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Research on the Implementation Path of China's Multilateral Diplomacy in Optimizing and Shaping Regional Order

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Received: 19 October 2024 Accepted: 30 October 2024 Published: 25 November 2024

Abstract: Over the past decade, following the 2013 Neighborhood Diplomacy Work Conference and the introduction of the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI), China has pursued multilateral diplomacy guided by the principles of “genuine multilateralism,” emphasizing equal consultation, openness, inclusivity, mutual benefit, and win-win cooperation. China’s efforts have focused on improving and reshaping regional order to promote common prosperity by prioritizing projects that benefit neighboring countries and enhance shared well-being. This includes providing regional public goods, developing inclusive regional industrial chains, facilitating trade and investment liberalization through the establishment of free trade zones, and strengthening regional identity through enhanced security and mutual trust. Simultaneously, China has sought to reshape the narrative around multilateralism, challenging the U.S.’s unilateralism and exclusive mini-lateral mechanisms designed to maintain its hegemony. China’s approach offers solutions and a “Chinese proposal” to address the fragmentation of global governance, the increasing complexity of global challenges, and the decline in multilateral cooperation, which has been exacerbated by intensifying great-power competition and rising inequity. Beyond participating in and promoting reform within existing multilateral organizations, China has also led or contributed to the establishment of new regional cooperation platforms under the BRI. This includes micro-regional corridors along the Silk Road Economic Belt, which offer a “three-in-one” public goods framework to participating countries, fostering an inclusive transformation of the regional economic order through the integration of supply and demand. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), by advocating a security community and advancing the Global Security Initiative, has provided a hybrid of security and development public goods, contributing to the formation of an inclusive regional security order. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), along with the BRICS coalition and the New Development Bank, has supplemented and refined regional and global financial systems by offering material benefits, multilateral institutional cooperation, and shared value propositions. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), co-led by China and ASEAN, has created an expansive free trade area that serves as a foundation for the integration of diverse principles and institutions within the Asia-Pacific Free Trade Area and the Asia-Pacific

Community of Shared Future. The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) mechanism, by adhering to inclusive and effective multilateralism based on “coexistence, co-governance, and co-sharing,” has spearheaded the joint development of public goods in areas such as water resources, infrastructure, and environmental protection, fostering a high-quality sub-regional order and a shared future for the Lancang-Mekong countries. Shaping the future Asia-Pacific regional order will require China and regional partners to leverage local cooperation practices and embrace open regionalism, asserting leadership and innovation in optimizing and reshaping regional dynamics.

Keywords: Multilateral Diplomacy; Regional Public Goods; Regional Order; Belt and Road Initiative; AIIB; China-ASEAN Cooperation

1. Introduction

In the course of modern nation-state reconstruction, achieving national independence, and pursuing an independent and peaceful diplomacy after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the country has developed a distinctive tradition of multilateral diplomacy. Over the past forty years of reform and opening-up, China has fully integrated into the wave of globalization and the multilateral institutional network centered around the United Nations, as well as the U.S.-led post-war liberal international order, exemplified by institutions like the Bretton Woods system. China has gradually evolved into a pivotal hub in the global supply chain, connecting the developed markets of industrialized nations with the raw materials and energy sources of developing countries. As China emerged as the “world’s factory” and became the world’s second-largest economy, it built a network of partnerships at both regional and global levels through a combination of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. By fostering deep regional and global multilateral cooperation—through partnerships like the comprehensive collaboration with ASEAN, the creation of free trade zones, and the expansion of multilateral cooperation via the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—China has consistently provided regional public goods. These contributions include material benefits, innovative multilateral institutional frameworks, and new conceptual approaches. This has led to the development of a novel model of regional cooperation characterized by openness, inclusivity, equal consultation, and mutual benefit, which promotes the optimization and inclusive transformation of the regional order. China’s multilateral diplomacy in its neighboring regions is grounded in concrete actions that benefit its neighbors, enhance collective well-being, and aim at achieving shared prosperity. The country has driven the inclusive transformation of regional order by providing regional public goods, developing inclusive regional supply chains, facilitating trade and investment liberalization through free trade zone initiatives, and strengthening regional identity through increased security cooperation and mutual trust. Innovations in China’s multilateral diplomacy involve active participation in global and regional multilateral cooperation mechanisms and advocating for fair reforms. This includes efforts to increase the voting shares and influence of developing countries in the IMF, as well as collaborating with multiple stakeholders to revive stalled WTO reforms aimed at fairness. These efforts seek to promote

equitable reforms within the multilateral financial institutions under the Bretton Woods system, thereby expanding the opportunities for developing countries within the existing international order. China's multilateral diplomacy, embodying the concept of "genuine multilateralism," includes initiatives led by China or in partnership with other developing nations to create new regional cooperation platforms under the Belt and Road Initiative. These platforms encompass micro-regional corridors such as the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, the New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor, the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, and the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor. These efforts are further supported by multilateral mechanisms such as the BRICS Cooperation Organization, the New Development Bank, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the China-ASEAN-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) mega free trade area. Additionally, the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation mechanism is a key component of this network. Together, these cross-regional, regional, sub-regional, and micro-regional multilateral cooperation mechanisms form the core of China's multilateral diplomacy framework. They serve as institutional vehicles for deepening global partnerships and building a community of shared future with neighboring countries, playing a significant role in the integration and optimization of regional economic, security, and political structures, effectively contributing to their restructuring and enhancement.

2. Literature Review

On the function of multilateralism in constructing international order, Li Jiang highlights that multilateralism is the primary paradigm for shaping order in contemporary international society. It relies on stability, equality, predictability, and other functional elements to establish a coherent international order. The multilateral legal regulation of unilateral actions is a key mechanism through which multilateralism fulfills its ordering role. In the face of unprecedented global changes, the international community should adhere to genuine multilateralism, support the proper functioning of multilateral international systems, and safeguard the authority and effectiveness of the multilateral international order. Regarding the restructuring of international order through multilateralism, Qin Yaqing argues that, in a world characterized by a complex system of multiple poles, layers, and dimensions, multilateralism is more relevant than ever as a foundation for global order. A century of international relations history and the 70-year evolution of the United Nations have demonstrated that multilateralism, more so than power politics or balance-of-power strategies, is capable of sustaining global peace and stability. Inclusive multilateralism, above all, is committed to building and maintaining a peaceful and stable world order based on international institutions rather than power dynamics. It advocates for managing global affairs through consultation on multilateral platforms rather than coercion, fostering international cooperation through policy coordination between nations rather than threats or the use of force. It seeks to balance national and global interests within a

multilateral framework, promote global citizenship, and prevent the tragedy of the commons. Li Xiaoyan observes that, for a long time, multilateralism theories dominated by the United States have overshadowed alternative perspectives due to the post-war U.S.-led liberal international order and its institutional dominance. However, the encounter with real-world crises has prompted a new phase of reflection and reconstruction. Multilateralism remains a crucial instrument for thorough consultation amidst differences and for consensus-building, enabling the international community to navigate crises and reshape global order. Regarding the trajectory and formation of regional order, Sun Xingjie suggests that the “Indo-Pacific” concept is an extension and projection of the Euro-Atlantic order into the Asia-Pacific region, while the “Asia-Pacific” is the result of a spontaneously evolving regional order within Asia and the Pacific. Over the long term, the natural characteristics of the Asia-Pacific region have dictated the logic of its regional order’s evolution. The Asia-Pacific has the potential to transcend the zero-sum logic, fostering new cooperation-oriented identities within a network of connectivity and creating an inclusive arena for collaboration that embraces all stakeholders.

