

July 2022

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Recommended Citation

Jaknanihan, Arrizal Anugerah (2022) "Beyond Inclusion: Explaining China's Rejection on the Indo-Pacific Regional Construct," *Global: Jurnal Politik Internasional*: Vol. 24: No. 1, Article 2.

DOI: 10.7454/global.v24i1.667

Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/global/vol24/iss1/2>

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BEYOND INCLUSION: EXPLAINING CHINA'S REJECTION OF THE INDO-PACIFIC REGIONAL CONSTRUCT

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Submitted: 4 October 2021; accepted: 21 April 2022

ABSTRAK

“Indo-Pasifik” telah menjadi konsep yang semakin banyak diadopsi dalam kebijakan luar negeri dalam beberapa tahun terakhir. Meski istilah “Indo-Pasifik” masih bersifat multitafsir, Tiongkok secara konsisten menolak penggunaan konsep kawasan ini dalam kebijakan resminya. Sikap Beijing digambarkan dalam komentar Menteri Luar Negeri Tiongkok Wang Yi yang mengkritik Indo-Pasifik sebagai “kembalinya mentalitas Perang Dingin” dan “kemunduran sejarah.” Penelitian ini berupaya menjelaskan kenapa Tiongkok bersikap tegas dalam menolak konstruksi kawasan Indo-Pasifik, lepas dari banyaknya interpretasi bersifat inklusif terhadap konsep ini. Dengan menggunakan realist constructivism theory, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa dominannya narasi containment dan anti-Tiongkok mendorong persepsi ancaman dari Beijing terhadap konsep Indo-Pasifik. Narasi yang dominan dalam membentuk kebijakan regional Tiongkok seperti “community of common destiny” turut membentuk bagaimana Indo-Pasifik dipandang sebagai konsep Barat dengan tujuan membatasi pengaruh Tiongkok di sekitar kawasan. Lebih dari sekadar mencari inklusi dari konsepsi Indo-Pasifik, Tiongkok berusaha mendorong visi kawasannya sendiri. Visi Tiongkok diwujudkan melalui melalui Belt and Road Initiative dan berbagai konsep untuk membentuk tatanan kawasan sesuai dengan preferensinya

Kata kunci:

Tiongkok, Indo-Pasifik, tatanan kawasan Sino-sentris, Konstruksi Kawasan, Belt and Road Initiative

ABSTRACT

The concept of “Indo-Pacific” has been increasingly adopted in foreign policies during the past few years. Despite its multifaceted nature, China has consistently rejected the use of the Indo-Pacific concept in its official policy. Beijing’s attitude was reflected in Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s remarks that dismissed the Indo-Pacific as a “come-back of Cold War mentality” and “retrogression of history.” This study explains why China renounced the Indo-Pacific concept despite the increasing inclusion in defining the region. By employing realist constructivism theory, this paper finds that the prevalence of containment and anti-China narrative engenders Beijing’s threat perception to the concept. The dominant narratives in China’s regional strategy, such as “community of common destiny,” also affect how the country treats the Indo-Pacific as a Western-centric concept, aimed to limit China’s influence. Beyond seeking inclusion from the Indo-Pacific conception, China advances its own vision to the region. China’s vision is projected through the Belt and Road Initiatives and various concepts to shape regional order in Beijing’s preference.

Keywords:

China, Indo-Pacific, Sino-centric regional order, Regional Construct, Belt and Road Initiative

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Indo-Pacific has been increasingly used in the policy lexicon during the past few years. The new regional construct denotes the coalescence of the Pacific and the Indian Ocean as a single geostrategic space. China serves a pivotal yet unobserved role in the construction of the concept. As Chengxin Pan (2014, p. 453) aptly argued, the anxiety over China's rise has led various countries to "manufacture super-region designed to hedge against a perceived Sino-centric regional order." Throughout its iteration, the discourse on the Indo-Pacific concept has been dominated by the strategy to contain China, whose influence have stretched beyond its traditional sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific and its periphery (Heiduk & Wacker, 2020).

