



A REVIEW OF THE CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS ACCORDING TO THE RISE OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY AND THE HEGEMONIC COMPETITION: THE STRATEGIC CONSIDERATION OF THE CROSS-OCEANIC CANAL

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Abstract

According to "A German Media Forecasts the next 30 year of China" a report which appeared in November 2016 in the internet, around the year 2033, surrounding the Chinese mainland, a Greater China region will be formed. It is expected that its total economy will be similar in size to that of the United States. It seems inevitable that by 2040, the Oriental world wealth will be more than the Western world's, while the global GDP ranking after re-shuffling may be sorted as follows: 1. Greater China; 2. European Union; 3. North America (USA and Canada); 4. Japan; 5. Republic of Greater Korea; and, 6. India. Through the presentation of this argument, this article hopes to understand the process of China's rise, the Chinese community's future overall cooperation, as a way to approach the hegemonic competition between China and the United States, and the future of cross-strait relations. Finally, from the angle of the trans-oceanic canal construction, some observations will also be made.

Keywords: Cross-strait relations, rise of Chinese community, hegemonic competition, cross-oceanic canal.

Titulo en Castellano: Una revision de las relaciones en el Estrecho de Taiwán teniendo en cuenta el auge de la comunidad china y la competición hegemónica: La consideración estratégica del Canal transoceánico

Resumen:

De acuerdo con el informe " las previsiones de los medios de comunicación alemanes sobre China en los próximos 30 años" aparecido en internet en noviembre de 2016, en el año 2033 se formará la región de la Gran China rodeando a China continental. Se espera que su economía sea similar a la de Estados Unidos. Parece inevitable que la riqueza del mundo oriental sea superior a la del mundo occidental en 2040, y el ranking del PNB quedaría así: 1. La Gran China; 2. La Unión Europea; 3. América del Norte (Estados Unidos y Canadá); 4. Japón; 5. La República de la Gran Corea; y 6. La India. Desde esta perspectiva, este artículo presenta la competición hegemónica existente entre China y Estados Unidos y el futuro de las relaciones en el Estrecho de Taiwan. Finalmente se hacen unas observaciones teniendo en cuenta la construcción del Canal transoceánico

Palabras Clave: Relaciones en el Estrecho de Taiwan, el auge de la comunidad china, competición hegemónica, Canal transoceánico.

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1. Introduction

According to a November 2016 report found in news media, under the title "A German media forecast on the next 30 years of China," it is expected that around the year 2033 a Greater China region will emerge, encompassing the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Singapore, a region to be known as Neo-Singapore (Malaysia under the control of a Chinese elite), a neighboring New Neo-Singapore (Indonesia controlled by the Chinese), and the associated Republic of Mongolia. It is expected that its total economy will be equal to that of the United States for the first time. And at that moment, according to the forecast report, the global GDP ranking will be as follows: 1. Greater China, 2. United States, 3. Japan, 4. Great Korean Republic (after reunification), 5. Germany, 6. France, 7. India, 8. Great Britain. And the Asian Community, established in 2034 under the influence of China, will make itself the world's largest economy, while the Asian Community will also take RMB as its common currency in 2038. Not only the yen exchange rate will be linked with the yuan, but the West-centered world economic order may also formally fall apart. It seems inevitable that by 2040 the East Asian wealth will be more than that of the Western world, while the global GDP ranking after that re-shuffling may be sorted as follows: 1. Greater China; 2. European Union; 3. North America (US and Canada); 4. Japan; 5. Republic of Greater Korea; and, 6. India.²

Although we cannot tell what was the exact basis for that prediction, nor the purpose of its author, however, according to the content of this article, it should serve to pay attention to the development of the international situation when the article was published. The process may not be scientific, but it certainly served to arouse the curiosity of many. The present article hopes that through the presentation of this argument, it will be important to understand the process of China's rise, and the potential of a Chinese community's future comprehensive cooperation, and to see the hegemonic competition between China and the United States, especially from the angle of a trans-oceanic canal construction, in order to foresee the possible developments in the international system. At the same time, according to the formation of this trend, the author wants to analyze how the Taiwan Strait relations will be, as well as its impact, so as to provide readers with more awareness and understanding about the development of this situation.

2. China 's Peaceful Rise and Hegemonic Stability Theory

For Chinese people, the concept of being the Central Land (or Central State) has been deeply rooted in their mind from long time ago. But after the Opium War, the Western countries one after another, actively despoiled the national interests in China. After the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty, the division of zones of influence among separatist Chinese warlords, the Japanese aggression, and the Kuomintang civil war against the Chinese communists, and later the separation of China between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait up to now, have limited the traditional zone of Chinese influence for more than a century. In particular, the People's Republic of China (PRC) had to wait until the beginning of the 1980s to re-enter a long-term stable development stage, due to internal and external problems at the beginning of its foundation. Since the reform and opening up in Mainland China to the present, China has experienced a rapid economic development. In 30 years, the GDP index is growing with an average of more than 9% per year, which has made China the largest economic entity with the fastest economic grow.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) statistics, China's GDP in 2010

² 「德國媒體預測中國未來30年，震驚全球」, ("German media predict China's next 30 years, shocked the world"), *Great Daily*, 11 July 2016, at <http://www.twgreatdaily.com/cat37/node1331999?>



surpassed that of Japan, ranking second in the world (after the United States). Some scholars believe that China's GDP will surpass that of the United States between 2020 and 2030. While the World Bank, the IMF and the United Nations report believe that China's GDP is still the second largest in the world, with a per capita GDP of more than US\$8,000 in 2015, reaching US\$8,028 in terms of the international exchange rate. And China's 13th five-year plan expects that by 2020, per capita GDP will exceed US\$ 10,000. China's total exports in 2015 accounted for 13.8% of the world, and total imports accounted for 10% of the world, making it the world's largest trading nation. China's foreign exchange reserves in February 2006, reached US\$853.6 billion, more than those of Japan, hence becoming the world's largest, and in December 2015, they went up to US\$3.33 trillion, maintaining the world's largest foreign exchange reserves status³ However, according to the increase of Chinese economic strength, the Western powers and China's surrounding countries have become more and more alert about the rise of China, especially the main superpower after the cold war, the United States, who has taken the rise of China as a challenge to its hegemony.