Existing literature has yet to explore in detail the mechanisms through which China’s extensive theoretical and practical innovations in multilateral diplomacy influence the transformation and reconstruction of regional order. Such an examination is crucial for further promoting “genuine multilateralism” and the diplomatic practices it informs, particularly in reshaping the discourse and practice of exclusive mini-lateral mechanisms and in establishing a non-Western multilateralism framework. This analysis is also essential for accelerating the development of regional partnerships and communities of shared destiny, deepening multilateral cooperation to enhance regional integration, preventing fragmentation, and advancing fair, inclusive, and shared globalization, as well as the democratization of global governance and international relations. Over the past decade, how China’s innovations in multilateral diplomacy—both theoretical and practical—have specifically contributed to optimizing and restructuring regional order remains an unexplored area of research. This includes understanding how China has effectively provided regional public goods, accelerated regional economic integration, refined regional multilateral institutions, enhanced security and mutual trust to strengthen regional identity, and contributed new concepts and ideas. Therefore, this research will conduct a comprehensive analysis of these mechanisms, grounded in an examination of “genuine multilateralism” and its innovations. The study will focus on several significant breakthroughs in China’s multilateral diplomacy, using representative cases as research subjects. These include the Belt and Road Initiative’s new regional cooperation platforms, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the BRICS Cooperation Organization and the New Development Bank, the RCEP mega free trade area, multi-layered cooperation between China and ASEAN, and the Lancang-Mekong sub-regional cooperation. The research will analyze how these cross-regional, regional, sub-regional, and micro-regional multilateral mechanisms serve as platforms, networks, and institutional frameworks. Specifically, it will examine how they effectively contribute to the restructuring and optimization of regional economic, security, and political orders by providing

integrated regional public goods, accelerating economic integration, strengthening multilateral networks to raise the costs of conflict, enhancing security and mutual trust to build a stronger regional identity, and offering new ideas and perspectives.

3. China's Vision for Regional Order and the Future of the Asia-Pacific

The U.S. perspective on international order, characterized by an outward, conflict-oriented approach, relies on constructing the “threat of the other” to create an internally stable but exclusionary order based on a homogenous civilization. This view has evolved into the post-war “liberal international order,” which has demonstrated a lack of inclusiveness and justice when faced with the diffusion of power and the rise of developing countries calling for greater fairness, justice, and democratization in the international system. The freedoms enjoyed in the Western world have, to some extent, resulted in restrictions on freedom in the non-Western world. Non-Western intellectual innovations, narrative practices, and demands for fair reforms to address underrepresentation have often remained marginalized. Although the power-driven order has provided some stability, raised welfare through technological diffusion and capital flow, and offered balanced benefits through the provision of international public goods, it is crucial to critically examine the inherent inequalities, injustices, exploitative center-periphery dynamics, and significant profit disparities in global industrial divisions. Only through this critical lens can constructive forces work towards strengthening self-reliance, creating inclusive and mutually beneficial cooperation mechanisms, and advocating values of equality and consultation to optimize and restructure both international and regional orders for fairer governance. China's concept of order does not prioritize differences in states' inherent attributes. Instead, it emphasizes developing cooperative, mutually beneficial relationships through economic exchanges, the building of security and trust, and cultural interactions. This approach allows China to propose an order model that moves beyond the Western conflict-driven perspective, favoring concepts such as harmonious coexistence, seeking common ground while respecting differences, celebrating diversity, fostering new international relations, non-interference in internal affairs, “appreciate the culture of others as do to our own, and the world will become a harmonious whole,” a community with a shared future for humanity, genuine multilateralism, and cooperative governance based on consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits. China's vision reflects a collaborative order philosophy of “no outsiders” or “no others,” emphasizing the creation of a shared identity within a community of interests, responsibilities, and destinies through internal consensus, interaction, and trust-building—rather than constructing identity through conflict with an “other.” This reflects an inward-focused, cooperative perspective on order. In the long term, the future of regional order in Southeast Asia, or the broader Asia-Pacific, is likely to align with China's inward-focused, cooperative view of order. This perspective prioritizes peace, cooperation, diversity, multiplicity, harmonious coexistence, and the importance of internal relationships, interactions, and trust to build a regional community with a shared future. It supports a model where autonomy and responsibility are central. The principles, rules, mechanisms, and practices that China promotes will play an

irreplaceable role in shaping and reconstructing the evolving order. In contrast, the U.S. strategy—framing China as a strategic competitor and engaging in exclusive regional security alliances—struggles to gain widespread support and recognition from Southeast Asian countries. China’s emphasis on deep economic ties, mutual benefits, and win-win cooperation aligns more closely with the development needs of all parties, maximizing the dividends of development-driven peace. The open, inclusive, and cooperative nature of China’s regional order vision resonates with the core aspirations of regional actors, who seek to drive a peaceful transformation of order through comprehensive cooperation and constructive competition.

China’s regional order perspective, founded on principles of “no enemies,” “no permanent allies,” “fluid relationships,” and “building mutually beneficial cooperation through interaction,” views Sino-U.S. relations as a mix of competition and cooperation rather than a zero-sum, “winner-takes-all” scenario characterized by hostility or replacement. China has consistently advocated for both nations to work together in building a new type of major power relationship, moving beyond zero-sum Cold War thinking and the so-called “Thucydides Trap.” China underscores that “the Pacific Ocean is vast enough to accommodate all countries around it.” While China emphasizes regional strategic autonomy and prioritizes local narratives and practices in shaping regional order with a focus on strategic innovation, it remains a strong supporter and practitioner of “open regionalism” within Asia-Pacific cooperation. China believes that effectively managing relations with the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific is crucial. It highlights the importance of both countries playing constructive roles in maintaining peace, stability, and economic prosperity in the region, as well as tackling shared challenges related to sustainable development. China’s open and inclusive stance towards cooperation with the U.S. has, to some degree, allowed Southeast Asian nations to retain strategic flexibility amid great power competition. This approach aligns with the future-oriented trend of peaceful development, Southeast Asia’s priority of economic growth to sustain the benefits of developmental peace, and the vision of an open, inclusive, and mutually beneficial regional order marked by diversity and complexity. Consequently, it better reflects the objective historical trends of the 21st century and is likely to gain greater acceptance among regional countries.