The notion of containment is further evidenced by the proliferation of economic and security initiatives directed against China, including the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, known informally as the Quad and AUKUS, a trilateral security pact between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. In response, China has been consistent in denouncing the Indo-Pacific concept. The country perceives containment as the underlying objective behind the regional construct (Liu, 2020). Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (2018) lambasted that, "It seems there is never a shortage of headline-grabbing ideas. They [Indo-Pacific concepts] are like the sea foam in the Pacific or Indian Ocean: they may get some attention, but soon will dissipate." Wang's statement captures China's attitude towards the Indo-Pacific: dismissive and full of suspicion.

China's views have been further reinforced as the Indo-Pacific concept is increasingly institutionalised, especially after the first Quad Summit in March 2021, which Wang referred to as "a come-back of Cold War mentality" (People's Daily, 2021). However, understanding containment as the sole reason behind China's renouncement reduces the complexity of the Indo-Pacific regional construction. The term "Indo-Pacific" is multifaceted and has become more complex as various actors adopt the concept. Unlike the U.S.'s anti-China narrative, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) interpreted the Indo-Pacific concept more inclusively.

Although the containment narrative as propagated by the Quad countries' Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision dominates the discourse, the actual interpretations of the Indo-Pacific concept are more varied and nuanced. India, for instance, still largely adheres to the non-alignment principle, which avoids exclusive strategic alignment with a certain country—including the U.S. as fellow Quad members—to contain China. India is also insistent in using

the “inclusive” term in its Indo-Pacific strategy, in contrast to “free” and “open” that are associated with U.S.’s containment narrative (Rajagopalan, 2020). Similarly, Indonesia and ASEAN also advocate an inclusive interpretation (Pertiwi, 2020). Through its own Indo-Pacific Outlook, the member states of ASEAN have demonstrated that the concept of Indo-Pacific is not opposing China’s aspiration. The Outlook specifically “intended to be inclusive in terms of ideas and proposals” so that the organization can continue on becoming an “honest broker” (ASEAN, 2019, p. 1). Despite the inclusion and interest that Beijing share with several countries, China is resolute in renouncing the use of “Indo-Pacific” term in its official policies. This article explains complex interaction between material and ideational factors that shape China’s attitude to the Indo-Pacific regional construct.

A number of studies have analysed the Indo-Pacific regional construct. The existing literatures on the topic can be mapped into three major themes: 1) the Indo-Pacific as a collective strategy to offset China’s influence and maintain rules-based order (Hu, 2020; He, 2018; Liu, 2020; Koga, 2020); 2) diverging and converging geographic conception of the Indo-Pacific region (Jakobson & Medcalf, 2015; Haruko, 2020), and in a lesser extent; 3) the Indo-Pacific regionalisation as the “spillover” of India’s rise to the east (Rajagopalan, 2020; Scott, 2012). In short, the existing literature has discussed converging and diverging views on the Indo-Pacific concept. While China’s role is crucial and its mentioning is ever-present in the debate, analysis on China’s response to the Indo-Pacific regional construct has been largely absent on the existing literature.

China’s response to the Indo-Pacific construct is a crucial but largely overlooked in the current debate. Among the few writings that discuss the subject, most are focusing on how the country responds to the Indo-Pacific concept solely as a part of the U.S.’s strategy (Ye, 2020; Ma, 2020; Liu, 2020). Other writings that focus on the Indo-Pacific more broadly as a regional concept only discussed China’s perception in brief (Danisov, 2021). The previous studies were also preoccupied with materialistic approach, focusing on the proliferation of security initiatives, military build-up, and diplomatic engagement that result in Beijing’s perception of threat. While acknowledging the importance of existing studies, the mentioned works have not sufficiently explained the ideational factors behind China’s rejection. It is imperative to analyse why China reject the Indo-Pacific concept despite the strategic convergence and inclusive concept that have been promoted by several countries. This article aims to fill the research gap by analysing the ideational and material factors that shape China’s rejection of the Indo-Pacific regional construct.

