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## Potential threats the rise of China's economic and military power in the Asia Pacific region

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### Abstract

Since long ago, international scholars have predicted that China will rise as one of the great powers in the international political economy. Based on China's potential to rise as the world's number two power, this paper will discuss the forms of China's potential threats through economic and military means that can threaten the security of the Asia Pacific region. The main objective of this study is to examine the factors behind China's rise as a new power in the world economy and to identify the potential threat of China's military to the security of the Asia Pacific region. This study uses the concept of human security and security dilemma. The results of the study show that China has indeed succeeded in becoming a major power in the world economy after joining the WTO. However, the development of the international political economy today, shows that China has not fully challenged the existing international order through its military. China is seen to have worked hard to establish cooperation based on the spirit of the neighborhood and sustainable economic relations with countries in the Asia Pacific region and the United States.

**Keywords:** Resurrection China, power big, threat economy, threat safety, relationship regional

### Introduction

*Double-digit* economic growth over the past two decades has able to become an economic power that dominates production and markets in the Asia Pacific region. The combined economic power of China and Japan is enough to exclude the country's producers and markets from other regions in the Asia Pacific (Putra & Putri, 2021). In other words, it will affect the trade dominance of the United States in the region in the long run. If China's economic expansion continues, it will endanger the economic prospects for ASEAN because

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the diversion of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows to China is happening on a large scale (Li & Gallagher, 2022).

ASEAN countries for example are under strong competitive pressure. One of the indicators of friction between ASEAN and China is an investment in the manufacturing industry, where FDI has shifted to China, and countries in Southeast Asia need to redouble their efforts to attract back lost foreign investment. Thus, China's concern over the competition in FDI plagues ASEAN countries (Ullah et al., 2022). The much lower cost of manufacturing in China is considered to pose a particular threat to ASEAN exports for the industrial market (Claudio-Quiroga et al., 2022).

### **Literature Review**

Indonesia faces the problem of dumping the most goods among ASEAN countries. Most local traders in Java and Jakarta state that these Chinese products threaten the economy and local goods because the price of Chinese goods is much cheaper. For example, for the same price of a pair of shoes made in Indonesia, users can get five pairs of shoes made in China (Anele, 2021). As such, local traders admit that ACFTA needs to be abolished to revive local businesses and industries, especially the textile and clothing industry so that they can continue to thrive. If Chinese goods continue to enter for a long period in large quantities and cheaply, then the local manufacturing industry will be threatened or bankrupt (Alleyne et al., 2020).

China's entry into the WTO in 2001 was the main factor in China's success in dominating the ASEAN and global markets due to wider economic and trade liberalization (Li & Zhang, 2022). This situation will threaten the local economy if the ASEAN countries are not vigilant because Chinese goods compete competitively with the cheapest prices, capable of paralyzing the local goods industry. Although China's entry into the WTO provides many opportunities for ASEAN and surrounding countries, it also poses an economic threat to regional countries because China has successfully expanded its political influence and strengthened its strong economic power, and can influence the decisions of other countries. For example, ASEAN regional agreements and economic cooperation such as ACFTA play a big role for China together with ASEAN member countries (Darmanto et al., 2021).

China's ability in nuclear technology cannot be disputed and is indeed a security threat to the Asia Pacific region. China is not only able to build and own nuclear but also sell this technology to other countries. China is the main supplier of nuclear technology and missiles (war equipment) to Pakistan, Asia, and Africa. The rise of China's power in the Asia Pacific region is a security threat to Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States, to balance China's increasing economic and military strength. According to (Guifang & Jie, 2019), based on the rise of China's power in the military, it will tend to invite conflict and China will threaten the security of East Asian countries, especially Taiwan, by using power structures to make transformations covering economic, political, and military aspects.

But different from the view of (Goldstein, 2001), asserting that China is heading towards a developed economic country, therefore China began to prepare its country with all forms of internal strength covering economy, politics, and security. Therefore, his rise is not intended to challenge other powers or to want to go to war. This is a priority for the country of China

to maintain peace and security of the country, especially in the issue between China and Taiwan, and to create a safe environment to attract foreign investors to the country. Although China has always insisted that the rise of its military power is aimed at defending itself from the threat of external forces, the rise of China's military power is now evident through arms trade, nuclear development, and the increasing export of arms. For example, China's progress in producing military equipment, weapons, and vehicles has threatened the monopoly of the Russian market, which for a long time dominated the international arms market (Andresen, 2019).