4. The Implementation Path of China’s Multilateral Diplomacy in Optimizing and Reshaping Regional Order

China’s multilateral diplomacy aims to foster the inclusive optimization and restructuring of regional order by providing a “three-in-one” set of regional public goods: material benefits, institutional cooperation, and conceptual contributions. This strategy involves building inclusive regional industrial chains, facilitating trade and investment liberalization through free trade zones, and strengthening security and mutual trust to enhance regional identity. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) acts as a new regional cooperation platform, delivering “three-in-one” public goods to participating countries and creating inclusive regional industrial chains by integrating supply and demand, thereby facilitating the inclusive transformation of the regional economic order. The

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) contributes to the development of an inclusive regional security order by promoting the concept of a security community and the Global Security Initiative, offering a combination of security, development, and conceptual contributions to resolve security governance challenges. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), together with the BRICS Cooperation Organization and the New Development Bank, augments the current international system by providing material benefits, strengthening multilateral institutions, and offering value-based principles, thereby enhancing and optimizing both regional and global financial systems. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), jointly advanced by China and ASEAN, provides a diverse framework for integrating principles and institutions, supporting the development of the Asia-Pacific Free Trade Area and the Asia-Pacific Community of Shared Future. China and ASEAN continue to drive regional economic integration based on open regionalism and inclusive multilateralism. The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) mechanism, founded on principles of “coexistence, co-governance, and co-sharing,” exemplifies inclusive and effective multilateralism, leading the joint development of public goods in sectors such as water management, infrastructure, and environmental protection. This approach supports the creation of an inclusive sub-regional cooperative order and a high-quality Lancang-Mekong community with a shared future. These cross-regional, regional, sub-regional, and micro-regional multilateral cooperation mechanisms constitute a network of China’s multilateral diplomatic practices. They serve as institutional platforms for deepening global partnerships and fostering a community of shared destiny with neighboring regions, playing a significant and effective role in the integration and optimization of regional economic, security, and political orders.

(1) The “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) aims to provide a “three-in-one” public good for participating countries, based on the principles of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits. By integrating supply and consumption, the BRI seeks to build an inclusive regional industrial chain that drives a transformation towards a more inclusive regional economic order.

As a new regional cooperation platform, the BRI, with its “six corridors, six routes, multi-country, and multi-port” framework, offers open, inclusive, non-exclusive, and non-competitive public goods across three dimensions: tangible infrastructure, institutional frameworks, and intellectual resources. This is achieved through a collaborative model of consultation, construction, and sharing. These measures encourage developing nations along the route to actively integrate into the regional industrial chain and the global division of labor through enhanced connectivity and increased industrialization. This approach promotes coordinated, sustainable regional development, enhances shared prosperity, and optimizes the regional economic order. The BRI’s emphasis on high-quality development also supports the creation of an inclusive regional industrial chain where supply and demand are harmoniously integrated. The historical lack of a robust consumer market in the region has posed significant challenges to developing a fully integrated regional industrial chain, leading to ongoing dependence on external markets. As China emerges as the region’s largest consumer market

and primary destination for final products, the accelerated formation of a regional industrial chain aligns with the global trend towards regionalization following the retreat of hyper-globalization, as well as the preference for industrial chains to locate closer to consumer markets. This strategy serves as an effective response to efforts led by the United States to reduce dependence on China's industrial capabilities through "onshoring," "friend-shoring," "near-shoring," and the "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework," which aims to decouple from China within the Asia-Pacific region. The BRI's innovative model of international cooperation, which emphasizes comprehensive connectivity, aids countries along the route in boosting their industrial capacity. This, in turn, enhances their standing within the international division of labor, breaking away from the traditional core-periphery structure of global industry. By constructing a mutually beneficial, inclusive regional industrial chain, the BRI helps overcome the passive and "captured" positions that many countries currently occupy. Relying on the BRI is a strategic move by China to break free from its "captured" position within the existing international division of labor and to proactively build its own regional and global value chains, thus overcoming developmental barriers. Deepening industrial cooperation in East Asia through the BRI will attract more countries and regions into a new production and supply network, fully leveraging their respective comparative advantages to adjust the spatial distribution of industrial chain segments. Utilizing differential development stages to achieve complementary strengths, this framework provides ample market demand and industrial relocation opportunities for deeper regional cooperation. It also establishes a stable and balanced regional industrial chain capable of mitigating global risks associated with de-globalization, unilateralism, and protectionism. Building an inclusive regional value chain under the BRI adheres to the principle of mutual benefit, strengthening cooperation across various segments and integrating global high-quality resources. This creates coordinated long-chain synergies, shifting from passive integration to regional leadership and eventually to active participation in shaping new global trade rules, global economic governance, and a new model of globalization. This long-term strategy aims to break free from the entrenched "low-end lock-in" within global value chains. By creating a two-way open and inclusive regional industrial chain, the BRI aims to dismantle the longstanding, rigid, and inequitable distribution of global value chains, facilitating industrial upgrading through coordinated development. The BRI explores a new regional cooperation model that enables less developed countries along the route to escape the "development trap," thereby addressing critical global challenges, such as income inequality, regional development imbalances, and unfair distribution of benefits in the current phase of globalization. China's advocacy for new Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridors, the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor, the China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor extends in three directions—north, west, and south—establishing regional economic cooperation that links individual points into lines, creating a wider network with a radiating effect. This integration embeds major countries and cities along the route into the global industrial

chain. These interconnected economic corridors are founded on a growing base of common interests and will generate new models of shared benefits. The creation of a network of interconnected interests will reinvigorate previously isolated peripheral regions of the Eurasian continent through equitable distribution of newly created benefits. The first decade of the BRI's construction has been marked by intense negotiations between globalization and anti-globalization, collective development versus "development first," the notion of a community with a shared future for humanity, and a renewed Cold War mentality. These years have demonstrated that China's advocacy of the BRI as a new international cooperation platform remains a driving force of globalization amidst the shadow of anti-globalization. China has emerged as a provider of international public goods in an era of unprecedented global change, and a leader of global values that emphasize connectivity by land and sea for common development. The BRI represents a new model of international cooperation, a land-sea coordinated development approach, a global governance concept based on consultation, contribution, and shared benefits, and a new framework for north-south connectivity and development. It reflects China's contributions of wisdom and capability to global governance.

(2) The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), along with the BRICS Cooperation Organization and the New Development Bank, complements the existing international order by providing additional material benefits, enhancements to multilateral institutions, and value-based contributions, thereby improving and optimizing regional and global financial systems.