To analyse the factors behind China's rejection, this article employs realist constructivism, a theory coined by J. Samuel Barkin. By using realist constructivism, the analysis is able to explain both ideational and material factors that shape China's behaviour. Apart from the containment efforts directed against China, this article argues that the Indo-Pacific concept represents the Western hegemony over the idea of regional order. Adopting such a concept will threaten China's position in the region; not only by subsuming China into the U.S.-led regional structure, but also displacing China's own visions to shape the region.

Containment strategies, such as establishing new institutions and military build-up, represent material factors that stoke China's perception of threat towards the Indo-Pacific concept. Further, the risk of being subsumed into a regional concept that devoid of China's influence represents an ideational basis that provides a more comprehensive explanation behind China's response. For China, the Indo-Pacific concept represents ideational and material hegemony of foreign powers that must not be facilitated. Asymmetrical power relations among those who adopt the Indo-Pacific concept can result in incorporation of an inclusive Indo-Pacific concept, as advocated by ASEAN, into the broader U.S.'s containment strategy. Further, this power gap can dilute ASEAN's aspiration to portray the Indo-Pacific as an open and inclusive region for China (Ho, 2019), resulting in the latter's vigilance over the concept. In this context, China's revisionism is partly evident: China aspires to build a China-centred regional order which is threatened to be displaced by the Indo-Pacific construct.

The contribution this article provides is threefold. First, it fills the gap in the existing literature by analysing the China's perception on the Indo-Pacific concept and regional construct. Second, this article provides a more inclusive analysis by taking into account factors that are often neglected when the "Indo-Pacific" term is addressed solely as containment strategy. Third, this article sheds light on not only material, but also ideational factors that shape China's response. This article uses Barkin's realist constructivism theory that will be elaborated in the analytical framework section.

Before delving into the analysis, the discussion section will map the dominant theme and narrative that capture China's vision for regional order. The discussion then examines the shift in China's perception to Indo-Pacific following the institutionalisation of the concept. After analysing China's perception, the discussion section will examine the power structure underpinning the Indo-Pacific construct; which actors are dominant and what are the implications will be discussed in the subsection. The discussion will end with analysis on China's attempt to project its own strategy in the Indo-Pacific region.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This research employs realist constructivism to combine realism's primacy of power and constructivism's primacy of ideas in analysing China's behaviour. Barkin (2003; 2010) argued that realism and constructivism overlap at their conceptual core, specifically on the two branches of the theories. First, classical realism's first image analysis and power-maximising tendency (Waltz, 1959; Morgenthau, 1985; Carr, 1964). Unlike neorealism, classical realism heavily implies that norms and values also constitute tools for power. As stated by Carr (1964, p. 235), "It is an unreal kind of realism which ignores the element of morality in any world order." Second, "thin" constructivism that relies on the primacy of power while believing that norms and values constitute state's relative power in the international system (Wendt, 1999). Realist constructivism posits that both ideas and power structure are intertwined in shaping state's behaviour.

Realist constructivism examines how a particular set of ideas or norms affect a state's approach under a certain power structure and, conversely, how power structure shapes the norms or ideas espoused by a state (Barkin, 2003, p. 337). The theory is relevant to analyse China's foreign policy in this article, given the centralistic nature of China's foreign policy-making and the prevalence of ideas in China's approach to the regional order. From this theory, the study identifies two variables that can be observed for the analysis, namely ideas/norms and power structure.