However, diplomatic frictions still persist between China and some of the big countries around her, so, in the road of peaceful rise, China still has to face a lot of challenges. The United States has so far been skeptical of China's ambitions in the international arena, and thus tries to curb China's external development. The relationship between China and India is also unstable. In addition to the war on the border issue in 1962, the Tibetan issue is also an obstacle to diplomatic relations between the two countries. And since the political and military relations between China and Pakistan are quite close, India is worried that, if a new war between India and Pakistan outbreaks, China may support Pakistan, making the problem even more complex. Sino-Japanese relations have often become a key factor to the sustainability of peace in Asia, since the Sino-Japanese Diaoyu Islands (Japanese called them "Senkaku Islands") dispute is a diplomatic obstacle to fluid relations between both countries. As for the South China Sea issue, it also affects the relationship between China and Southeast Asian countries, while the largest island in the Nansha Islands is still protected by the presence of the Taiwan Coast Guard.⁴ During decades, the United States has handled Taiwan issues in accordance with the three Sino-US joint communiques, and its domestic Taiwan Relations Act. If the war breaks out in the Taiwan Strait, it may arouse a Sino-US engagement and the confrontation between the United States and China. In fact, how to turn the confrontation into a peaceful settlement should be a problem that both sides of the Taiwan Strait must face together.

The reasons why the world currently puts its attention to China is due to the plan of "One Belt, One Road". In fact, from the "self-improvement movement" of late Qing Dynasty to Deng Xiaoping's "reform and opening up", China has always put her emphasis towards the ocean, learning from the West; the presentation of "One Belt, One Road" by China signified the transformation of China's vision. Zhang Deng-ji, professor of Taiwan University described, "This is an upgraded version of the Chinese model." Since China has been contained cleverly by the United States with its political and military force in the Pacific, it goes westbound, and breaks out cleverly with economic infrastructure diplomacy. Xue Li, Director of the Department of International Strategy, of the Institute of World Economy and Politics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, believes that if we retrospect further, "One Belt, One Road" is the watershed for the concept change of China's five thousand years governance. In the past, China "attracts the world by her noble virtue, if the foreigners do not come, China does not care." Nowadays, China not only takes the initiative to go out, but also tries to influence the others actively. That is, Xi Jinping changed China's self-positioning, from a country of East Asia, to a

³ 「中國崛起」, ("China's rise"), *Wikipedia*, at <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/中國崛起>.

⁴ *Ibid.*



country in the east of Asia, the center of Asian countries.⁵

Prof. Hsie Lun indicates that "One Belt, One Road, OBOR" is the abbreviation of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road." The plan of "One Belt, One Road" will include 4.4 billion of people, a GDP size of more than 20 trillion dollars, the world's 63% and 29%, respectively. The goal is to digest the excess in the production capacity, enhance the export level, promote the internationalization of the RMB, guarantee the energy and food security of China, and support the sustainable economic development with traffic construction.⁶ At the end of March 2015, the Chinese government promulgated the vision and action plan of "One Belt, One Road", which became the world's loudest policy slogan. The "Silk Road Economic Zone", beginning from the northwest China through Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East to Europe, and "the 21st century Maritime Silk Road," from Fujian passing by Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa to Europe, is known as a plan covering more than sixty countries, two thirds of the population, and thirty percent of the GDP of the world. By the end of April, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan and gave them a big gift of US\$ 46 billion. It means that China will build a "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" from Kashi, Xinjiang, to Gwadar, Pakistan.⁷

Professor Xiao Fuyuan also pointed out that Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), with 100 billion US dollars capital, is the key weapon of "One Belt, One Road." The support and participation of traditional American allies like the United Kingdom and Western European countries in the AIIB, with no doubt is a great help to "One Belt, One Road." In this way, China can bypass the first Pacific island chain controlled by United States forces and goes forward to the Central Asia region through the Middle East, the core of "Western culture," and then linked to Africa, integrating their own global market.⁸ On October 2, 2013, President Xi Jinping held talks with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in Jakarta. In this talk, Xi Jinping initiated the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, to promote the process of interconnection and economic integration in the region, offering infrastructure construction funds to all the countries in the region, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In October 2014, 21 countries such as China, India and Singapore signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the Asian Investment Bank in Beijing, when Li Keqiang, the premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, went to Southeast Asia. On March 12, 2015, the British expressed their will to join the Asian Investment Bank as a founding member. Switzerland also applied for the AIIB the next day, then, France, Italy, Germany, and other developed countries have also prepared to follow up. South Korea, Russia and other Asian countries, and even Brazil, also followed suit before the deadline on March 31.⁹

⁵ 蕭富元，「一帶一路全面解讀」(Xiao Fu Yuan: "A comprehensive interpretation of the 'one belt, one road'", 天下雜誌 (*Common Wealth*), nº 571 (28 April 2015), at <http://www.cw.com.tw/article/article.action?id=5067331>

⁶ 解畚，「中國十三五規劃，一帶路新商機」(Hsie Lun, "China thirteen five years plan, a new business opportunities of 'one belt, one road'"), at http://www.ib.nccu.edu.tw/uploads/archive_file_multiple/file/58ed9f231d41c83a1e0008a3/十三五106.04.11.pdf

⁷ Xiao Fu Yuan, *op. cit.* China and Pakistan are going to carry out a series of large-scale projects, with a railway up to 3,000 km, a 46 billion US dollars investment. This will also be the hub and important project of "One Belt, One Road".