## **Research Method**

Research is done to give answers to a matter or phenomenon that has, is, or has not happened. This study uses a qualitative approach to obtain data and information. This study uses available data strategies from books, journals, and online data related to China's economy and politics such as reports and statistical data obtained from the *IMF*, *World Bank*, *US Department of State*, *WTO*, and *CIA*.

## **Result and Discussion**

Since the 1997 crisis, Asian countries have experienced a decline in the export market except China showing an increase at a high rate 20%. The specific effect is seen based on the competitive position between China and ASEAN-5 in the US market. The quantity of exports to the US is the main category used to explain this competition. ASEAN countries' exports to the US since the mid-1990s have not shown a high growth rate compared to China, which has reached double-digit growth rates. The main factors affecting the export of ASEAN countries (Feenstra et al., 2019).

The US due to competition from China. The study conducted by Liu & Lou (2004) confirmed that there is economic competition between ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand with China being the processing place for the main goods and products of the world market. While the competition between China and Singapore usually occurs in the manufacturing sector (Xu & Wu, 2022).

In addition, there is also competition in attracting the amount of FDI inflows from developed countries such as Europe, Britain, Australia, and the Netherlands. FDI flows have experienced an inflow from Southeast Asia to China. The flow of FDI experienced a significant change when almost 70% of FDI flowed to China which previously flowed to Southeast Asia. The competition between China and ASEAN in attracting FDI worsened when the share between ASEAN countries decreased to 15% compared to FDI flowing to China increased to 85% in 2003, debated that competition in FDI can arise at any time, and countries with a less competitive economic environment will be in a state of danger and threat (Miao et al., 2020).

Because China has a large and cheap labor force, its expert force, and a wide geographical situation, China has succeeded in making its country a strategic location for foreign investor countries to invest in the country. Incentives and tariff reductions offered by China are

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welcomed by foreign investors to cooperate with China in the long term such as BMW automotive company, electrical and electronics company Sony, companies based on *medium technology products*, and world brand clothing companies such as Nike and Adidas (Jun et al., 2018). China has also succeeded in becoming the main supplier of children's toys to McDonald's for the worldwide market. This situation will produce products *made in China* for every human and household item.

### ***China's Entry into World Trade Organization***

*World Trade Organization* (WTO) is also associated with trade liberalization. This situation marks the beginning of a state of openness and relaxation in trade activities that will be gained by China and subsequently also affect Southeast Asia. China's membership in the WTO is considered a '*grand event*' in the global economy at the beginning of the 2nd century. This is because China's entry will open up more opportunities and challenges for China's trade relations with regional countries. The WTO will further increase the degree of openness of China's economy, thereby accelerating changes in the structure of the Chinese and global economy. Nevertheless, enterprises in China will be faced with fierce competition in terms of rapid import growth rates due to world demand. China's entry into the WTO will also make China a driving force in the economic growth of the Asia Pacific countries. Market opportunities for regional countries will be created through the liberalization and restructuring of China's industry (Scott & Wilkinson, 2022).

China has the potential to become a major power in the global economy and politics in the future. However, China's approach is very different from the United States' way of expanding its influence. China wants to be the most powerful country in the world. That is why China made many alliances and cooperation in economy, politics, and security, for example establishing economic cooperation with ASEAN, becoming a member of the IMF organization, and a member of the UN Security Council. Southeast Asia is indeed a region that China is paying attention to spread its influence to compete with America's power and influence in Southeast Asia. China helps Southeast Asian countries a lot towards stability by developing constructive relations. In addition, China always tries to show the good of its country to society and the world that its rise is peaceful. The rise of China was also greatly assisted by Southeast Asian countries by becoming a market and manufacturing location for its country's products (Zeng, 2022).

Now the rise of China's economic power is a concern and a threat to the Asia Pacific. In Southeast Asia for example, there is a lot of dumping of Chinese-made goods in the domestic market. This situation becomes a problem for local traders to compete with goods made in China or China Brands in selling local goods. According to Octavio (2011), one of the economic threats to Southeast Asia is now the economic power of China which dominates the local market. This situation occurred due to the ASEAN-China economic integration agreement, the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA). Through the ACFTA agreement, ASEAN member countries need to reduce tariffs imposed on more than 90% of imported goods and eliminate tariffs on some important products. The average tariff rate applied to goods made in China sold in ASEAN countries dropped from 12.8% to 0.6% with effect from 1 January 2010 and was adopted by six ASEAN member countries namely Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. While waiting for the implementation of the free trade area by other ASEAN member countries, the average tariff rate for ASEAN goods sold

in China has been lowered from 9.8% to 0.1%, this agreement has led to the liberalization of the economy and products with the elimination of tariff barriers (Li & Zhang, 2022).