Ideas/norms can be observed through the prevalent narrative in China's approach in defining regional order. For instance, the diplomatic slogans such as China's "peripheral diplomacy" and "community of shared destiny" that distinguish China's approach to the region. These ideas shape China's power-maximising behaviour in the midst of material and ideational power structure. In material terms, power structure can be observed from China's relative position in the region where power struggle takes place, particularly between China and U.S.'s allies. In the ideational terms, this study observes which countries are dominant in defining the "Indo-Pacific" term and how China perceives that dominance as a threat to its regional aspiration.

By taking both material and ideational power into the equation, realist constructivism can provide a more comprehensive analysis on China's behaviour. This theory also brings novelty to the study of China and regional order. In the existing literature, realism and constructivism have often been used separately on the topic related to the Indo-Pacific, whether as a concept or regional space. Realist analysis is premised on the idea that China will

inevitably adopt power-maximising behaviour without taking into account how prevalent ideas among China's key foreign policy actors. Realist approaches represented in variety of concepts such as "power transition" (Shambaugh, 2020) and "Thucydides' Trap" (Allison, 2017).

To explain China's approach to regional order, the existing research have also highlighted ideas that shape China's strategies. Many works have been dedicated on Confucianism and its impact on China's foreign policy (Kissinger, 2011; Zhang, 2015; An et al., 2021). Some works analyse the ideas that shape China's approach on regional security and governance, including the "China dream" (Ferdinand, 2016; Callahan, 2016), "Community of Shared Destiny" (Zhang, 2018), and the long-term goal that these notions sought to achieve, including as China's "great national rejuvenation" (Stevens, 2020; Carrai, 2021) and self-conception as the "middle kingdom" (Jacques, 2009; Hui, 2015). Indeed, since Xi Jinping assumed the presidency, China has coined various concepts that indicate its aspiration to shift the *status quo* in Beijing's favour.

According to the mentioned literature, it is evident that China aspires to gain a leading position in shaping the regional order. The concepts of "community of common destiny and shared future" or briefly "community of common destiny" denote China's vision to build a regional order centred around the country. This is further evidenced by the "new Asia security concept" introduced by Xi Jinping (2014) which signifies China's rejection of foreign concepts in defining China's periphery, namely the Indo-Pacific region. Equally important, China also aims to maximise its power in the regional domain. China's increasingly assertive stance during Xi's administration is embodied by building several initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) seen by many as China's equivalence of the Indo-Pacific strategy (He, 2018; Ma, 2020). China's assertiveness comes from the power structure where the country is located—where many countries attempt to contain its rising influence, both in material and ideational areas.

Consistent with core realist assumptions, China attempts to maximise its power by not only acquiring material resources, but also advocating its own concept of regional order. The leading role that China seeks to achieve necessitates both material and ideational leadership in constructing the region surrounding its periphery. This condition engenders China's negative perception of any concept where China's dominance is absent, including the Indo-Pacific concept advocated by the China's adversaries. As the implication, the U.S.'s dominant role in institutionalising the Indo-Pacific concept and Japan's role during its initial conception makes the concept aptly fit China's threat perception.

This study explains China's renouncement through analysis on two key variables based on the theory above. First, power structure that underpins the Indo-Pacific construct, whether it is the material or ideational power struggle that defines the region. Second, the ideas that capture China's vision on regional order, namely the Indo-Pacific region and its subregion, i.e. East, Southeast, and South Asia. China's ambition as a great power necessitates a leading role both in the material and ideational areas in defining the region. Realist constructivism explains China's negative perception of the Indo-Pacific concept, which is dominated and constructed by anti-China narrative and counterstrategy against China's expanding influence. China's vision to regional order also determines how China treats the Indo-Pacific as a newly constructed region. Analysis on these two variables is detailed on the discussion section.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a qualitative research that employs literature review as the primary data collection method. The method highlights the interpretative nature of the study and emphasises words rather than quantitative data in analysing China's perception on the Indo-Pacific concept. This study analyses primary and secondary data collected from various online sources. The primary data include state documents, speeches, and remarks from Chinese officials sourced mostly from the government websites. The secondary data include academic journals, books, online articles, and news pieces sourced from the internet. In addition, this research also explores data from the opinion and past interview of mainland Chinese scholars, and China state-sponsored media such as *People's Daily*, *Xinhua*, and *Global Times* to map the dominant narrative on the issue.