⁸ Xiao Fu Yuan, *op. cit.*

⁹ 「一帶一路」，*維基百科* (Belt and Road Initiative, *Wikipedia*), at <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E4%B8%80%E5%B8%A6%E4%B8%80%E8%B7%AF>



Suddenly, with China's peaceful rise, "One Belt, One Road" has already become a new important subject of international political economy. But Western countries do not believe in China's peaceful rise and that China has no hegemonic ambitions, so, after studying Beijing's diplomatic, military, economic and trade practices, inevitably they analyze it from a hegemonic perspective and explain China's behaviour according to their own response, a reasonable and logical thinking. On the contrary, from the Beijing point of view, some countries want to prevent the rise of China, so she has to react. Their way of thinking can be seen in the struggle for the South China Sea.¹⁰ Besides, according to the hegemony stability theory, the hegemony cannot be sustained, only consultation and cooperation can create a win-win situation in order to ensure China's long-term development, and the world's peace and prosperity. Following this reasoning, China says that she has no intention to dominate and considers that perhaps the Western countries are thinking from a Europe-centric perspective, so it is difficult for them to understand the Eastern logic of governance based on morality and benevolence.

3. Adjustment of US Policy to China

Echoing the return of a stronger military presence to the Asia-Pacific, the United States began to participate in TPP negotiations in 2009, with the aim to contain China economically. On the other hand, in geopolitics, in 2011, the United States began the so called "New Silk Road Vision" with Afghanistan as a hub, connecting Central Asia, South Asia and West Asia, to accomplish its strategy of exporting its goods to the north and importing the energy to the south. In addition, Japan as an American ally, also proposed the "arc of freedom and prosperity" in 2006 to contain China, that is, linking an arc from Southeast Asia through Central Asia to Central and Eastern Europe, surrounding the whole Eurasia. The purpose is to share the universal values of Japan, the United States and Europe within the arc in the Eurasian continent, and even to include all these countries into a stronger NATO dialogue. After the outbreak of the global financial crisis, what could be seen around 2009 is that the strategy of the United States is to start a comprehensive containment of China, from the military, political, economic and even culture spheres, in order to isolate China.¹¹ After the global financial crisis in 2008, China's global political and economic status has been highlighted; the GDP gap with the US has shrunk rapidly and, in general, it is expected that China's GDP will soon beat the United States, and the United States has clearly felt the economic impact of China's global economic influence. The continuous growth and the rapid development of military technology not only enhance China's military strength, but also makes the United States feel that their military advantage in Asia has been challenged. Therefore, Obama after taking office in January 2009, took preventive measures against China, through the performance and implementation of the return to Asia and return to Asia-Pacific policy, then rebranded as "Asia-Pacific rebalancing" and becoming even a more ambitious strategy in 2013, with the implementation of the "Indo-Pacific rebalance" strategy.¹²

In November 2016, Trump was elected president of the United States, and his personal style was going to have a certain impact on the United States China's policy. Shortly after the

¹⁰ 楊開煌，「中國式全球化的特徵與困難，論一帶一路的意義」，*海峽評論*，318期，2017年6月號 (Yang Kai-huang: "The characteristics and difficulties of Chinese-style globalization, on the meaning of 'one belt, one road'", *Hǎixiá Pínglùn*, nº 318, (June 2017), at <https://www.haixia-info.com/articles/9265.html>)

¹¹ 「淡定明志：一帶一路為戰略突圍指明了方向」，*海峽吧*，("With calm and clear mind: One belt, One road shows the way to breakthrough strategically,"), *Haixiabar*, 11 May 2017, at <http://www.haixiaba.com/n1166799.html>

¹² 薛力，「中国“一带一路”戰略面對的外交風險」，*國際經濟評論*，2015年2期，(Xue Li: "diplomatic risk of China's strategic of 'One belt, One road'", international economic commentary, 12 March 2015, <http://www.faobserver.com/Newsinfo.aspx?id=11580>)



election, it was generally felt that although the US policy was likely to remain in line with the traditional practice, the slogan of Trump's "American first" led many to believe that the United States was bound to put pressure on China on trade and exchange rates. Nevertheless, the abandonment of the TPP would be beneficial to China's expansion in Asia. Trump has said that he would seek cooperation with China and Russia. But in the South China Sea issue, he took a tougher attitude than Obama. As an outsider in the American political scene, he is not familiar with the US foreign policy and, therefore, being the US president, he is more likely to have a chaotic decision-making. This could be a challenge but also an opportunity for China.¹³ In addition, as Trump proposed to renegotiate the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), to some extent it will also weaken the leadership of United States in the Americas. Comparing with the "One Belt, One Road" policy of China, it is evident that in the regional leadership competition between China and the United States, the later is losing little by little.

If we observe the actions taken by Trump towards China, maybe due to the requirements of the US Navy, on 19 May 2017, the United States finally challenged for the first time Beijing's strategic channel in the South China Sea, and sent an Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer, the Dewey (USS Dewey) near the twelve nautical miles area of the Nansha Islands, intending to convey to China that the insistence of the American policy about the right to navigate freely on the high seas is unchanged. Of course, China promptly made public her opposition and negotiated with the United States. Meanwhile it also sent two missile frigates, Yanchuan and Luzhou, to identify the US ship and asked the American destroyer to leave the area. The US Department of Defense said that this was a regular free navigation mission and that there will be more in the future. However, it is reported that Trump himself is relatively passive to this particular policy. Most probably it is because he hopes to get support from China on the issue of North Korea.¹⁴ The North Korean intercontinental ballistic missiles tests has made the United States more determined to take further sanctions on North Korea and it is clear that China will inevitably be informed about any action.