The economies of China and the United States are two very strong and influential competing powers in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia is made a new development site for the manufacturing industry and urbanization of the 21st century. Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand have close relations with China, especially in regional economic cooperation. Nevertheless, Indonesia is seen as having a bit of a problem with China since the era of Suharto's rule and past historical experience makes the country not very close to China. Unlike Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand have good relations with China and are seen as ready and able to face China's economic competition compared to Indonesia (Sargent & Matthews, 2008).

Although most countries in Southeast Asia such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand have anti-dumping acts that are used to protect the market and consumer safety, these acts are seen to be not implemented comprehensively and are less effective in dealing with the problem of dumping goods from China. This situation is evident when Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand as well as other countries continue to be flooded with uncontrolled dumping of Chinese goods such as children's toys, plastic goods, shoes, clothes, mobile phones, food products, and so on. Usually, these items do not meet consumer safety specifications or international standards and they come in large quantities. In this situation, the role of the Chinese government is very necessary to carry out its proper responsibilities by monitoring the quality of goods to be exported and ensuring that exports are carried out according to legal channels and procedures to guarantee consumer safety. China once shook the world with the incident of the poisoned milk scandal in 2008 due to the occurrence of corruption among food quality officials (Garred, 2018).

The progress of a country's economic sector plays an important role in shaping or determining a country's defense and foreign policy. This is because the ability (capacity) and capability (capability) can be played by the economic sector itself either in terms of qualitative or quantitative contribution to the formation of the two policies above. The capabilities and capacities of this economic sector seep into the security, military, political, and social sectors which in turn prove the importance of the economic sector as the most important factor in a country. The economy plays an important role in the formation of defense policy and foreign policy because of the interdependence between countries. Rapid economic growth will usually lead to development in various sectors.

Most countries allocate a budget ranging from 1% to 30% of the entire Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for military development to maintain the internal and external security of the country. This expenditure is also used to prevent resistance or deal with crime, rebellion, secession, revolution, and coup. China allocates a large budget to the national military to finance the salaries of the ever-increasing number of troops, the cost of military training, maintenance of equipment and facilities, support of new operations, R&D, purchasing new weapons and spare parts, and war vehicles. It is estimated that in 2010, China has allocated around US\$ 100 billion for the national defense budget. This situation places China as the world's second-largest military spender after the United States, which is an increase of around 8% from 2009 (US\$ 88 billion). This figure means that in 2010 China spent around 1.4% of the country's GDP income on the military. Similarly, China is presenting its military financial

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report in 2010 has announced the military budget in 2011 is over 12.7% of the year's budget 2010 which is equivalent to US\$ 110 (Gao, 2022).

This situation shows that China wants to become a great power in the military and prepares itself with internal strength. Economic growth will be associated with GDP growth in the country. GDP will provide financial resources to generate the process of military development and modernization (Annual Military Report 2008). So the reciprocation is through the strengthening and modernization of the military which contributes to the stability of the country, guarantees national security, and the continuation of economic growth. Military strength through the possession of weapons and war equipment will help China to strengthen its position at the global level and prepare to face future challenges and threats to its country (Zhou & Laurenceson, 2022).

The forms of threats posed by China can be classified as follows, direct threats to people's lives and their activities, threats to the integrity of borders, threats to the way of life of a country, or threats to the freedom and independence of countries or institutions (Hovhannisyan et al., 2022). Often a phenomenon that can be seen is that state actors will spend a large amount of money on national defense provisions when facing a security threat whether it is an internal or external threat (Chen & Zheng, 2022).

### ***Threats to China's Military Capabilities***

(Yeh & Wu, 2022) make the important division between threats and vulnerabilities. Fragility is greatly contributed by geographical factors such as mountain passes, narrow waterways, major transport corridors, and so on. One of the ways to reduce this fragility or eliminate the threat is to increase military power, not only to increase one's capabilities but also to help other countries. When two or more parties share the same perceived security threat, they will engage in various military cooperation such as technical advice, arms guarantees, and information exchange up to a stronger form of cooperation which is a formal alliance (Wuthnow & Fravel, 2022).

China demands Russia sell weapons technology in defense platforms and advanced weapons to China. Moscow refused to do so because the sale of weapons and their components would be too risky. Russia fears that China will take advantage of the technology by engineering and replicating the tool or weapon, then selling it to the Asian market at a much lower price (Hovhannisyan et al., 2022). This threatens the arms sales market of Russia, which has been in the world's arms supplier sector for a long time. For example, in 2006, Russia refused to sell certain and selected sensitive technologies to China. This is to maintain the creation and avoid imitation by the Chinese state (Tsokhas, 2022).