The establishment of the AIIB has spurred reforms within the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and represents a new strategy for diversifying and reforming the Asian financial order in an inclusive manner. It aims to provide regional financial public goods that supplement, rather than replace, the multilateral financial system. The AIIB's creation is part of China's broader effort to advance the global governance system and refine regional order, supporting developing countries in the region to achieve mutual benefits and win-win outcomes. The enthusiastic response from regional countries, particularly in terms of infrastructure financing in Asia, reflects China's emphasis on altruistic strategic intentions, which have attracted many nations to participate. China's strategy for optimizing the Asian financial order has been characterized by a gradual and cautious approach, enhancing differentiated competition to transition from a U.S.-centered to a China-centered regional order. This shift has enabled China to move from being a rule-follower to a rule-maker, taking on an active leadership role in the regional financial arena. By providing urgently needed regional public goods, China is reshaping an inclusive, equitable, and shared regional order. As a crucial institutional support for Asia's connectivity, the AIIB has become the primary financing platform for implementing the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). AIIB funding has facilitated the alignment of China's BRI with the ASEAN "Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025," the "Greater Eurasian Partnership Initiative," the EU's "Eurasian Connectivity Strategy," and the "Bright Path" infrastructure strategy of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states. These alignments support the infrastructural connectivity of the six major economic corridors within the BRI, facilitating robust connectivity that

enables regional countries to integrate into both regional and global industrial chains. China's strategy for optimizing the Asian financial order emphasizes a gradual and cautious approach to supplementing differentiated competition, shifting the regional order from U.S. dominance to Chinese leadership. This transition has allowed China to evolve from following rules to creating them, assuming a leadership role in the regional financial sector. By supplying the regional public goods that are urgently needed, China is rebuilding an inclusive, equitable, and shared regional order. The AIIB gives special consideration to the development needs of developing nations and the concerns of smaller borrower countries. Its loan conditions are carefully crafted to reflect sensitivity to these demands, and it incorporates developing countries as donors, bringing diverse perspectives and experiences to the table. This inclusive approach has introduced a more altruistic and varied perspective to loan policies and standards, pushing the World Bank to innovate its loan policies for smaller nations. These reforms contribute to global sustainable development, serving as a source of policy innovation, and providing momentum, along with a distinct Chinese contribution, to the inclusive restructuring of the Asian financial order.

The BRICS cooperation mechanism is composed of some of the world's most dynamic and promising emerging market economies. It has consistently adhered to the principles of "openness and transparency, solidarity and mutual assistance, deepened cooperation, and shared development." BRICS aims to build a "closer, more comprehensive, and stronger" partnership, playing an increasingly vital role in advocating for true multilateralism based on "equal consultation, openness and inclusivity, and mutually beneficial cooperation," while promoting sustainable development for the global community. As a multilateral platform that enables comprehensive cooperation among emerging powers, BRICS has significantly transcended traditional concepts of international relations. It is dedicated to advancing the democratization of international relations, the progress of a multipolar world, and the evolution of the international order toward greater equality and fairness. BRICS countries engage in comprehensive and innovative cooperation, focusing on key growth drivers such as the digital economy, technological innovation, trade and investment, and infrastructure development. The bloc has made substantial progress in fostering partnerships for technological innovation in the context of the new industrial revolution, exploring digital economy cooperation, and strengthening financial collaboration through the New Development Bank, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and currency swap agreements. These efforts have facilitated reciprocal cooperation across various domains. On matters of regional conflict and international hotspots, BRICS is committed to reducing tensions and promoting reconciliation through peaceful consultation and inclusive dialogue. BRICS countries advocate for new international cooperation models, fresh concepts of international relations, and innovative approaches to global governance, which have steadily increased their appeal to developing nations. Their contributions to global governance are growing, and BRICS plays a significant role in advocating for a decentralized, diverse, and equitable international order, and the democratization of international relations. With the expansion of BRICS,

the “BRICS+” cooperation mechanism will address gaps in the global economic framework in several ways. First, the “BRICS+” framework, as a platform for coordinating some of the largest regional integration projects among developing countries, will promote regional stability and strengthen the global economic architecture. Second, it will move away from the traditional “core-periphery” model, allowing for a more diversified and inclusive form of globalization. Third, for developing countries, the “BRICS+” system can fill gaps, creating an economic integration model that aligns more closely with “balanced regionalism.” An expanded “New BRICS” will provide additional material benefits, multilateral institutional cooperation, and value-based support to the existing international order. Firstly, it will deliver low-cost bank loans and financial assistance tailored to the actual needs of developing countries, targeting those in the Global South that are in urgent need. The New Development Bank’s robust financial resources, combined with the inclusion of Middle Eastern oil-producing nations with abundant sovereign wealth funds, will strengthen this material foundation. As multilateral cooperation between the Global North and South slows and financing gaps widen—due to development paths that emphasize autonomy in developing countries—the supply of material public goods from Western countries has diminished. At the same time, the internal diversification of development levels among developing nations and the growing demand for South-South cooperation are empowering multilateral organizations like BRICS, which focus on joint self-reliance, internal financing, collective provision of public goods, and decentralization of the international financial system; Secondly, BRICS advocates for multilateral cooperation characterized by openness, inclusivity, equal consultation, and mutual benefit. It promotes a cooperation mechanism that respects diversity, seeks common ground while preserving differences, and encourages intercultural dialogue. This approach complements existing multilateral institutions under the Bretton Woods system through differentiated competition and policy innovation. The New Development Bank respects each country’s right to self-determined development, adheres to borrowing nations’ policy standards, and adapts loan conditions to the changing needs of clients at different stages of development. This has driven reform in World Bank loan conditions, pressuring it to adopt more inclusive policies. The New Development Bank has introduced innovative designs in equity distribution, governance and decision-making authority, environmental standards, social frameworks, and loan policies, encouraging the World Bank’s shift towards more inclusive reforms. The principle of equal equity and equal voice among the five founding members of the New Development Bank reflects the consensus among major developing nations on fair reform of the global economic governance system. These institutional innovations are constructive efforts to democratize international relations within the framework of reforming the international financial order, fully embodying the BRICS principle that “despite differences in capacity and stages of development, countries should enjoy equal rights, opportunities, and participation in global economic governance.” Thirdly, BRICS champions values of openness, inclusivity, solidarity, mutual assistance, universal sharing, and non-interference, contributing to a fairer, more democratic, and inclusive transformation

of the international order. The BRICS cooperation mechanism has set an example for South-South cooperation based on mutual respect, solidarity, and trust, significantly contributing to the democratization of international relations. This underscores the role of South-South cooperation mechanisms in reinforcing institutional multilateral collaboration among countries of the Global South, strengthening their collective voice, and enhancing their growing influence in reshaping and reforming global governance. From global security management to cooperative efforts in capacity building and technological innovation, from financial assistance driving the diversification of the international financial system to the innovation of international development knowledge systems, BRICS has created new opportunities for mutual development within the Global South. It offers countries the freedom to forge independent relationships. In the future, BRICS is expected to continue its transformative role in global governance and international order across various domains, including agricultural cooperation, partnerships in traditional and green energy, technological innovation, emerging industrial capacity collaboration, and sustainable development.

(3) The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) provides a comprehensive public good that integrates security, development, and conceptual frameworks, contributing to the establishment of an inclusive regional security order through the implementation of a security community and the Global Security Initiative.

