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TOWARD “LAND” OR TOWARD “SEA”?

The High-Speed Railway and China’s Grand Strategy

Wu Zhengyu

China’s maritime development having come up against pressures and challenges in recent years, the concept of “strategic hedging”—that is, pursuit of and investment in policies meant to protect the nation against the effects of geopolitical and economic uncertainty—has emerged. One of its most important proponents is Gao Bai, an ethnic Chinese professor of sociology at Duke University (in Durham, North Carolina) and the author of the article “The High-Speed Railway and China’s Grand Strategy in the 21st Century” (高铁与中国21世纪大战略).¹ Professor Gao believes that the 2008 global financial crisis and the return, through its own strategic adjustment, of the United States to the Asia-Pacific region mean that China’s “blue-water strategy” has come to an end. The financial crisis severely battered China’s export market, which will be difficult to restore even after the crisis has subsided. America’s return to the Asia-Pacific region has not only complicated China’s situation in its own neighborhood but made East Asian economic integration more difficult to achieve. As Professor Gao points

out, because China’s economic transformation cannot be achieved in the short term, the nation must find a new way out—and a high-speed rail provides a realistic way to break through the current impasse.

The development of a high-speed rail has the potential not only to promote the integration of Eurasian economies but to prevent a reversal of globalization and gain time for China’s domestic economic restructuring. A high-speed rail could also represent a hedging strategy, leading to a

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more favorable position for China in the global arena. Professor Gao stresses that such a project, a land/sea hybrid in nature, offers a measure of freedom of strategic choice: if a problem arises on the maritime front, China can develop westward and dedicate itself to the integration of Eurasian economies; if difficulties emerge on the Eurasian landmass, China can turn eastward, dedicating itself to the integration of Asian-Pacific economies. It is no exaggeration to say that the importance of Professor Gao's article is on a level well beyond that of a high-speed rail in itself. The strategy that he advocates is essentially related not only to China's present dilemma but at the same time to China's strategic choices into the foreseeable future.

There is no doubt that, China at the moment being under intense pressure, the hedging strategy that Professor Gao proposes is highly appealing. If this proposition really comes to fruition, for quite some time China will no doubt enjoy the enviable position of having the best of both worlds on the global political and economic stage. But the problem is that while Professor Gao's article is principally based on the usefulness of the high-speed rail in integrating the economy of the Chinese mainland, this proposal is not as feasible as it seems at first glance; also, and more importantly, even if it were realizable, it would not help China escape its present conundrum. In modern history, the emergence and development of the railway has indeed played an important role in increasing the power of continental countries vis-à-vis maritime countries. However, this does not mean that we must see the importance of the railway as unquestionable. In actuality, though more than a hundred years have passed since the emergence of the railway, the Chinese "heartland" mentioned by Professor Gao (he borrowed it from Halford Mackinder's *Democratic Ideals and Reality*) is still a relatively backward region. Since there exists no substantial "generation gap" between the high-speed rail and its existing precursor, the modern railway, it is highly doubtful whether the high-speed rail really has the force to "integrate the economies of the Eurasian landmass."

An even more important question is, Can the continental strategy with the economic integration of the Eurasian landmass as the core really live up to the strategic utility to which Gao refers? The answer to this involves three issues. First, can the continental strategy help China sidestep strategic contradictions and conflicts between China and America? Second, as a pillar in the economic integration of the Eurasian landmass, what impact will the high-speed rail have on Sino-Russian relations? Third, what are the possible strategic impacts of great Chinese inroads into Central Asia? In view of Professor Gao's proposed strategy relating to the direction of China's long-term development, it is necessary to explore and analyze systematically the wisdom of his hedging strategy and on this basis strive to clarify what path China should take in response to maritime pressure.²

THE CONTINENTAL STRATEGY AND AMERICAN STRATEGIC MISGIVINGS ABOUT CHINA

The first problem inherent in Professor Gao’s “hedging strategy” is doubt as to whether the continental strategy, with the integration of the Eurasian economies as its core element, will actually lessen the current strategic contradictions and conflicts between China and the United States. The key to the answer lies mainly in America’s strategic interests, as well as in the contradictory nature of present-day Sino-American strategic conflicts.