### ***The rise of China and the sole dominance of America***

According to (C. Wang et al., 2021), Russia is now always sensitive to China's attitude that it often imitates other countries' products and sells them at cheap prices in most African and Latin American countries as well as Southeast Asia such as Indonesia and Thailand (Lee et al., 2022). For example, the J-11B aircraft and the J-15 fighter made in China imitate the products of Russian fighter aircraft namely the Sukhoi SU-27 and SU-33. The Russian arms market at the global level is decreasing especially for the purchase of air and sea weapons and vehicles from Russia. China's ability to imitate imported goods is increasing and this situation worries Russia about its country's products. Until 2010, Russia admitted that this attitude of

China continued especially in the weapons production industry (<http://weapons.technology>). As a result, both sides have reason to delay the purchase and sale of arms to each other. In 2009 and 2010, China reportedly reduced large arms orders from Russia because it was already capable and successful in producing various types of combat aircraft for sale abroad, especially equipment developed from Russian technological expertise. In addition, USA and Russian arms exports have also declined since 1994, but China's exports have shown an increase to the point of attracting world attention through the spread of arms and international nuclear suppliers (Colombo et al., 2021).

In the early stages, China is said not to show a high interest in the development of atomic energy. Even the top leaders of the military such as Mao Tze Tung and some other top leaders stated that nuclear is not everything in creating national security (MacKay et al., 2022). However, this view changed because it was influenced by the state of the balance of power that occurred at the beginning of the Cold War. In this regard, China thought that if it did not do something then the communist power would be underestimated in the era of ideological conflict that was going on at that time (Sauter et al., 2021).

All efforts carried out by China in the development of nuclear weapons are a form of vertical nuclear proliferation. It is a huge threat to the world, especially to the Asia Pacific region. Even worse, when China is also said to be involved in the development of nuclear weapons in several other countries (Franco et al., 2022). China contributes to international security threats because it supplies nuclear technology and weapons to Pakistan and weapons production technology to Iran and Algeria. China also supplies CSS-2-IRBM to Saudi Arabia, Silkworm (anti-ship missile) to Iran and Iraq, and missile technology to Pakistan, Iran, and several other countries. Not only that, but China also developed SRBM type M-9 and M-11 which Pakistan, Syria, and Iran are said to be interested in buying these weapons for a long period (Gaspari Cirne de Toledo & Cirne de Toledo Júnior, 2021).

### ***China's Threat to the United States***

The Guardian newspaper written by John Gray and Martin Jacques entitled *China and the End of* (Jiang et al., 2021) asserts that the rise of China is not only changing global geopolitics but also changing the way the world thinks. Although it is increasingly recognized that China's economic rise will change world politics, the most profound effect is on the global economy. If the 19th century, world influence was dominated by the British Empire, the 20th century was dominated by the United States, and now we are entering the Asian century dominated by the rise of China and its currency. According to the economist, (Lan et al., 2021) in *The Almighty Renminbi?* Indicating that the dollar's status as the primary reserve currency may soon disappear. This is because the dollar may be challenged by another currency, the renminbi (Jain & Lee, 2021).

This situation is a serious burden on America and a challenge to the country's ability to finance the budget and the trade deficit that will disappear. While major economic countries such as America, Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom experienced a recession in 2009 with world GDP projected to contract by 2.9%, China's economy was projected to grow by 7.7%. According to Goldman (2010), China's economy will surpass America's in 2027 (AlAlkim, 2022). The rise of China together with India in particular will bring down the curtain on the era of western domination that began about 1800 years ago. Instead of western

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universalism, the world community will feel the atmosphere of living in a non-western culture and China will emerge as a major influence (X. L. Wang et al., 2021).

The rise of China as an economic power that is likely to threaten other countries is gaining attention, especially when the global financial crisis occurs and the world is stuck in recession. However, it is expected that China's dramatic economic growth as well as the country's increasing geopolitical influence will constitute an economic, military, and cultural threat to the West rather than the countries of the Asia Pacific region. China will emerge as the world's new hegemony in the future and will compete with the power of the United States as the world's sole power. The Rise of China and the Demise of the Capitalist World Economy (Monthly Review Press: 208) states that China's growing economic power will have an impact on the global capitalist system and the western world (X. L. Wang et al., 2021).