In fact, the exchanges between Chinese and American government officials are becoming more frequent. After the visit of Yang Jiehu, Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Chinese foreign affairs, to the United States at the end of February, US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, visited Beijing on 18, 19 March 2017. According to their official statement, "They will build constructive and result-oriented relations with China, which would be not only beneficial to the American people but also meet the trustful relationship between United States and his allies". However, the Asian allies of the United States only worry about their possible exclusion in any sort of diplomatic trade agreements reached between China and the United States. As Trump does not come from the political circle, he is not familiar with the US strategy to China, hence his China policy wavers. The case of the "One China" policy could be an example. At the beginning, Trump's attitude may not follow that principle. However, in early February he was frankly committed to China to comply with this policy and even demonstrated his will to improve Sino-US relations. Unlike the strong condemnation of the alleged manipulation of the renminbi exchange rate and the South China Sea issue before taking power,

¹³ 邊驛卒，「特朗普贏得美國大選！對中國有六大影響」，*鳳凰評論*，(Bian Yi-zu: "Trump won the US election! Six major effects on China"), *Fènghuáng Pínglùn*, 9 November 2016, at http://news.ifeng.com/a/20161109/50228977_0.shtml

¹⁴ 美艦杜威號駛南沙，陸驅離」，*聯合報*，2017年5月26日，頁A1。("USS Dewey heading to Nansha and expelled by frigate of Mainland China"), *United Daily*, 26 May 2017, p. A1.



he has recently begun to control his words on it.¹⁵

Thus, Trump's character as businessman has been revealed completely in his international affairs decision-making. He advocates patriotism and populism, has strong self-confidence and a changeable and irritable personality. So, in his diplomacy, there is no ideological framework nor strategic thinking, all depends on the interests of the United States, making it something similar to a transaction-type diplomacy. Trump actually perceive the diplomatic failures of the former presidents of the United States. If the United States had abandoned the containment of Russia after Cold War, and no longer intervened in the internal affairs of Eastern Europe, the Middle East, West Asia, North Africa and other places, the United States could have concentrated on the development of its own economy, infrastructure, hence allowing the United States to keep growing, making it impossible to experience a Chinese panic in front of China's rapid rise today. Therefore, it is logical that Trump advocated the abandonment of some unnecessary international interventions, to reduce the defense burden of United States in different regions, to approach Russia, in order to solve the mess in the Middle East and West Asia, and the elimination of the Islamic State.

And economically, Trump applies tax incentives to the American or foreign companies, in order to attract them back to the United States for investment, infrastructure, and to increase the levels of employment. Therefore, Trump abandoned the United States long-term advocacy of free trade, threatening to impose import tariffs, trying to balance trade, pressing China for the appreciation of the renminbi and improving the export of US products. Trump believes that for the elimination of the Chinese threat to the United States, it is necessary to curb the continuous rising strength of China, or even the potential scenario of China surpassing the power of United States. As a result, Trump considered necessary to strengthen the United States-East Asian League and, therefore, instigated Japan to take the lead in the regional collaboration for restraining China. However, Xi Jinping expressed his hope to uphold the principle of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect, win-win cooperation between them, and develop the bilateral cooperation for the regional and global benefit of the people of both countries, and for the people of the whole world.¹⁶ Nevertheless, due to Trump's personality, he will act entirely according to the interests of the United States and, considering the Xi Jinping's expectations, these moves are becoming quite problematic.

4. Kra Canal and the Construction of the Trans-Asian Railway

In May 2017, when Xi Jinping attended the opening ceremony of the "Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation", he announced that 100 billion RMB (about 4,400 million NT\$) would be added to the Silk Road Fund, which provides construction funds to all countries along the "One Belt, One Road". Besides, more than 700 million RMB (about 3.8 trillion NT\$) funds or loans would be offered to them. Eventually, the "One Belt, One Road" program will count for the funding of \$900 billion dollars (about 27 trillion NT\$), which will be the largest overseas investment initiative launched by a single country in history and will become the largest economic diplomacy project after the "Marshall Plan", provided by United States for the reconstruction of Europe at the end of World War II. In addition to promoting the sustainable development of China's import and export goods, with the transportation web programmed in

¹⁵ 秋田浩之，「強硬的川普呢？談川普對中國態度的超級髮夾彎」，*日經中文*，(Akita Hiroshi: "Where is the tough Trump? Talking about the super transformation of Trump's attitude to China"), *Nikkei Chinese*, 25 March 2017, at <http://www.cw.com.tw/article/article.action?id=5081576>

¹⁶ 張麟徵，「陽奉陰違的川普一中政策」，*海峽評論*，315期，2017年3月。(Zhang Linsheng, "The fake 'One China Policy' of Trump"), *Haixia Pinglun*, n° 315 (March 2017), at <https://www.haixia-info.com/articles/9045.html>



“One Belt, One Road”, China could control the capacity to formulate the rules of the game and strengthen economic relations with Eurasian and African countries. Political experts pointed out that within two decades, "One Belt, One Road" may make China the center of Asia and the world's first power.¹⁷