The SCO adheres to the “Shanghai Spirit,” which emphasizes “mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for diverse civilizations, and the pursuit of common development.” It follows an open principle of non-alignment, non-confrontation, and does not target any country or organization. The SCO does not base its security needs on the expense of other nations’ security, nor does it form a closed, exclusive, and antagonistic political alliance driven by a specific ideology. Instead, it respects the right of all nations to independently choose development models and paths that suit their national realities, opposing the imposition of specific ideologies or values on other countries or using them as exclusionary standards. The SCO remains open and inclusive toward other regional countries interested in joining. Initially focused on specific security issues—such as maintaining border stability and combating cross-border terrorism and religious extremism—the SCO has gradually expanded its scope to include a broader range of issues, encompassing sustainable development, economic cooperation, and agricultural collaboration. It successfully brought India and Pakistan, two long-standing rivals in South Asia, into the organization, making them signatories to the “Treaty on Long-term Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.” This inclusive, mediation-driven, and development-oriented approach demonstrates the strategic wisdom of its member states. As the SCO’s member states, observers, and dialogue partners are largely countries along the western stretch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), SCO members are well-positioned to leverage the organization’s platform for regional multilateral cooperation. This includes collaborative efforts in investment, trade, connectivity (both soft and hard infrastructure), social welfare, agricultural development, and security cooperation,

all of which support the high-quality development of countries along the BRI and facilitate its broader objectives. The SCO remains committed to genuine multilateralism, consistently upholding fairness and justice in the international order. Throughout its development, SCO member states have strengthened political support for one another, deepened mutual trust in security matters, expanded mutually beneficial economic partnerships, and enriched cultural integration and exchange. These actions provide a holistic public good for regional governance, combining security, development, and conceptual frameworks that guide the enhancement of cooperative regional order, establishing the SCO as a model for a new kind of international multilateral organization. Through the Global Security Initiative, the SCO has systematically addressed regional security challenges by delivering integrated public goods that connect security and development while carefully advancing its expansion process. It has established a security framework that fosters sustainable regional development, positioning itself as a trailblazer in implementing the Global Security Initiative, transforming the region into a testing ground for this model. Alongside other regional multilateral organizations, such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the SCO has emerged as a crucial component of a comprehensive Eurasian security framework and regional order, enhancing political and security trust across the region and contributing to the development of a diverse regional security community.

(4) The establishment of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a vast free trade area, provides a foundation of diverse principles and institutional integration for constructing the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) and fostering an Asia-Pacific Community of Shared Future.

The signing of RCEP has unified the previously fragmented and overlapping free trade agreements (FTAs) in the Asia-Pacific region. Additionally, its partial overlap with some member countries of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which adheres to higher regulatory standards, has encouraged RCEP members to pursue more ambitious free trade agreements and to explore emerging FTA issues. RCEP serves as an institutional framework, facilitating the alignment of rules and regulations across various regional FTAs, thereby advancing the development of the FTAAP and fostering regional integration. Although the CPTPP sets significantly higher standards than RCEP in areas like trade liberalization and investment facilitation, making it the most stringent FTA in the Asia-Pacific, RCEP's provisions—designed to accommodate the diverse realities of the Asian region—include principles of openness and inclusiveness, flexible transition periods, dispute resolution mechanisms, and neutrality concerning ownership. These features create substantial opportunities for mutual complementarity, interaction, and institutional integration between the two frameworks. This synergy between RCEP and CPTPP has significant implications for the rule-making and enhancement of the FTAAP and the global multilateral trade system. With the implementation of RCEP, considerations of gradual expansion should be on the agenda to encourage higher-level development and inclusive growth within the

region. In stark contrast to the deglobalization, decoupling, and trade protectionist unilateralism promoted by developed nations, developing countries have no alternative but to continue integrating into globalization and the global supply chain through regional multilateral organizations and integration processes. This ongoing integration is also a key driver for the inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development of globalization. Many developing countries have proactively opened their economies and significantly reduced tariffs—often below the levels they committed to under the WTO—in a bid to integrate more fully into the global supply chain. This reflects a clear desire and momentum for deeper integration into regional economic frameworks and the global trade system. RCEP should adopt a more open and inclusive approach to attract greater participation from developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region, enabling the people of these nations to share in the benefits and advantages of free trade. By establishing FTA rules that are fairer, more inclusive, mutually beneficial, and respectful of diversity, RCEP can attract additional developing countries, thereby laying a broad foundation for the FTAAP and an Asia-Pacific Community of Shared Future. The signing and implementation of RCEP also offer a historic opportunity for developing countries, including those in Latin America, to engage in Asia-Pacific regional economic integration. According to the 2024 Annual Report on the Outlook for Asian Economic Integration, released at the 2024 Boao Forum for Asia, since RCEP came into effect, cooperation among member countries in regional industrial and supply chains has shown strong resilience. RCEP members have not only gained significant advantages in trade liberalization, facilitation, investment protection, and economic and technological cooperation but have also produced positive spillover and demonstration effects, effectively mitigating the adverse consequences of global economic fragmentation. As trade interactions between Latin American and East Asian countries intensify, creating an increasingly interconnected network of trade agreements, the inclusion of more Asia-Pacific developing countries, including those from Latin America, in RCEP will significantly advance economic integration across the region. The larger the membership of RCEP, the greater the benefits from its rules of origin accumulation, the stronger its capacity to uphold free trade, and the more extensively businesses will benefit.

The RCEP provides China with a comprehensive platform to consolidate its existing free trade agreements and expand its broader economic cooperation network, thereby advancing the regional economic development objectives of the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI). By signing the RCEP agreement, China aims to gradually integrate and interconnect the Northeast Asia economic zone, Southeast Asia economic zone, Oceania economic zone, and the Europe and Africa economic zones included in the BRI. Through measures promoting trade liberalization, investment facilitation, and the creation of additional bilateral and multilateral FTAs, China seeks to build a higher-standard and more flexible regional free trade network, enhancing its influence and authority in setting rules within regional economic agreements. As the largest and most promising free trade agreement in the Asia-Pacific region, the RCEP will further support the development of ongoing projects under the BRI.