As was once true for Great Britain, the position of America in the world today as the dominant maritime power and system leader stands primarily on two pillars. One is the balance of power on the Eurasian landmass core (Europe and East Asia), and the other is global economic, technological, and military superiority. In the history of the modern world, the system leader has been without exception the leading maritime power of the era, and aside from economic, technological, and military superiority, the preservation of a balance of power in the core regions of the Eurasian landmass has always been an important means by which the system leader has maintained its power advantage or supremacy.³ First, once a single power achieves hegemony in the Eurasian landmass core, it automatically gets hold of the necessary resources and wherewithal to challenge the existing hegemon—the dominant maritime power and system leader. That is why, throughout history, the leading maritime power and system leader has always played the leading role in checking and balancing against covetous states. Likewise, once a country achieves hegemony of the Eurasian landmass core, it has the ability to close off completely the continental market from the leading maritime power. The latter has a vested interest in maintaining an open system, requiring the political and economic doors of the system’s core region to stay open for itself and its followers.⁴

In the case of America, modern technological developments have to a large extent removed the possibility of being invaded. However, a hegemonic power with control over Europe or East Asia can still threaten America’s leadership of the international system. First, American values could not survive in a world in which the United States was surrounded by a hostile and powerful environment, since the challenge of hegemonic powers in Europe or East Asia could possibly force America to become a “barracks” or “fortress” state.⁵ Second, American freedom and prosperity necessarily rely on an open door to the core regions of the world (especially Europe and East Asia), doors through which American economy, politics, and culture can pass. But any hegemonic state on the Eurasian continental core would be able to close off these regions completely.⁶ Preservation of the balance of power of the Eurasian core region is therefore directly related to the superiority of the leading maritime power and system leader; Britain once

saw maintenance of the balance of power system in Europe as one of its fundamental interests; so does America today, in both Europe and East Asia, including the latter's littoral seas.

It is for this reason that the United States today is vigilant to guard against the rise of China, and not, largely, because China's powerful expansion or the growth of its naval forces substantially threatens American homeland security or the safety of the sea-lanes. The possibility of the Chinese navy whipping the American navy on high seas does not exist and will not into the foreseeable future. American strategic apprehensions over China mainly revolve around the consequences should the rise of China damage the balance of power on the Eurasian landmass. The rapid rise of China's economic, political, and military might in the post-Cold War years, China's natural superiority in continental East Asia and on the East Asian littoral seas (within the first island chain), and the increasingly serious imbalance of the East Asian regional system resulting from the rise of China have become not only sticking points, structural contradictions, between America and China but also the fundamental complicating forces in relations between China and its maritime neighbors. This East Asian imbalance also serves as a major reason for deep American concern over displays of China's naval power in recent years.⁷

All this means that America is concerned about the exponential development of Chinese sea power in recent years not because China has the naval power to compete effectively with America's oceanic hegemony (or for command of the seas within the first island chain) but because that development will greatly reduce America's capability to meddle in the regional balance of power in East Asia and its littoral seas. Such meddling is very crucial to the United States if it hopes to prevent possibly military Chinese expansion and to preserve or solidify its own hub-and-spoke alliance system in East Asia.⁸

If, however, for the purposes of strategic hedging, China begins operating in Central Asia, not only will China's economic influence in Central Asia rise, but China will be enabled to obtain a magnitude of political sway in there. But even if the proposed scheme smoothly comes to fruition, the consequences will be nothing more than consolidation of China's advantage on the continent; the imbalance of power on the Eurasian landmass—which America has always regarded as its crucial national interest—will be even more severe.⁹

China's move to consolidate its position in Eurasia and America's desire to preserve the continental balance of power are not merely incompatible; actually, they are diametrically opposed. In modern history, Napoleon's France and Hitler's Germany, on the basis of the lessons from, respectively, the failures of maritime expansion pursued by Louis XIV and Wilhelm II, turned to continental expansion, but the results were the same. The maritime consequences of a continental

strategy toward Central Asia would in no way circumvent China's deepening strategic contradictions with America at sea; in fact, they might only accelerate and deepen them. America's overriding objective in East Asia in the post-Cold War era has been to prevent China's emergence as a continental and maritime power able to challenge its own superiority in the western Pacific. Strategically, America could contain Chinese expansion at sea while at the same time exerting tremendous pressure on China's vast land border, which would force China to divert precious strategic resources to the defense of the border.¹⁰