In early 2011, China's “Chongqing-Xinjiang-Europe Railway” was on the road. With this railway, having a total length of 11,179 km, a trip from Chongqing to Germany would only take two weeks. In 2017, the railway has been expanded into "China Railway Express", turning a few railway lines into a web with 39 regular lines, connecting 16 Chinese cities and 12 overseas cities, and even, through the English Channel, it arrived to London. It only needs one-third of the traditional shipping time and only one-fifth of the traditional air transport costs, greatly improving the trade efficiency and convenience. In the fourth quarter of 2016, China generously spent US\$46 billion for the opening of the Gwadar port, so that the original 16,000 km of sea transportation to send oil to China, now by railway service through Gwadar port only takes 3,000 km of trip, substantially saving 85% of the previous costs. Before, the merchant ships had to pass Singapore's Malacca Strait, and now they can go directly to the port of Gwadar in Pakistan. Another project that has been delayed for several decades, the Carat Canal, thanks to strategic plan of the “One Belt, One Road”, also seems to restart again during the past two years. China is expected to cooperate with Thailand, investing 36 billion US dollars in the project, shortening 1,200 km of shipping.¹⁸ Also, we can see that the “ASEAN plus One” mechanism could become the future upgrade version of the “ASEAN plus Three.”

It is important to emphasize the implications of Kra Canal's construction. In 2002, a total of 11 million barrels of oil went through the Malacca Strait daily, and by 2030 it will reach 22 million barrels daily. It means that the equivalent to two-thirds of Asia's oil needs are transported through the Malacca Strait. Nevertheless, if the construction of the Kra Canal materializes, it will be a threat to Singapore's economic strategic position. In mid-May 2015, the Chinese media widely reported that a memorandum of cooperation between China and Thailand to build a Kra Canal was signed and the Chinese and Thai governments will formally carry out joint development projects for the Canal. However, the Chinese Embassy in Thailand has claimed on May 19, 2015, that they did not sign any official document about the Kra Canal. Yet, in spite of their denial, there are several big Chinese enterprises of infrastructure and machinery and equipment that, on April 9, 2014, invested 2 billion RMB to form a cooperative agency and started to study the plan of the Kra Canal.

Since China put forward the concept of "One Belt, One Road", the Kra Canal is considered an important shipping route within the new Silk Road. But there are also people who point out that even if China invested heavily in the Kra Canal, it cannot escape the blockade by an American armed force in Thailand. Furthermore, the most favored countries will be those countries that are heavily dependent on imported oil, like Japan, who also maintain very good relations with Thailand.¹⁹ Until now, there is a lot of speculation about China's attitude towards the Kra Canal. If the canal is built successfully, it will certainly impact the Singapore freight throughput, and even grab the pro-US Singapore's economic lifeline. Singapore's political stance has always been hovering between China and the United States, economically closer to China, while in military and security affairs they maintain very close contacts with the United

¹⁷ 「3 分鐘搞懂「一帶一路」如何讓中國邁向世界第一強權」，報橘，("3 minutes to understand" one way along the way "how to make China into the world's first power") *BuzzOrange*, 23 March 2017, at <https://buzzorange.com/2017/03/23/china-one-belt-and-one-road/>

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ 「克拉運河」，維基百科，("Kra Canal", *Wikipedia*), <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/克拉運河>



States. For example, Singapore allows the US Navy to use some facilities, so that the US military naval combat ships and reconnaissance aircraft can be supported in the South China Sea.²⁰ The attitude of Singapore could push the Beijing government to reassess Singapore's identification with the Chinese community.

Nevertheless, theoretically, the Kra Canal is incompatible with the Pan-Asian Railway, which is generally welcomed by Southeast Asian countries. The Pan-Asian Railway was launched under the active advocacy and multilateral coordination of the Chinese government and Southeast Asian countries. The Pan-Asian Railway is expected to have a total length of more than 14,000 kilometers, of which more than 1,500 kilometers are to be located in China. It starts from Kunming, Yunnan Province, the east line passes through Yuxi, Mengxi, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Phnom Penh to Bangkok; the midline passes through Jinghong, MoHan, Laos capital Vientiane, and arrives to Bangkok, Thailand; the West line passes through Dali, Baoshan, Ruili, Yangon of Myanmar, and then to Bangkok. The three lines eventually converged in Bangkok, then going south through Kuala Lumpur, and ultimately arriving in Singapore. If the Pan-Asian railway project is implemented, the Kra Canal project is basically over. The reason is that the Pan-Asian Railway must go to Kuala Lumpur via the Kra region of Thailand. If you dig a river in the Kra area, it is equivalent to cutting off the Pan-Asian railway. As the Pan-Asian Railway allows the Southeast Asian countries along the way to benefit from China's economic development, so they will take the initiative to maintain the safety of the Pan-Asian Railway; while the Kra Canal's would ultimately only benefit China and Thailand. For Malaysia and Singapore, it would bring even damage, and for the other Southeast Asian countries, it would be problematic, so the attitude of these countries may be detrimental to the safety of the Kra Canal. In addition, since 2015, the Pan-Asian Railway project has entered the stage of specific implementation; while the Kra Canal project is still in the stage of evaluation.²¹ Although the Kra Canal is useful for China's strategic deployment, the future development remains to be seen.