These projects encompass a wide range of areas, including power plants, railways, highways, ports, telecommunications infrastructure, fiber optic networks, and smart cities. These initiatives will be implemented and managed sustainably and responsibly, aiming to stimulate economic demand in participating countries and contribute to global economic growth. Many RCEP member countries are also participants in the Maritime Silk Road and overland Silk Road components of the BRI. The economic potential unlocked by the RCEP's benefits will foster increased economic exchanges among countries along these routes. This will create an efficient network system linking Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, as well as China's coastal cities, ports, underdeveloped inland regions, and border cities. This transformation will turn the BRI into a comprehensive regional economic cooperation framework. Additionally, through initiatives such as the "Digital Silk Road," "Green Silk Road," and "Health Silk Road," a closer and more deeply integrated cooperation network will be established among member countries across multiple sectors. This will advance regional economic integration and the restructuring of regional order, strengthening China's central role in regional and global trade connectivity.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) promotes cross-border logistics by harmonizing rules of origin and streamlining customs procedures, thereby deepening regional industrial and value chains. It advances investment liberalization through a negative list approach, enhancing transparency in investment policies. In terms of goods trade, more than 90% of products will ultimately achieve zero tariffs, while trade in services and investment will be more open than in existing 10+1 free trade agreements. RCEP also addresses new areas such as intellectual property, e-commerce, competition policy, and government procurement. It adopts an inclusive approach by granting special and differential treatment to the least developed countries, favoring an inclusive and balanced development model in East Asia. RCEP lays a broad regional foundation for China, Japan, and South Korea to establish an open economic network. By reducing tariffs, the agreement encourages new connections among these countries, which may benefit more from RCEP than ASEAN countries. The agreement signals strong support from East Asian nations for regional arrangements and multilateral trade liberalization, marking a significant milestone in East Asian economic integration. By lowering business costs and fostering trade creation, RCEP enhances the region's overall economic environment. It also seeks to narrow the development gap among member states by increasing economic and technical assistance to developing and least developed economies, promoting coordinated and balanced regional development, and shaping a new pattern of open regional economic integration. By 2035, RCEP is expected to boost East Asia's GDP by 0.86%, with exports and imports increasing by 18.3% and 9.63% respectively, and investment growing by 1.47%, positioning the region as a global economic growth center. As the largest economy in the region, China's consumer demand plays a pivotal role in shaping regional trade dynamics. Therefore, China should expedite the development of a comprehensive domestic demand system, gradually establishing a new economic model centered on domestic circulation, supported by international circulation.

Additionally, China should actively reduce trade surpluses with neighboring countries to achieve trade balance, alleviating external pressures and increasing regional dependence on the Chinese market. By leveraging its vast domestic consumption market, China can continue implementing high-level opening-up policies, fostering a supply-demand value chain in East Asia that sustains a virtuous cycle between production and demand. Maximizing the advantages of China's large-scale market and domestic demand potential will create a development model where domestic and international circulation mutually reinforce each other, forming a dynamic that not only stimulates East Asian economic development but also supports global economic rebalancing. Aligning initiatives like the "Belt and Road Initiative" and regional connectivity will help fully exploit RCEP's policy benefits, driving new economic momentum in East Asia. China should capitalize on the "reform and innovation effects" of regional integration to establish a balanced development framework, both internally and externally. Additionally, it is crucial to transition away from an external economic structure heavily reliant on trade. In this context, China will pursue a comprehensive strategy that integrates "domestic economic development" with "East Asian economic integration," fostering a mutually beneficial, win-win environment. In the post-pandemic era, the principles underlying production networks have shifted from pure "efficiency" to "efficiency underpinned by security." The institutional frameworks established by RCEP will provide a more stable and predictable economic environment, bolstering confidence in developing regional production networks, reducing transaction costs, and improving social welfare across the region. This transition supports the Asia-Pacific region's trajectory towards economic integration. The implementation of RCEP and deeper interconnections among member countries will accelerate the formation of an East Asian regional market. A favorable trade and investment climate will facilitate the integration of East Asia's regional value chain, enhancing the efficiency of the regional market network. This, in turn, will mitigate geopolitical and geo-economic risks associated with regional economic integration. By strengthening the alignment of interests among member countries, RCEP will support economic recovery, foster political trust, and solidify a shared sense of identity within the community of a common destiny.

(5) China and ASEAN are jointly advancing regional economic integration through a commitment to open regionalism and inclusive multilateralism.

China's comprehensive and innovative collaboration with ASEAN has served as a model, setting a precedent for cooperation between other nations and ASEAN. Different "10+1" frameworks have both learned from and competed with each other, gradually leading to the convergence and optimization of cooperation content and platform structures between partner countries and ASEAN, characterized by institutionalization and comprehensive engagement. At the beginning of the 21st century, China was the first to initiate the establishment of a free trade area with ASEAN, the first to join the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, the first to establish a strategic partnership with ASEAN, and the first to propose and sign the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea to manage disputes, build trust, and foster regional security confidence. In the

years since, China has engaged in extensive cooperation with ASEAN, covering areas such as maritime cooperation, joint anti-terrorism initiatives, connectivity, education and culture, green and low-carbon emissions reduction, public health, the digital economy, and technological innovation. This comprehensive collaboration has catalyzed a qualitative upgrade in East Asian cooperation. Countries like Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, India, and the United States have also intensified their comprehensive cooperation with ASEAN, resulting in a competitive environment where various cooperation models vie for influence over ASEAN. China's proposal to establish a common market with ASEAN is built on a solid foundation of ongoing regional integration. This initiative comes in response to external pressures that have posed significant challenges to Asia-Pacific regional integration through antagonistic, isolationist, and exclusive strategies. The objective is to jointly construct an inclusive regional industrial chain, deepening economic ties to mitigate risks and pursue economic integration that counters fragmentation. Based on strong strategic trust, China and ASEAN are collaborating to create a higher-level, more open version 3.0 Free Trade Area. This initiative not only provides institutional assurance for building a vast China-ASEAN market, but also represents a major effort by China and ASEAN to lead East Asian economic integration. It demonstrates a clear commitment to multilateralism and free trade, contributing significantly to regional development and the preservation of regional peace. China and ASEAN are capitalizing on strategic opportunities, establishing a multidimensional cooperation framework that encompasses political, security, and economic dimensions. They are making steadfast efforts to ensure peace, prosperity, and stability in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region while advancing the process of regional integration. In the journey to establish a comprehensive strategic partnership between China and ASEAN, three key consensuses have been reached regarding the vision for regional order: the first principle is supporting ASEAN's leading role in promoting regional cooperation and shaping the regional order. ASEAN's central position in regional cooperation has developed through historical and practical experiences in the region and aligns with Asian values and the diverse realities of Asia. This central role has become the foundational and guiding norm in the process of East Asian integration. At the summit celebrating the 30th anniversary of China-ASEAN dialogue relations, President Xi Jinping expressed China's strong support for ASEAN's central role through four key commitments: "China will unswervingly prioritize ASEAN in its neighborhood diplomacy, unswervingly support ASEAN's unity and the building of the ASEAN Community, unswervingly uphold ASEAN's central position in regional frameworks, and unswervingly back ASEAN in playing a greater role in regional and international affairs." With the deepening of their strategic relationship, China not only aims to support ASEAN's centrality but also to strengthen ASEAN's capacity-building through the expansion of the "Belt and Road Initiative" in Southeast Asia. This includes aligning the "Belt and Road Initiative" with the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific," and advancing the "Global Security Initiative," "Global Development Initiative," and "Global Civilization Initiative" in Southeast Asia as demonstration projects. History has shown that ASEAN's leadership in regional cooperation