At least in theory, if Sino-U.S. strategic contradictions deepen further, the United States will likely adopt in the future certain measures toward China similar to those once used against the Soviet Union—containing and weakening China's strength and influence through an array of allies along its lengthy periphery. These alliances, once established, will constitute an effective complement to America's bilateral alliance system in the Pacific Rim. In an important sense, America's worry is not China's outward-oriented development; this type of development will only increase, not reduce, China's dependence on, and integration into, the international system dominated undoubtedly by the United States—one of the principal goals of America's China policy since the Richard Nixon presidency. Taking the long view, America's concern over China's future strategic orientation is that it will probably adopt a defensive position on the maritime front while adopting aggressive policies on the mainland, thus establishing a relatively closed sphere of influence into which America cannot project significant influence. In light of this, the American strategic focus will be fixated not merely on preventing China's expansion toward the sea (toward Southeast Asia) but also on preventing China from expanding on the mainland. The latter form of strategic defense in the future will likely require America to focus on powers and countries adjacent to China, especially India, Russia, and the Central Asian states.

THE DUAL CHARACTER OF THE HEARTLAND POWER

The second problem inherent in the “hedging strategy” proposed by Professor Gao is what the potential strategic impact of a continental strategy, with economic integration of the Eurasian landmass as the core, will be on already precarious Sino-Russian relations. The key to the answer lies to a large extent in the dual character, in terms of strategic orientation, of the “heartland power”—a concept that has unfortunately been ignored or dismissed by most students and observers of geostrategy in the postwar years.

As the continental power of the heartland, Russia has a dual strategic character. On the one hand, the Russians as the direct successors to the nomadic grasslands people of the heartland occupy a unique geographical position that has enabled them to apply enormous pressure on states on their periphery, by the

actual or potential threat of territorial expansion. However, on the other hand, so long as Russia does not intend to establish some form of hegemony over states on its periphery, it is also the most effective guarantor of peace on the Eurasian continent.¹¹ This dual character of Russia as the heartland power means that so long as it eschews the dream of a Eurasian empire, Russia and the leading maritime power should share similar, or even the same, primary strategic interests. This point has been proved more than once in modern history; Russia itself, despite longtime antagonism toward Britain previously and the United States since then, has seldom clashed directly with the leading maritime power and system leader.¹² Instead, throughout modern history Russia has always sought to make alliances with Britain, and later the United States, to fight jointly against rimland challenger states, including Napoleonic France and Wilhelm II's and Hitler's Germany, which had struggled for the hegemony over the European continent. Given the strategic character of Russia as the heartland power, it can be reasonably said that the end of the Cold War and the continuing weakness of contemporary Russia have largely restored the harmony of interest between the heartland power and the United States, as the leading maritime power and system leader. The nexus of this strategic uniformity is prevention of the rise of and any challenge from a great power located on the rimland. Such a challenge would apply a great deal of pressure not only on the United States but also, given its unique geostrategic position, on Russia.

In fact, in its opposition to European integration and eastward expansion before and after the end of the Cold War, we can see Russia's concerns. During the Cold War there were two strands of thinking to the Soviet Union's policy toward Western Europe policy—opposition to America's military presence in Western Europe and to multifaceted integration tending to convert Western Europe into an independent power center. In the context of the Cold War, that fact that these two strands of thinking were separate was not obvious; after the Cold War, however, Russia's opposition to the eastward expansion of the European Union and to America were no longer linked, as they had been. The former exists essentially to prevent the emergence of a unified Europe, with Russia left on the outside. This policy does not involve hegemonic intentions but rather seeks to avoid a new type of imbalance.¹³ Similarly, Russia is also vigilant against the post-Cold War rise of an independent power center in East Asia. From the geostrategic perspective, Central Asia and the Far East have significance for Russia equivalent to that of Latin America for the United States. The Soviet Union's policy toward Japan before and during World War II and, during the Cold War, its stationing of millions of troops on the Sino-Soviet border in disregard of the tremendous cost vividly illustrate Russia's vigilance over the situation in the East Asian continent. With

history in mind, it can be argued reasonably that Russia today should share some of America’s worry at China’s rise. Given that Central Asia and the Far East have always constituted Russia’s soft underbelly, the possible spillover effects inherent in China’s tremendous population alone, regardless of other elements, would represent a great potential challenge in Russian minds.¹⁴

