’s national security interest; North Korea views the U.S. through the lens of its long-held anti-imperialism for fear of being toppled. As the veteran U.S. policymakers Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan observed in 2019, “Taiwan is not only a potential flash point; it is also the greatest unclaimed success in the history of U.S.-Chinese relations,”³⁷ as a result of the flexible and nuanced approach historically adopted by both sides.

If South Korea and the United States fail to resolve the deep-rooted North Korean nuclear problems over the long run, the Korean peninsula will face turbulence and conflict extremely difficult to imagine. The first step the two allies should take is make the mutually accepted roadmap toward the denuclearization of North Korea in the practical terms. If leaders in both countries can understand how North Korea views the roadmap, they will have a better chance of building a better future of Korea without nuclear weapons.

All in all, South Korea should make its own definition of national interests in order to maximize the benefits out of the fierce competition between the U.S. and China through a risk-minimizing practice of betting in opposite directions. Delaying or avoiding a diplomatically sensitive decision may shield South Korea from the risk of commitment. In addition, such pragmatic approaches offer the needed space, channels, and platforms for widening multi-layered partnership. If South Korea intends to make it work successfully, the Seoul government must find

³⁷ Kurt M. Campbell and Jake Sullivan, “Competition Without Catastrophe,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/competition-with-china-without-catastrophe> (Accessed September 12, 2021).

ways to work with an ally and the partners to deter and defend against nonmilitary incursions. Peace is a spiritual value that can be obtained from an accurate awareness of the horrors of war. In diplomacy and military strategy, thus, flexibility does not mean a change of principles and goals, but rather it means taking one of several paths. The right recipe is simple, though not easy: It needs to set the principles based on the national interests. I take that peace and liberal democracy both should be the highest goal the Seoul government continues to pursue. **/END/**