fosters healthy competition among major powers, while ASEAN's norms, well-suited to the Asian context, maximize consensus and build trust. The second key principle is consultative multilateralism. A consultative approach, which respects diverse realities and mutual concerns while maximizing trust and consensus-building, should be the foundation for the future regional order. This consultative regional order does not overlook the importance of rules but emphasizes that these rules should be recognized and accepted by the majority of countries, with inclusiveness and universal benefits. A consensus formed through equal consultation among stakeholders can foster the most inclusive and open cooperation. The third principle is open regionalism. Open regionalism encourages diverse, multi-layered, and multidimensional cooperation among relevant regional stakeholders, which has been a key factor in sustaining the vitality of East Asian cooperation. Respecting the ASEAN Way's guiding norms, consultative multilateralism, and open regionalism is a practical and feasible strategy for shaping the regional order. Amid the current context of declining globalization, a shift in global governance and supply chains toward regionalization, significant geopolitical and economic shifts, severe global economic imbalances, sluggish growth, and shrinking demand, China and ASEAN must jointly explore new policy spaces for deep cooperation. They aim to establish a common market that surpasses traditional free trade frameworks, utilizing deeply intertwined interests to shield regional integration from geopolitical disruptions. Promoting the free movement and optimal allocation of five key elements—goods, services, capital, technology, and knowledge—within the regional market, particularly the movement of people and data, is crucial. A common market, characterized by high-level openness through the alignment of market rules and standards, represents an innovative and mutually beneficial initiative to achieve a higher degree of regional economic integration. The “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” aims to offer a vision for an inclusive regional order and cooperation, creating favorable conditions for regional peace, stability, and prosperity. It seeks to prevent the formation of divisive regional blocs, strengthen ASEAN-led cooperation mechanisms, and implement the “ASEAN+” frameworks across multiple areas of cooperation. ASEAN's vision for regional order comprises three essential elements: inclusiveness of interests and concerns: Multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific should be open to all countries, and establishing open and inclusive partnerships is a central pillar of ASEAN-led cooperation. This approach refutes the premise of excluding China, as seen in the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. Additionally, the construction of regional order should remain open to diverse ideas and initiatives, promoting mechanisms that enable effective strategic alignment for regional cooperation. ASEAN welcomes all material, institutional, and conceptual contributions conducive to regional peace, development, and prosperity, encouraging regional actors to contribute to regional public goods and order-building. The inclusive vision outlined in the “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” aligns with China's expectations for regional order construction. Thus, China will continue to promote the alignment and innovative cooperation between the “Belt and Road Initiative” and the strategic vision of the “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,” facilitating high-quality development of RCEP and the realization of institutional benefits. This

includes deepening collaboration in maritime cooperation, joint law enforcement, the digital economy, green and low-carbon initiatives, public health, education and technology, industrial chain co-construction, and other areas vital to regional development. China will also work to ensure the early implementation of the “Global Development Initiative,” “Global Security Initiative,” and “Global Civilization Initiative” in Southeast Asia, continuing to foster successful cooperation in establishing an inclusive regional order. In this critical historical moment of changes in international and regional order, China and ASEAN must move forward with determination, jointly taking on shared responsibilities and missions. They should explore innovative spaces for cooperation on the foundation of existing multilateral mechanisms and platforms, seizing the initiative in the strategic discourse on Asia-Pacific security, development, and prosperity. As key players in the transformation of regional order, they will work together to build an inclusive Asia-Pacific regional order.

(6) The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) Mechanism embodies an inclusive and effective form of multilateralism characterized by “coexistence, co-governance, and shared benefits.” It guides the joint development and sharing of regional public goods in areas such as water resources, infrastructure, and environmental protection, aiming to establish an inclusive sub-regional cooperation framework and a high-quality Lancang-Mekong Community of Shared Future.

Initiated by China, the LMC Mechanism is the first new type of sub-regional cooperation mechanism in the neighborhood, grounded in the concept of creating a Lancang-Mekong Community of Shared Future. It spans various areas, including politics, security, economics, socio-cultural relations, and sustainable development, and has established a comprehensive framework for cooperation. China and the countries along the Mekong River “share the same water,” and through specific cooperative efforts in water resource management, they have built political trust and fostered a sense of regional identity. This makes the Lancang-Mekong region, especially Southeast Asia, one of the most promising areas for early successes under the Belt and Road Initiative. Water resource cooperation within the LMC considers the interests of both upstream and downstream countries, promoting an inclusive and effective multilateralism of “coexistence, co-governance, and shared benefits.” This approach challenges Western competitive narratives and narrow practices, continuing to lead in multi-sector cooperation and the joint development and sharing of regional public goods, thereby creating an inclusive sub-regional cooperation framework and a high-quality Lancang-Mekong Community of Shared Future. The geographical proximity, interconnected interests, economic complementarity, mutual assistance in development, and shared fate of Lancang-Mekong countries provide strong internal momentum for the LMC. The principle of equal consultation, combined with China’s considerate engagement that respects the concerns, developmental needs, and perspectives of downstream countries, as well as its provision of urgently needed public goods in development, infrastructure, security, and the environment, ensures the participation and autonomy of all parties in building a community of shared water resources. The institutionalized cooperation mechanism, economic and trade interactions, cultural exchanges, technical cooperation in

hydrological information, and knowledge sharing establish a multi-layered network that further enhances sub-regional relations and deepens mutual trust. This optimizes an inclusive and symbiotic sub-regional order. The establishment of bilateral communities of shared future between China and Cambodia, China and Laos, and China and Myanmar underscore that the Lancang-Mekong nations will strengthen and enrich the Lancang-Mekong Community of Shared Future through bilateral efforts, achieving “early successes” in the high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative. The LMC also prioritizes openness and cooperation with existing multilateral frameworks within the region, aiming to harmonize regional, sub-regional, and micro-regional cooperation mechanisms. In fields such as water resource management, environmental protection, and scientific and technological collaboration, the LMC incorporates the experiences and resources of all parties, gathers collective wisdom, and adheres to the principles of openness, inclusivity, mutual benefit, and win-win cooperation. This “genuine multilateralism” seeks to address common challenges, enhance the well-being of the Lancang-Mekong countries, and promote the optimization of an inclusive sub-regional order.

5. China and Regional Countries are Leveraging Local Cooperative Practices and Open Regionalism as Foundational Elements to Exercise Agency and Innovation in Shaping the Regional Order, Driving the Optimization and Transformation of Regional Dynamics.

The Asia-Pacific region’s economic growth potential has attracted the strategic focus of major powers, each seeking to connect the Pacific and Indian Oceans to secure strategic advantages. The “Indo-Pacific Strategy” has emerged as a dominant policy narrative, characterized by a selective, exclusive, adversarial framework with strong geopolitical and geo-economic implications. This has significantly disrupted the Asia-Pacific’s longstanding efforts towards integration and multilateral cooperation. Competitive regionalism has led to institutional overlap, nesting, and counterbalancing, complicating the region’s progress towards open regionalism and inclusive integration. The diverse, multi-layered, and composite nature of the Asia-Pacific region’s geography dictates that the evolution of regional order must be characterized by coexistence, seeking common ground while respecting differences, transcending binary oppositions and zero-sum games. In interconnected networks, a new cooperative-oriented common identity can develop, with multiple centers working together to create an inclusive space for cooperation. In contrast, exclusive networks of cooperation, based on security alliances and shared values, pose a risk of fragmentation within the Asia-Pacific. Following World War II, the rise of new nation-states coincided with the establishment of regional order. Indigenous narratives, previously overshadowed by colonial rule, principles of independence, equality, non-interference in internal affairs, and explorations of mutually beneficial cooperation for regional peace and stability have all influenced the region’s evolving order. These characteristics have fostered a foundation of diverse cultural coexistence. The normalization of Sino-American relations and China’s initiation of reform and opening-up in the 1970s brought the Asia-Pacific beyond Cold