Like European countries facing the Atlantic, China is a land/sea hybrid power, with one side facing an open ocean and no insurmountable obstacle on its land frontiers. This type of country usually faces a basic dilemma in terms of its choice of strategic orientation—that is, whether toward land or toward sea. Such countries, under pressure from both land and sea, are often exposed to a double vulnerability. Since the Opium War in 1840, China has over the long term been both weak and poor, to a large extent because pressure has come from both sea and land. In the modern period, China has only twice temporarily escaped this strategic dilemma—once during the Sino-Soviet alliance in the 1950s, and again since the 1990s and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The present reprieve has in recent years made it possible for China to concentrate on developing a maritime capability. From a macrohistorical perspective, it is of paramount, inestimable importance for China to develop and maintain as cooperative a relationship with Russia as possible, not only for China’s seaborne export-oriented economic development but also to avoid attack from both land and sea, because China faces significant strategic pressure on the maritime front.

It is for this reason that the high-speed rail links integrating Eurasian economies to which Professor Gao refers may under no circumstances come at the expense of the painstakingly reconstructed relations between China and Russia. This point similarly means that for China to make inroads into Central Asia to promote Eurasian economic integration without securing Russian support or at least acquiescence carries great costs and risks. Also, the possibility of failure is great. However, whether from a historical or practical point of view, it is difficult to imagine Russia allowing China to make such significant inroads into Central Asia; objectively speaking, the rise of Chinese influence in Central Asia will necessarily mean the reduction of Russia’s, even lessening the weight of Russia’s great bargaining chip with China—energy.¹⁵ Russia may not have the wherewithal to compete economically with China in Central Asia, but that certainly does not mean that Russia will turn a proverbial blind eye to China in Central Asia. Strategically speaking, the meaning of Eurasian economic integration as proposed by China is somewhat similar to that of America’s “Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership” to China. These two economic-integration schemes are both connected with transparent political ambitions and impacts. In view of this, it is easy to imagine that if China really makes significant inroads into Central Asia, not

only will Sino-Russian relations be complicated but there may be created between China and Russia a climate of competition in Central Asia, whose results may even involve some degree of Russo-American cooperation (though not deliberate) against China.

Empirical evidence provided by history suggests that mutual vulnerability between two continental powers is usually far greater than that between a continental power and a maritime power. This point is intimately related to a maritime country's capability and interests.¹⁶ First, for reasons of tradition and geography, maritime powers generally do not maintain strong armies, especially in peacetime, and thus rarely pose threats to the survival of other great powers. Large armies massing on borders threaten—or simply have the potential to threaten—the territorial integrity of other states in a way that naval power and economic strength do not.¹⁷

Second, the key to the viability of America's hegemonic position today is the nation's ability to maintain superiority in the leading economic, military, and technological fields. But this type of superiority essentially cannot be maintained through military means alone. Despite America's ability to impose its will on weaker states on some occasions, it is generally through means other than naked military force. More importantly, in terms of capabilities, the United States can hardly expect to coerce other great powers to conform to its will.¹⁸ Since the end of the Cold War, despite unending difficulties, Sino-American relations have shown considerable endurance and flexibility. This resilience is a product not only of the two countries' economic complementarities but also of their differences in capabilities and interests. Global powers usually have a greater range of strategies for increasing their influence than solely coercive force. Such flexibility, however, does not exist between China and Russia. Not only do these two countries lack economic complementarities, but their capabilities and interests are surprisingly similar. Thus, Sino-Russian relations essentially are those of two continental great powers.