The Pan-Asian Railway is of great significance to both China and Southeast Asian countries. For China, the Pan-Asian Railway not only connects the Silk Road through the Straits of Malacca, but also opens up the land access to Germany via Iran and Turkey passing by the Dzungarian Gate. Many goods and commodities can be transported to the north or to the south without having to "detour," and it helps a lot in the promotion of the region's economic development. Some public data show that the length of the ASEAN part of Pan-Asian Railway in Southeast Asia reaches 5,000 km, connecting Singapore and southern China, via Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, and other countries, with a total investment of about 15 billion US dollars. Only the auxiliary line will cost about 1.8 billion US dollars. However, the Pan-Asian Railway also encounters resistance and difficulties: not only the rail track gauges are different, but also, in order to solve the financial problems, the loans require multilateral political consultations.²² Another change could strengthen China's future international influence too. That is, in 2013 China found "methane clathrate (methane ice)" deposits in the eastern part of the Pearl River estuary, and then in 2015 they also found over 100 billion square-class of

²⁰ 「中國要建克拉運河掐住新加坡經濟命脈，新國冷眼以對一帶一路」，鉅亨網，("The construction of Kra Canal by China could grab the lifeline of Singapore's economy, Singapore stays cold in front of the 'One belt, one road'"), *cnYES.com*, 22 May 2017, at <https://tw.money.yahoo.com/中國要建-克拉運河-掐住新加坡命脈-新國冷眼以對一帶-053029177.html>

²¹ 「克拉運河未始已終，是因為有他」，華語熱聞，("The Kra Canal died before beginning, all because of him," GOOREAD), 6 January 2017, at <http://www.gooread.com/article/20120307261>

²² 「泛亞鐵路一旦修好，會帶來哪些影響？」，壹讀，("What are the implications of the Trans-Asian Railway once constructed?"), *READ01*, 27 July 2016, at <https://read01.com/o4PkoP.html>



"methane ice" in the northern part of the South China Sea, in Shenhu sea, which offers an important test area for the mining of "methane ice". According to the announcement of the China Geological Survey of the Ministry of Land and Resources, on May 18, 2017, China had tested successfully in the Shenhu sea, in South China Sea area, the mining of "methane ice" (methane gas hydrate). Therefore, China has become the first country in the world that can achieve the continuous and stable production of methane ice on sea bed. Deputy Director of China's Geological Survey, Li Jinfa, said that the successful mining means the commercial exploitation of "methane ice" would not be far. The commercial exploitation and utilization is expected before 2030. This will change the pattern of the world's energy use. Scientists believe that "methane ice" is a new energy that is able to meet 1,000 years of human needs for energy, and it is the best alternative to oil, coal and other traditional energy in the future. Apparently, China's mining success surpasses in one fell swoop the United States and Japan technically.²³ However, since the controversy over the sovereignty of the South China Sea is based partially on the resource-based competition, any resource discovery may make the parties unwilling to compromise. China's successful mining of "methane ice" may provoke again sovereignty disputes between other countries in the South China Sea and China, protecting their own interests and protesting against China unilateral mining tests.

5. The Integration Process of the Great Chinese Community

As China promotes so actively the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, the mentioned German think tank's prediction about China's projection in the next three decades, foreseeing the formation of a Chinese community centered on Mainland China can be pointed out. Simultaneously, in the mainland Chinese media, who also quoted Ukrainian internet information, it was published that, in the next 50 years, China will carry out six wars: the absorption of Taiwan, Mongolia, the South China Sea islands, Tibet, the Diaoyu Islands and Ryukyu, and the territories occupied by Russia. The goal is also the establishment of the Chinese community.²⁴ No matter what the real reason for the promotion of is "One Belt, One Road", in general, people think that, in some way, it could consolidate the Chinese community, resolve the conflict between China and the neighboring countries, and attract these countries to join China's economic development. The countries where "One Belt, One Road" pass are basically the traditional influence area of China, but it also ends up in Europe and the Middle East. "One Belt, One Road" not only can re-string the main Chinese living circle, through the transportation infrastructure investment, reducing hostility of the neighboring countries to China, but it also links China with the trade network of Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and truly builds a Chinese community with China as the core. And by linking China with Europe and the Middle East, through land routes, it can also guarantee the trade interaction of China with Europe, and the supply of energy and other resources from the Middle East if the sea route is blocked.

According to an article published by the US magazine "Diplomacy" in September 2015, in the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, promoted vigorously by China, there are several risks, and the timing may not be proper either. First of all, the article believes that China needs capital too, in order to maintain a stable domestic economy growth and avoid the market turmoil; second, in the process of economic transition, if China spares one hand to open up overseas

²³ 陳曉，「中國成功在南海開採「可燃冰」，又多一張「王牌」？」，新華社，(Chen Xiao, "China succeeded in mining" methane ice " in the South China Sea, another 'trump' in hand? "), *Xinhua News Agency*, 20 May 2017, at <https://www.hk01.com/兩岸-92414/-解讀-中國成功在南海開採-可燃冰-又多一張-王牌>

²⁴ 徐尚禮，「外媒：中國未來統一戰爭首戰台海」，中時電子報，(Xu Shangli, "Foreign media: China's first battle in the future will be in the Taiwan Strait"), *China Times*, 18 February 2017, at <http://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20170218005115-260409>



exploration, it will be contrary to the policy of stimulating domestic demand, and it could weaken the government's ability to resist structural crisis; moreover, it will not be easy to win the trust from the countries involved. As designer, financier, and builder of "One Belt, One Road", China is considered as the biggest winner of the initiative, and China must convince other governments in that area that they are able to achieve a win-win situation. The aggressive performance of China's foreign policy during the dispute over the territorial waters of the South China Sea may also arouse suspicion and concern in those countries. In addition, the problem of the Ukrainian crisis and terrorist forces will also threaten the progress of "One Belt, One Road".²⁵ However, under the planning of Xi Jinping, it has become an irreplaceable benchmark.