To explain China's rejection of the Indo-Pacific concept, this article utilises the analytical framework of the realist constructivism theory by Barkin (2003; 2010). The theory posits that both material and ideational factors are crucial in underpinning a state's behaviour. The study analyses the collection of data published surrounding these four events: 1) Shinzo Abe's "Confluence of Two Oceans" speech and first Quad establishment in 2007; 2) Quad's revival and incorporation of Indo-Pacific concept into national strategies in 2017-2018; 3) Adoption of ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific in 2019; and lastly 4) first Quad Summit in 2021. By analysing the mentioned data, this article can elucidate material and ideational factors that shape China's rejection of the Indo-Pacific regional construct.

DISCUSSION

The Indo-Pacific concept has been increasingly incorporated to regional policies since 2017. While the concept is still characterised by ambiguity, China has consistently refused to use the term in its official policy discourse. The arguments this article advanced are twofold. First, the discourse surrounding the Indo-Pacific concept is still dominated by countries that aim to offset China's influence. Although ASEAN offers an alternative interpretation, China perceives that containment strategy still underpins the Indo-Pacific concept due to asymmetric relations of power in constructing the regional concept.

China perceives that the regional concept is dominantly shaped by Western countries, particularly the U.S.'s network of alliance in the region. This means not only ideational dominance, but also material with the proliferation of various Indo-Pacific strategy and unilateral security initiatives. Western domination over the concept threatens to dilute alternative vision that calls for inclusiveness in the Indo-Pacific concept, namely ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) that can be subsumed into U.S.'s strategy (Chongkittavron, 2020). As a result, China has decided to not adopt the concept.

Second, the Indo-Pacific concept threatens to dilute China's vision on regional order. During Xi Jinping's administration, China actively seeks to attain a leading position by advancing Beijing's own vision for regional order such as the "community of common destiny" and "new Asia security concept." Marginalisation and antagonization of China in the "Indo-Pacific" term implied that the country will not be able capitalise the concept for its advantages. In this regard, China not only seeks an inclusion in constructing the Indo-Pacific region, but also a leading position. The following section will examine the ideas that define China's perception to Indo-Pacific concept, power structure surrounding the regional construct, and lastly, China's vision for the region.

China's Vision for Regional Order

As a self-perceived great power, China strives for a leading role in shaping its immediate region (Huang & Kurlantzick, 2020). China's rise, encapsulated in the visions of "China dream" and "great rejuvenation" aims to construct a regional order in which China is positioned at the fulcrum—popularly labelled as "Sino-centric regional order." As observed in an extensive work on Chinese grand strategy by Rush Doshi (2021, p. 175), these concepts "serve as a declaration of China's interest in building order within the region." China has coined various concepts that indicate its aspiration to revamp the existing regional structure throughout Xi's

administration. In the context of regional order, Callahan (2016, p. 228) suggested that Beijing aims to build network of institution that will knit the surrounding region into a “tight network of economic, cultural, political, and strategic relations” centred around China.

“China dream” was first coined in Xi Jinping’s first presidential speech in 2013 and has since become the hallmark of his domestic and foreign policy. The concept epitomises China’s aspiration to become a leading country in global and, more immediately, regional theatre by the time China reaches its centenary anniversary in 2049. To realise the China dream, Beijing must achieve four pillars, namely strong, civilised, harmonious, and beautiful China (Kuhn, 2013). “China dream” is closely intertwined with the goal of achieving “great national rejuvenation” through which China aim to rejuvenate its past greatness by revitalising the country and achieve its global power status. Although the scale of the two goals is global, China’s aim to build its power will resonate the greatest in its neighbouring regions. China’s rejuvenation impacts how the country view its immediate periphery as an arena to consolidate its influence, and, concomitantly, impacts how China views foreign-made concept such as the Indo-Pacific as a hindrance to achieve China’s ambitions.