War-era confrontation and into a global trend of peaceful development. This integration, involving capital, people, goods, and technology, formed a dense network that established a complex and resilient geo-economic space in the Asia-Pacific, transforming it into a new global economic growth center. The region's intricate web of trade and investment networks, supply chain divisions, technological cooperation, and multi-layered security collaboration serves as a barrier against conflict and division, transcending the zero-sum logic of maritime and terrestrial antagonism. Consequently, the Asia-Pacific economic cooperation network acts as a soft counterbalance to the "Indo-Pacific Strategy," which is marked by exclusive security-economic alliances targeting specific countries. This strategy, aimed at maintaining U.S. dominance in the region, increasingly diverges from the Asia-Pacific's developmental prospects. The ASEAN-centered, multi-layered, multilateral cooperation framework forms the foundation of a diverse and complex Asia-Pacific regional order, effectively countering the "Indo-Pacific Strategy." The ASEAN Way, known for its principles of equality, inclusiveness, and flexibility in regional cooperation, is crucial for developing a regional order that transcends binary opposition and zero-sum games, merging maritime and terrestrial dynamics. Indigenous systems and the diverse coexistence of local ecologies, previously obscured by colonial frameworks, are now revitalized and thriving, making local resources essential pillars of regional order. The ASEAN+ cooperation framework, along with various cross-regional, regional, and sub-regional initiatives, weaves a complex network of institutions dedicated to exploring economic integration and political trust in the Asia-Pacific. Although competitive regionalism is often criticized for "institutional oversupply," intensifying regional competition, weakening institutional integration, and creating an uncertain regional identity, it has also contributed to regional stability and institutional innovation, enhancing the institutionalization of cooperation mechanisms and increasing the potential for peaceful transitions. This diversity reflects the Asia-Pacific's autonomy and independence. The Asia-Pacific's political landscape is characterized by a multi-centric power structure, where major powers engage with smaller nations to co-lead the integration process. This means that power centers must provide regional public goods, establish shared norms, increase economic interdependence, and assume responsibilities that foster regional identity. Competitive multilateralism among major powers offers small and medium-sized countries opportunities to balance interests, navigate between larger powers, and act as buffers, thereby enhancing the flexibility and resilience of the Asia-Pacific order. Exclusive military alliances or economic blocs are incompatible with the broad, diverse, and multi-layered Asia-Pacific order. Only an order rooted in the region's historical traditions, diverse cultures, and interactive practices holds promise for the future. In the shared economic space of the Asia-Pacific, major powers like China and the United States are not engaged in a zero-sum contest of "your rise is my fall," but rather in a process of co-evolution, jointly shaping the Asia-Pacific order. China's multilateral diplomacy in the region, characterized by openness, inclusiveness, win-win cooperation, mutual benefits, and non-confrontation, has significantly increased its appeal to neighboring countries. The future trajectory of the Asia-Pacific order will largely depend on China's

interactions with regional nations. If China can provide greater market demand and consumption potential for its neighbors during the development of regional supply chains, offer more effective regional public goods for governance, and contribute to building an inclusive regional order that fosters stability and prosperity, then China's vision for coordinated regional development could surpass the bloc-oriented political landscape promoted by the United States, becoming the mainstream direction for the Asia-Pacific order. In constructing the Asia-Pacific regional order, the supply of regional public goods, such as consumer markets, is critical, as the supply-demand relationship of these goods will determine the development trajectory of the regional order.

6. Conclusion

China's multilateral diplomacy is grounded in the principles of "genuine multilateralism," emphasizing equal consultation, openness, inclusivity, mutual benefit, and win-win cooperation. With a steady and pragmatic approach, China seeks to benefit neighboring countries and enhance shared well-being, aiming for collective prosperity while contributing to the optimization and reshaping of the regional order. By offering a comprehensive package of regional public goods—encompassing material benefits, institutional cooperation, and ideological perspectives—China aims to build inclusive regional industrial chains, facilitate trade and investment through free trade agreements, and enhance security and trust to foster a stronger regional identity. This strategy promotes the inclusive transformation of the regional order. Simultaneously, China offers an alternative to the U.S.-led unilateralism and exclusive, confrontational small-scale multilateral alliances that maintain hegemonic power, reshaping narratives and redefining multilateralism to address global challenges. This approach provides a "China solution" for navigating the complexities of a changing global landscape, dealing with fragmented governance, escalating great-power competition, and rising distribution crises, which have contributed to a decline in multilateral cooperation. China's innovative multilateral diplomacy goes beyond extensive participation in existing multilateral organizations and advocating for fair and inclusive reforms. Initiatives like the "Belt and Road Initiative" and micro-regional cooperation corridors along the Silk Road, which China has initiated or co-led, deliver "three-in-one" public goods through consultation, joint development, and shared benefits. These initiatives integrate supply and consumption to build inclusive regional industrial chains, driving a more inclusive transformation of the regional economic order. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), by promoting a security community and the Global Security Initiative, provides a comprehensive set of public goods—covering security, development, and ideas—that address security challenges and contribute to an inclusive regional security order. Institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), BRICS, and the New Development Bank support the current international order by offering material benefits, refining multilateral frameworks, and providing value-driven guidance, thereby enhancing regional and global financial systems. The RCEP, a mega free trade agreement jointly promoted by China and ASEAN, lays a foundation for integrating diverse principles and institutions, paving the way for the establishment of an Asia-Pacific Free Trade Area and the

Asia-Pacific Community of Shared Future. The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism follows an inclusive and effective multilateralism framework characterized by “coexistence, co-governance, and shared benefits.” It leads the development and sharing of regional public goods, including water resources, infrastructure, and environmental initiatives, thereby creating an inclusive sub-regional cooperation framework and a high-quality Lancang-Mekong Community of Shared Future. The future of the Asia-Pacific regional order requires China and regional nations to leverage local cooperative practices and open regionalism as foundations for exercising agency and innovation in reshaping the region. These cross-regional, regional, sub-regional, and micro-regional multilateral cooperation frameworks form a network of China’s multilateral diplomatic efforts and serve as institutional platforms for deepening global partnerships and building a community of shared destiny with its neighbors. This network plays a vital and effective role in integrating and optimizing the region’s economic, security, and political order.

Acknowledgement

None.

Funding Statement

This paper presents findings from two projects funded by the National Social Science Fund: the Key Project “Sub-regional Cooperation and Changes in Regional Patterns in Southeast Asia” (Project No. 22ASS004) and the General Project “Risk Management and Mitigation of Default in Large-Scale Infrastructure Projects During the Implementation of the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’”(Project No. 20CGJ025).

Author Contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

Availability of Data and Materials

None.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the present study.

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