A "EURASIAN UNION" AND THE STRATEGIC POSITION OF CENTRAL ASIA

The third problem of the strategic hedging to which Professor Gao refers relates to the possible strategic impacts of China's major push into Central Asia. First of all we have to dispel a serious misunderstanding that has plagued China's foreign policy in recent years, regarding the political effects of economic development.

Since the policy of "reform and opening up" China's economy has maintained high-speed growth. This growth not only provides a solid foundation for China's rise but serves as a powerful weapon of its foreign policy. It can be said that the significant achievements of contemporary China's foreign policy and the rapid

development of its economy are more or less intrinsically linked. However, there are very few “one size fits all” truths in the world, and no policy in international politics is effective in every situation. Rapid economic growth, with resulting boom, has provided China with a powerful political lever in East Asia. However, the political influence that can be sought through economic advantage is inherently limited, and once this limit is exceeded, efforts may actually be counterproductive. In recent years, the disparity between political relations and economic links in East Asia (including Northeast and Southeast Asia) has vividly proved this point. To some extent, it can be said that today East Asian countries’ strategic and political dependence on the United States is largely aimed at offsetting the political and strategic consequences, or even risks, of their economic dependence on China.¹⁹ From this perspective, it can be reasonably expected that as economic integration between East Asian countries and China deepens, their dependence on China’s economy will deepen as well, and their political and strategic dependence on the United States will become increasingly serious.

To a large extent, this logic also applies to Central Asian countries—that if China increases its economic penetration of Central Asia, that region’s countries will likely, in the interest of maintaining political and strategic autonomy, opt to strengthen strategic cooperation with other powers as a means of hedging against political risks caused by economic dependence. That is to say, Chinese inroads into the Central Asian region may probably create another instance of separation between political relations and economic links. Strictly speaking, that separation, which is now widespread in East Asia, does not come as a surprise; according to the logic of an anarchical system, it is the normal reaction of weak countries facing strong and rising neighbors.²⁰

From a strategic standpoint, China, being a “land/sea hybrid power,” at least in theory, is likely to project its political and economic expansion in two directions—one toward Southeast Asia, the other toward Central Asia. These two regions are not merely increasingly reliant on China for economic well-being; more importantly, since the end of the Cold War they have been marked by a kind of power vacuum.

Southeast Asia’s power vacuum is at present being swiftly and effectively filled by U.S. efforts to return Southeast Asia to the American embrace, along with the constant expansion of two potential powers in the region, India and Japan—although Southeast Asia and mainland China are culturally and economically joined at the hip. In an important sense, this is the basic motivation underlying America’s unrelenting efforts in recent years to stir up trouble and discontent in Southeast Asia.²¹ Historically, in contrast, America’s influence in Central Asia has been limited; this region has traditionally fallen within Russia’s sphere of influence. However, since the end of the Cold War, Russia’s persistent weaknesses

have created great political uncertainty in Central Asia. In some sense, the power vacuum now existing there is not only favorable to the possible revitalization of Islamic extremism in this area but also, given Central Asia's abundant resources, hugely tempting for China, which has been seeking all over the world the natural resources necessary to maintain its high-speed economic development.²²

Corresponding to America's new rebalancing policy in Southeast Asia, Russia is at present stepping up the pace of its own return to Central Asia. On 3 October 2011, in an article in *Izvestia*, Vladimir Putin, then the Russian premier, proposed a "Eurasian Union." On 18 November 2011 a formal agreement was signed among Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan formally establishing a Eurasian Union by 2015. Putin's initiative is not purely economic; its political meaning is very clear. A Eurasian Union formed along China's northern border will resemble the former Soviet Union as a political and economic entity. In this sense it will be strikingly similar to America's efforts in Southeast Asia in recent years, both being strategic moves, almost identical in nature. This strategic move by Russia to fill up the power vacuum in Central Asia means that Chinese pursuit of economic integration of the Eurasian landmass by a push into Central Asia would, instead of offsetting the great pressure on the maritime front, probably stimulate strongly unfavorable, even antagonistic, reactions from Russia. In fact, only a basic understanding of the strategic implications of a Eurasian Union allows us to understand why China cannot expect to achieve the so-called hedging goal by pushing into Central Asia.²³