These two concepts symbolize China’s power-maximising behaviour. As observed by Zicheng, Levine, and Liu (2011), “If China does not become a world power, the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will be incomplete. Only when it becomes a world power can we say that the total rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has been achieved.” And as China seek its global status, the immediate region in China’s periphery—namely the Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia, or, in other word, the Indo-Pacific region—will become the frontier of China’s power projection. Over the past two years, China has undertaken various initiatives to cement its influence in the surrounding region, such as establishing BRI and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, strengthening its relations with ASEAN, and introducing various concepts to better portray and cement its position in the region.

Further, in the security area, Xi Jinping (2014) also proposed the “new Asia security concept,” stating that, “It is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia.” By arguing that the traditional structure could not accommodate Asia’s interest, Xi attempted to legitimise China’s efforts in redefining the regional construct. Such a role was illustrated in one of Xi’s speeches at the 2018 Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, when he declared that China needs to “lead the reform of the global governance system with the concepts of fairness and justice” (Xinhua, 2018).

To conduct its regional diplomacy, Xi Jinping introduced the concept of “community of common destiny and shared future” or shortly “community of common destiny” (CCD) that calls for a fair and equitable relations between sovereign nations, especially between developed and developing world. Xi views that the *status quo* does not accommodate fair relations between developing countries, especially Asia. And all through his administration, Xi has exhibited various attempts to introduce China’s concept of regional order. Instead of becoming a “free rider” in the existing system, China actively advances its own vision for the region (Summer, 2016; He, 2018).

The revisionist element of China policy outlook is apparent in its attempt to alter the *status quo* which was built upon the U.S.-led regional architecture. In this regard, China views the Indo-Pacific concept and regional construction as an attempt to thwart China’s vision. Even since its early iteration, many Chinese scholars contended that the Indo-Pacific concept is a sort of “manufactured super-region designed to hedge against a perceived Sino-centric regional order” (Pan, 2014, p. 453). China does not only want to be included in the new regional construct, which is unlikely considering the U.S.’s and western powers’ dominance over the concept, but also to advance its own regional vision.

Beijing perceives the Indo-Pacific as a concept that reinforces the existing U.S.-led regional order. Xia Liping from Tongji University (Chen, 2018, p. 22) argued that the Indo-Pacific concept aims to regulate China’s rise in an international framework that is dominated by the U.S.. Against this backdrop, China advances its own vision of regional construction which is focused to leverage developing countries across the Indian and Pacific Ocean, especially Southeast Asian and South Asian states. In October 2013, China held a high-level work conference where it renewed the concept of “neighbourhood” or “peripheral” diplomacy implemented during the Hu Jintao administration. During the conference, Xi Jinping (2013) stated that a good neighbourhood diplomacy is the prerequisite to achieve China’s “two centenary goals”: China dream and the rejuvenation of great China nation.

The conference had reoriented China’s diplomatic focus, from one that was previously occupied by major powers to the one that focuses more on China’s periphery, including Northeast, Central, Southeast, and South Asia (Zhang, 2018). China seeks to incorporate the neighbouring countries into a “single region,” a China-centred region (Summers, 2016). China’s self-perception as a great power makes the country believes that the vision can only be advanced under its leadership. After introducing the CCD concept to the 2015 Boao Forum for Asia in Hainan, Xi Jinping (2015) stated that as a big country, China should shoulder “greater

responsibilities for regional and world peace and development, as opposed to seeking greater monopoly over regional world affairs.” Xi’s speech alluded to China’s self-conception as the country who ought to lead the reform and how it could benefit the surrounding countries.