### ***Analysis of China's Threat to the Asia-Pacific Region***

Companies are perceived as threats in different forms and activities. Therefore, the strategy taken to establish a relationship with these two forces is also different. China is perceived as an invisible threat with non-coercive behavior and foreign policy, while the US is seen as a tangible threat with a more harsh foreign policy behavior and orientation either joining it or being considered an enemy, especially in strategic orientation (Meijer, 2021).

ASEAN perceives China as a power that seeks hegemony in the region and aspires to become a great power. This ambition has been translated by China with its military and armament modernization efforts on a large scale. For example, China since the beginning has bought a lot of Cold War weapons from Russia such as submarines, missiles, fighter planes, and tanks. These efforts are not an obstacle for China because the country has strong economic strength, which has recorded economic growth of over 10% over the past twenty years (Fedorova & Novosyolova, 2022). China's economic prosperity and China's modernization efforts have created a security dilemma and are perceived as a form of threat to countries in the Asia Pacific region including the ASEAN bloc. Furthermore, China has spent a lot on the aspect of weaponry beyond its own needs as an effort to 'accumulate weapons stocks' that can be used for military purposes on other countries, especially countries that are in conflicts with China such as Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries in the disputed issue of the Spratly islands in the South China Sea (Chand & Garcia, 2021).

However, until now China has not shown any interest in discussing or resolving the archipelago dispute with the ASEAN countries involved. In this regard, Malaysia has transferred the burden of its dispute with China to the ASEAN organization. Furthermore, several other countries in ASEAN face the same issue. So any decision made by China regarding the dispute will be equally faced by ASEAN in the future (Akimov et al., 2021). As well as aspects of China's military and weaponry modernization, the security dilemma faced by ASEAN is shared with other countries in the Asia Pacific region. Therefore, the interest shown by China to attend the ASEAN meeting is seen as a way to ease the dilemma. Next, there is a better opportunity for negotiations with China (Ulatowski, 2022), although until now this problem has only been preceded by economic discussions and regional cooperation, ASEAN-China trade relations show a positive situation and reduce China's aggressive actions on ASEAN member countries to protect the economic interests of benefiting both parties (Lobo, 2021).



In addition, in terms of economic growth and the impact on the environment, China needs to be more sensitive and emphasize the restoration and care of the environment. Driven by strong economic growth, energy demand from China has been increasing. China is the world's largest energy customer and the third largest customer of crude oil importers in the world, after the United States and Japan. China is also the second largest energy producer in the world, after the United States (Munir & Safdar, 2021). China's energy consumption is expected to grow by more than 4% in 2030 due to economic and industrial development factors. Coal is the main energy source of China's industry around 70%, China is the largest producer and customer of coal in the world. Thus, for the continuation of China's industrial growth, the demand for coal will continue to increase significantly (Fang & Liu, 2022). The use of coal and China's dependence on coal will continue to increase, thus China has emerged as the world's largest contributor to air pollution such as greenhouse gas pollution, acid rain, and carbon dioxide gas (Baltabayeva et al., 2021).

### **Conclusion**

The rise of China's economic, political, and military power is indeed feared by most countries, especially the United States because China can end the influence of the United States in the Asia Pacific region. The rise of China's power in the global economy poses a threat to the local economy and market of Asia Pacific countries, especially ASEAN. However, from the aspect of security, China's military capability and modernization are more evident in threatening East Asian countries, especially Taiwan. China has all economic strengths such as capital, energy resources, and international trade areas, cheap goods prices, the use of high technology, expert energy, military strength, and cheap labor have made regional countries challenged by China's power and unable to compete with it.

In addition, China and the Asia Pacific countries do not promote economic integration at the regional level and coordinate the product production chain more efficiently, so the almost identical export structure is feared to affect bilateral relations between China and the region. Political issues will also affect bilateral political relations, for example, the issue of territorial overlap at the border and island claims in the South China Sea, the Taiwan issue, as well as problems arising from regional agreements such as ACFTA. East Asian countries such as Japan, Taiwan, and Korea consider China a security threat to their respective countries. East Asian countries are made up of developed countries from the global economic aspect and are advanced in technology, military, and nuclear and have trade influence in the Asia Pacific region. Thus, economic issues and territorial and archipelago disputes are seen as a debate in Southeast Asia.

There is no doubt that the Asia Pacific region has various security threats between countries. Therefore, regional countries should accept China with an open heart so that conflicts can be avoided while also being able to continue to enjoy the economic opportunities and advantages offered by China in economic and security aspects.

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