Generally speaking, the Eurasian Union will have two negative consequences for China: a serious constraint on access to energy from Central Asia and a substantial hollowing-out of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Contemporary China's high-speed economic development has created a serious problem for it—increasing dependence on foreign sources of energy. The Middle East is the principal source of imported energy today, but the political situation in the region is complex, its countries have intimate ties to the United States, and, even more importantly, control of the sea-lanes on which China's imported oil flows remains in American hands. All of this makes Central Asia and Russia irreplaceable for China's energy security. Once the Eurasian Union as advocated by Russia comes to fruition, China will still wish to obtain energy from Central Asia but will likely pay a much higher price than in the past. The Sino-Russian energy game essentially hinges on Central Asian countries. So long as China can access energy at a cheaper price from Central Asian countries than from Russia, Russia will not be able to challenge China on the energy question. But once Russia and Central Asian states take a united approach on energy issues, the loser will be China.

One of China’s great diplomatic achievements since “reform and opening up” has been the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which comprises China, Russia, and four Central Asian states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. However, these Central Asian states are also all designated members of the Eurasian alliance. It is not difficult to imagine that the Eurasian Union, once formed, will not only seriously weaken China’s leading role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization but effectively empty the organization of any substance. In an important sense, the Eurasian Union as advocated by Russia is essentially a strategic hedge against the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; from the Russian perspective, China’s leading role makes the organization a vehicle through which China can increase its influence in Central Asia. The Eurasian Union agreement does not necessarily turn Russia into an enemy of China, but it represents Russia’s preventive strategy against China’s rise and the ensuing strategic ramifications. Thus, if China really attempts to integrate the Eurasian economies by means of a high-speed railway, the project may not only produce a new pattern of political and economic separation (政经分离) but may even turn Central Asia into something of a new cold-war frontier.

Professor Gao’s proposition to the effect that China, given its land/sea hybrid nature, enjoys much freedom of strategic choice implicitly assumes that the strategic contradiction now existing between America and Russia is irreconcilable. However, in the 1970s China, on the basis of its perceived national interests, could boldly break from the shackles of ideology to make an alignment with the United States in a united front against the Soviet Union. It cannot be taken for granted that in the future Russia and the United States will never stand together in common interest against China.

THE PATH CHINA’S PEACEFUL DEVELOPMENT SHOULD TAKE

As a land/sea hybrid power, China must pay close attention to two interrelated problems in determining its long-term strategic development. First, as a hybrid power, China has to strike an appropriate balance in the distribution of resources between land and sea. Second, on the basis of the balance between the two strategic directions, China also must choose between land and sea as its own long-term, leading development direction.²⁴

Compared to a landlocked or island country, a land/sea hybrid power like China generally has certain obvious strategic weaknesses: one is the strategic dilemma between facing toward the land and facing toward the sea; a second is the dual pressure from both land and sea; third is the risk that resources to serve the greater national strategy can be too easily dispersed. Over the past five centuries, suffering from the unique weaknesses and constraints of a land/sea

hybrid power, China missed several precious opportunities to develop itself into a powerful, modern state. The safety and stability of its land boundary in the post-Cold War period, allowing China to concentrate its energy and resources on seaborne development, do not mean that its strategic vulnerabilities as a land/sea hybrid power have absolutely disappeared, once and for all. In fact, to ensure its long-term safety and security, China still has to find the appropriate balance between land and sea. Most importantly, for a relatively long time China will have to constrain its land-oriented activity to ensure stable relationships with neighboring powers, especially Russia.

China must establish on the basis of the land/sea balance its dominant direction of development. Modern historical experience has shown that land/sea hybrid powers, once achieving stability of their land borders, principally thereafter focus their energy on sea-oriented development. The viability of this pathway has already been proven in the past thirty years by the success of the “reform and opening up” policy. Even if the high-speed rail ultimately brings about the successful integration of Eurasian economies, the crucial point is that it cannot replace the economic benefits and social impacts of sea-oriented development. In terms of economic development, Eurasian economic integration cannot serve as a vital substitute for China’s current multifaceted dependence on the markets of developed countries, nor can it replace China’s dependence on the less developed markets of Africa and Latin America. Within China, the social impacts of sea-oriented development versus those of land-oriented development may be very different. These two developmental directions in actuality relate to the rise and fall of different social forces within China, in which one’s loss is another’s gain. This win-lose scenario is crucial to the development of China’s domestic political environment.