CCD represents China’s vision for regional order. The concept envisioned a new type of partnership that is more “equitable and balanced” to achieve “common interests of mankind,” said Former Chinese President Hu Jintao (2012) when delivering his report during the 18th CCP Conference. In a similar vein, former Chinese Ambassador for Cuba Liu Yuqin stated that China aims to establish a new political and economic order that is based on equity, which the *status quo* failed to achieve. Interestingly, the CCD concept is used by China more frequently to developing countries’ audiences, whereas developed countries are rarely used as reference to this concept (Zhang, 2018). Its usage implies China’s vision to build a network where developing countries can be leveraged by China’s ascent as a leading country. China perceives inherent incompatibility that is posed by the Indo-Pacific concept not only for China’s interest, but also neighbouring countries that China attempts to support through its narrative.

Chinese Ambassador to Singapore Hong Xiyong (2020), for instance, wrote in his editorial for *The Strait Times* that, “the so-called ‘Indo-Pacific strategy’ does not fit with the common interests of the region and is just a U.S. effort to create regional divisions to contain China.” Similarly, Wang Yi also contended the Indo-Pacific strategy undermined the prospect of peace and development of East Asia, during a joint press conference with the Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin in October 2020 (Xinhua, 2020). Perceived under the great power competition narrative, China’s initiatives to shape regional order are deliberately framed as an “antidote” for the U.S.-centred regional architecture.

Based on China’s narrative, Beijing’s ascent has to anchor to the national interest of neighbouring countries. This aspiration is exemplified in one of Xi Jinping’s speeches when he pledged that the “China dream” will converge with aspirations of its neighbours as the part of the community of common destiny (Xinhua, 2013). China views that AOIP is still susceptible to be influenced by the U.S.’s Indo-Pacific strategy. Its inherent weakness, moreover, also make its inclusive vision at risk to be diluted. Both ideational and material factors necessitate China to advance its own initiative, not embracing the foreign concept that is still malleable and can be directed against the country in its further development. This prevalent narrative ultimately shapes how China perceives the Indo-Pacific concept and that perception shifted along the power struggle in the region.

China's Shifting Perception to the Indo-Pacific Construct

In the context of regional architecture, the idea of Indo-Pacific was first introduced by Shinzo Abe in his “Confluence between Two Oceans” speech in 2007. Abe’s speech exhorted a stronger cooperation between the Pacific and Indian Ocean, especially between the four countries he called as the “Asia’s Democratic Diamond.” His address later served as an ideational formation of the Quad. In his speech, Abe “envisages a strategy whereby Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. state of Hawaii form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the Western Pacific.” (Hayashi, 2013). Against the backdrop of Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands tension with China, Abe (2012) later added that the Quad countries must “shoulder more responsibility as guardians of navigational freedom across the Indian and Pacific Oceans.”

Over years, the interpretation of the Indo-Pacific concept has evolved and diverged among the countries that adopt the concept. Thus, understanding the “Indo-Pacific” term as a single U.S.-led containment effort is misleading and inadequate to analyse this concept. The Indo-Pacific concept is understood differently in terms of geographic area and strategic orientation. The 2017 U.S.’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific covers only the Pacific to the Eastern Indian Ocean on its map; Japan and India’s conception of the Indo-Pacific region, in contrast, encompasses a wider area, spanning from the U.S. in the Western Pacific to the Eastern Coast of Africa (Haruko, 2020). Apart from geographic conceptions, the strategic orientation also varied between countries. The country’s alignment with the U.S. and degree of threat perception against Beijing determine how they project their respective Indo-Pacific vision.

While the U.S., Japan, and Australia exhibit clear antagonism against China, middle powers like India and Indonesia still largely adhere to the non-alignment principle (Rajagopalan; 2020; Kartikasari, 2019). This strategic orientation distinguishes India from the other U.S.’s allies, as evidenced by India’s rejection of the Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in Indian territory and its insistence of using the “inclusive” word in its Indo-Pacific vision, in contrast to U.S.’s “free” and “open” (Peri, 2021). India’s refusal to condemn Russian invasion to Ukraine against the other Quad members adds another example.