Nowadays, "One Belt, One Road" has become an important policy for China's future development, and its success or failure has much to do with whether the Chinese community can really be reunited. Taiwan is certainly an important component of the future Chinese community, and whether the Chinese community can be really formed depends on the upcoming development of cross-Strait relations. On the other hand, although Singapore has always been regarded as an important part of the Chinese community, due to its close relationship with the United States, Singapore becomes a piece of the United States strategy to check China. The construction plan of Kra Canal of China is just an alternative to avoid being contained by Singapore. Although there is a rumor that the Thai government has rejected the plan for the construction of the Kra Canal, perhaps it could be read as a way to reduce the tension and possibility of any conflict in the area. However, the commercial investments in the excavation process are a question of economic benefits; normally, even the government cannot intervene. Besides, there are still informations saying that China and Malaysia are in cooperation for the construction of a third port in Port Klang in Malacca, which may be a greater economic shock for Singapore, because 80% of vessels arriving in Singapore are Chinese ships; therefore, if they go through Malaysia, it will have a significant impact on Singapore. So, the Sino-Malaysian joint construction of a port in Malacca will be a major economic blow to Singapore.²⁶ As a significant economic entity of the Chinese community countries, the future of Singapore seems under shadow.

6. The future Development of cross - Strait Relations

Without a doubt, Taiwan is a priority for China in the integration of Chinese communities. One of the reasons for the diplomatic friction between China and some Western powers is the Taiwan issue. China has enacted the Anti-Secession Law, declaring that it may not hesitate to use force to resolve Taiwan affairs and destroy all Taiwan independence forces. Although most countries have maintained a good relationship with China, recognizing China's "one China principle" and respecting its "core interests", the United States has long handled Taiwan issues according to the three Sino-US joint communiques and its domestic Taiwan Relations Act. If a war burst out in the Taiwan Strait, a Sino-US war may be added to the confrontation between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. At this stage, the United States is still skeptical about the China's ambitions in the international community and tries to restraint the expansion of China's outward force,²⁷ Taiwan's strategic position in the first island chain has thus become the focus for both sides.

²⁵ Yuan Ling: 「美媒用 5 點解析中國「一帶一路」，將面臨嚴峻考驗」，*報橘*，(Yuan Ling, "US media analyzed the challenges "One belt, one road" may face with 5 points of view"), *Buzzorange*, 30 September 2015, at <https://buzzorange.com/2015/09/30/chinas-silk-road-initiative-is-at-risk-of-failure/>

²⁶ 「泰国官方终证实拟开挖克拉运河：新加坡末日来临-开挖泰国运河最新消息」，*新浪博客*，("Thailand's official final confirmation of the excavation of the Kra canal: the end of Singapore - latest news about the excavation of the Thai Canal"), *Sina blog*, 4 January 2017, at http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_14eecd8c0102wliq.html

²⁷ 「中國崛起」，("China's rise"), *op. cit.*



During the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou, from 2008 to 2016, the cross-Strait relations can be described as the most harmonic period. The overwhelming victory of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in the 2016 elections of Taiwan not only makes Mrs. Tsai Ing-wen (Cai Yingwen), the President of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), president of the Republic of China, but also gave the DPP the absolute majority in Congress. Since Tsai government insisted on maintaining the *statu quo* of cross-Strait relations, reluctant to accept the "Consensus of 1992", cross-Strait interactions fall once again into a dilemma. In March 2016, Gambia established diplomatic relations with China, and months later, Sao Tome and Principe broke diplomatic ties with Taiwan and turned to China. In June 2017, the most important ally of Taiwan in Central America, Panama, also cut off with the ROC and established diplomatic relations and China, after more than one hundred years of diplomatic relations. It shows that the Chinese authorities want to use the pressure in the international field to force Taiwan to accept the Consensus of 1992, in order to avoid the strengthening of Taiwan independence consciousness. But after a series of diplomatic defeats, in fact, among the Taiwanese people a certain degree of distrust to the Chinese authorities has been strengthened. Therefore, it could produce an adverse effect in the process of the formation of the Chinese community, but it does not mean that this trend cannot be reversed.

The Panama Canal is certainly an important factor in the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Panama, and it will actually impact the Grand Canal Project approved by the Congress of Nicaragua in 2013. The project was originally scheduled to start in 2015, but later was postponed to the end of 2016. In an article of The Times, in November 2016, due to the improvement in relations between China and Panama, it seems that China's investment in Nicaragua's project of a new canal has been abandoned, but local farmers still believe that the project will continue and hope to get some compensation. After President Ortega promoted the approval of the canal legislation, the canal project, signed by Chinese wealthy businessman Wang Jing and Nicaraguan government, a 278-kilometer canal program which was expected to cost US\$50 billion, was strongly protested by local farmers and environmental groups. And since Wang Jing lost in the stock market 85% of his capital, it seems that the project has been paused.

It is generally believed that although the Chinese government denies the intervention in the program, most people still believe that Wang Jing must be supported by the Chinese government, otherwise it would be impossible to proceed with the project. Besides, the lack of diplomatic relations between China and Nicaragua could also become the biggest obstacle to this project.²⁸ However, in January 2017, according to the local newspaper El Nuevo Diario, the canal project will begin in the first quarter of 2017, and the scale will be larger than scheduled.²⁹ However, in June 2017, HKND reassured, that due to environmental impact assessment and geological exploration and other factors, it was necessary to re-design the canal, so the project will be delayed, but they ensured that the modified canal will be more environmentally friendly than the original design, and more resistant to the impact of possible earthquakes.³⁰ But so far, no further news has been heard. To some extent, obviously this also could be read as China's strategy to distract the international attention from the Kra Canal. After all, the Kra Canal is much more beneficial for China than the Nicaragua Canal.

²⁸ Jonathan Watts: "Nicaragua canal: in a sleepy Pacific port, something stirs", *Times Daily*, 24 November 2016, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/24/nicaragua-canal-interoceanic-preparations>

²⁹ "Work to begin on Nicaragua Canal in first quarter of 2017", *Hellenic Shipping News*, in *Port News* 31 January 2017.