Indeed, China’s maritime-oriented development of recent years has encountered a series of major obstacles. These problems do not necessarily mean that China should abandon its maritime-dominant development direction but rather that it must optimize and improve the current development course as much as possible. One of the most significant issues in this regard is how to deal with outward-oriented development in light of dual pressures from the leading maritime great power and from neighboring states. Throughout modern history, the rimland powers that have attempted to pursue maritime transformation (especially France under Louis XIV and Germany under Wilhelm II) have failed, to a large extent because of the obvious common interest between the leading maritime power and the neighboring countries in preventing the rise of a land/sea hybrid power on the rimland.

The most important issue facing contemporary China’s outward-oriented development is how to overcome pressure from neighboring states, exemplified

clearly in the challenges China has endured in recent years in the East China Sea and the South China Sea even though the Chinese government has repeatedly shown no intention of challenging the existing international order. This argument relates to the global, not regional, balance of power, though the latter is naturally the focal point of neighboring states. Strictly speaking, to dispel effectively suspicion and pressure from neighboring states, China should strive to establish a series of regional institutions, with “all hands on deck” throughout the process, not only taking the initiative in shaping a regionalized system binding China and its neighbors but tolerating participation by outside powers (principally the United States). The reason for the latter point lies in the fact that without the guarantees of extraregional powers, China simply cannot form any meaningful institutional mechanism with neighboring countries, especially second-level powers and smaller states.

Another problem that contemporary China’s export-oriented development needs to overcome is pressure from the leading maritime power and system leader, namely, the United States. In addition to optimizing existing strategies, when China responds to this type of pressure it must pay close attention to creating a truly open international order, regionalized and globalized, and taking into consideration the historically formed core interests of the leading maritime power and system leader. In short, one of the core interests of the leading maritime power and system leader lies in keeping the Eurasian core regions (especially Europe and East Asia) politically, economically, and culturally open to itself as well as to its various allies and followers. Thus for the foreseeable future China must not only tolerate the participation of the leading maritime power and system leader in shaping the regional system but also establish a truly open ideology. Only in this way can China effectively lessen, if not eliminate, the strategic distrust of its long-term intentions widely held by the United States and by China’s neighboring states.

NOTES

This article is the fruit of discussions between the author and Professor Ma Jun, associate researcher at the School of International Studies and Foreign Affairs, Shanghai International Studies University. On the basis of this original perspective, I made further modifications on and additions to the original argument. I express sincere thanks to Professor Ma Jun for his help.

1. Professor Gao Bai’s article originally appeared in the 11 March 2011 *经济观察报* (*Economic*

Observer), a newspaper located in Beijing, and thereafter, along with several other articles, in the book 《高铁与中国21世纪大战略》 (*The High-Speed Railway and China’s Grand Strategy in the 21st Century*), which was published by China Social Sciences Press (Beijing) in 2012.

2. In addition to Professor Gao Bai’s article, Professor Wang Jisi of the School of International Relations, Peking University, recently published “西进, 中国地缘战略的再平衡”

- [Westward: The Rebalancing of China's Geo-strategy], 《环球时报》 [Global Times], 17 October 2012. Professor Wang makes strategic propositions similar to those of Professor Gao, though through different approaches. Professor Wang Jisi also argues that China should reorient its strategic direction from the seas to land, especially to Central Asia. Although my article is aimed against Professor Gao's strategic proposition, the reasoning presented here also can be used against Professor Wang's.
3. Michael Sheehan, *The Balance of Power: History and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 115.
 4. Ludwig Dehio, *The Precarious Balance* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), pp. 166, 263.
 5. Walt W. Rostow, *The United States in the World Arena* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. 543–44.
 6. Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 2006), p. 33.
 7. Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), p. 7.
 8. Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, *Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2012), p. 22.
 9. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy*, p. 7.
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