<http://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/work-to-begin-on-nicaragua-canal-in-first-quarter-of-2017/>

³⁰ "HKND reitera que construirá canal interoceánico en Nicaragua", *El Nuevo Diario*, 28 July 2017,

<http://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/nacionales/432420-hknd-reitera-que-construira-canal-interoceanico-ni/>



In fact, strategically, China has established diplomatic relations with Panama, and Chinese enterprises play a significant role in the Panama Canal expansion and operation, is it necessary to invest heavily in the construction of the Nicaragua Canal? Moreover, the canal could cause environmental and social problems in Nicaragua and has already raised much criticism in the country and in the international community. Furthermore, the Chinese businessman Wang Jing, who had obtained the Nicaragua Canal Project, given his financial losses, has a lot of problems with the project, and a canal project without any movement has aroused many speculations. Some people think that the Nicaragua Canal was only a tool for President Ortega to seek re-election in 2016, and that it is impossible to build the canal.³¹ However, there is something more worrisome. That is, if, in the future, Nicaragua still wants to carry out the construction of the canal, it may affect the diplomatic relations between Nicaragua and Taiwan and make the cross-Strait diplomatic competition more intense. In addition, the Nicaragua Canal program is likely a smoke bomb to shift the attention of the United States, so that the United States ignores what China is doing in the Thai Kra isthmus, and the possible association between Thailand and China, as was mentioned before.

Presently, the United States is still the most important factor in the future development of the cross-Strait relationship of Taiwan. If the United States respects the "One-China policy", the cross-Strait relations are unlikely to have drastic changes. After taking office, with the strong statements of Secretary of State, Tillerson, Defense Secretary, Mattis, and others, President Trump has finally softened his position against the restraint of the "One China policy". Different from the previous president, Trump did not congratulate the Chinese community in the US for the celebrations of the Chinese New Year as usual, but after a few days, or in the fifth day of the first lunar month, that is, February 1, he sent her daughter Ivanka with his granddaughter, to attend the Chinese Embassy's New Year party. One week later, on February 8th, Trump wrote a letter to Xi Jinping, giving thanks to the latter for his elected congratulatory message, and wished Xi a happy Lantern Festival. On Feb. 9th, Trump and Xi Jinping spoke by phone. The White House issued a statement that the two leaders had a long telephone conversation to discuss many issues. At the request of the Chairman Xi, Trump agreed to respect the "One China" policy.³² It is obvious that even Trump has its own ideas, but he still has to take into consideration the country's real interests and may wish to play between the two sides and win more attention from both sides. However, this could have a negative impact on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

As mentioned above, the Chinese media in Hong Kong quoted the Ukrainian media forecast, saying that China will carry out six wars in the next 50 years, in order to unify Taiwan and Outer Mongolia, to recover the South China Sea islands, Tibet, Diaoyu Islands and Ryukyu, and the territories occupied by Russia. This is also related to the goal of the establishment of the Chinese community. Although this argument did not indicate that the unification of Taiwan will be the first battle, the Chinese people's identification to the region means that the rulers have to attract the people with moral righteousness, and the success of this Chinese Community would be something natural. However, if there is a deep ideological gap among Chinese people and the political and economic system is still highly differentiated, it would be difficult and could even cause a disaster in the Asian Chinese world. Moreover, in the process of integration of this Chinese community, there are major interests of the United States, Japan, India, Russia and other countries involved, so the uncertainty of the future development is still high. So, we

³¹ 「尼加拉瓜运河开凿进度缓慢引发各方质疑」, 腾讯财经, ("The tardiness of Nicaraguan Canal construction caused lot of questions") *Tencent Finance*, 20 August 2015, at <http://finance.qq.com/a/20150820/068692.htm>

³² This paragraph has been quoted from 張麟徵 (Chang Lin-zhen), *op. cit.*



still have to observe the region closely. Besides, there is a famous Chinese saying, "A long-standing integrated world is destined to split apart, and a divided world tended to unify at the end," which has always been a well-known historical lesson for us in the Chinese world.

7. Conclusions

After suffering for more than 100 years, China got the chance to rise again; but what is the most important goal for China? the rebuilding of a Chinese community or being a hegemonic power in the world? The answer to those questions needs much calculation and wisdom from its leaders. Perhaps, China has no intention to be a hegemonic power, and according to China's own history, the lesson that the hegemony cannot persist forever, is something well-known by the Chinese people. Only when every country is willing to be what it is, the world can be in peace. The only way to solve the common problems is through the coordination with others with wisdom when necessary, and each country dealing with its own business. Therefore, the coexistence among hegemonic powers is possible, especially considering that the hegemonic position can only be won by reason, not by force. Nevertheless, when several Chinese leaders speak on the maritime military exercises, that China will not seek the hegemony, it seems that their argument could not convince the international community at present time and space, so the future will have to be tested with the passage of time.

But in the eyes of the United States, the only hegemonic power in the world, there must be a different way of interpretation. Since it is normal for a great power to seek the hegemony according to the historical experience, no wonder that the United States takes China's rise as the greatest threat. However, although the hegemonic stability theory in international relations argues that the existence of hegemony is conducive to the order and economic development of the world, the hegemonic countries that need also to be involved in world affairs, must, at the same time, bear a very heavy responsibility. So, after a long period of time, all this will inevitably damage their own national strength. Especially, if hegemonic competition takes place, there will not remain only one champion forever. How to pursue the country's development and greatness, but not making excessive commitments abroad to make the development of the country enduring, it is something worth of reflection. The way the hegemon interacts with its surrounding areas, usually tends to arouse speculation, not knowing whether it is a great power with no ambition, or it is in its way towards reinforcing its hegemony.

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