The lack of clarity surrounding the Indo-Pacific concept has resulted in a dismissive, rather than a confrontational, response from China during its early iteration. As described by Ma (2020, p. 181), China’s initial responses to the Indo-Pacific concept and strategy that entailed were rather “sporadic, cautious, and reserved,” instead of aggressive. China viewed

the Quad and Indo-Pacific strategy as challenges, but not an immediate threat that needed to be addressed in high regards (Zhang, 2019). Perceiving India as the weakest link of the Quad, China believes that improving its relationship with New Delhi would undermine the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategy.

Beijing's initial position is summarised in one of Global Times (2017) editorial, a China-stated sponsored media, that ridicule the concept of Indo-Pacific as "a fresh one, but if reviewed carefully, it appears as another empty slogan." The editorial echoed the sentiment previously delivered by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (2018) who described Indo-Pacific concept as the "seafoam in the Pacific or the Indian Ocean: they may get some attention, but soon will dissipate." Similarly, Lin Minwang from Fudan University in Chen (2018, p. 23) stated that the Indo-Pacific concept is still not matured and needs to be developed further to show its actual significance. The statements pointed China's perceived weakness to the Indo-Pacific concept.

Despite its early dismissal, China's attitude has significantly shifted as the Indo-Pacific concept has undergone rapid institutionalisation.¹ The escalation of U.S.-China competition has instigated various countries to adopt the term through the lens of strategic policies, replacing the term "Asia-Pacific" that was commonly used. In 2017, the U.S. State Department rolled out the FOIP in the U.S. National Security Strategy, which explicitly labelled China as a "strategic competitor" and "revisionist power" (White House, 2017, p. 25). The establishment of the "second" Quad in 2017 further signifies the security narrative that define this concept.²

To understand China's growing perception of the Indo-Pacific concept, Quad's revival in 2017 and its subsequent summit in 2021 were critical. First, Quad's revival and initial adoption of the FOIP vision exposes the prevalence of the Indo-Pacific concept. Not only that the Indo-Pacific concept was gaining prominence, the term was also officially adopted into strategic policies in various countries. Second, it signifies the security-heavy nature and exclusionism behind the concept (Kliem, 2020). The Quad reconvened when China's tension with surrounding countries was escalating. There was dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands with Japan, border conflict in the Doklam Plateau with India, Prime Minister Turnbull's accusation over China's "foreign interference" with Australia, and the overarching competition with the U.S.

The prevalence of security narrative makes China downplay the potential economic and socio-cultural dimensions of the Indo-Pacific concept as championed by other actors like ASEAN. Even when the term is adopted into the economic initiatives, the "Indo-Pacific" term

is still closely associated with the containment effort against China. For instance, Biden's Indo-Pacific Economic Network that explicitly stated to not include China in building infrastructure and supply-chain cooperation (Blanchard, 2022). The aim to offset the influence and dependency to China also underpin other regional economic initiatives, including the US-Japan-Australia Trilateral Partnership for Indo-Pacific Infrastructure Investment and Supply Chain Resilience Initiative.

The Quad's revival has remarkably shifted China's perception towards the Indo-Pacific concept, from initially reserved to explicitly opposing the term. During the inception of the "first" Quad, then-Chinese President Hu Jintao only expressed an unconvinced and suspicious response when he sought clarification regarding the Quad during the 2007 G8 Summit (Ali, 2007). After the establishment of the "second" Quad, and even more so after its 2021 summit, China officials responded to this initiative harshly by referring to the Quad as an "Indo-Pacific NATO" and "detrimental to international order" (Jaipragas & Sukumaran, 2020). As illustrated in Table 1, China's response has been shifting along the institutionalisation of the concept, notably after the Quad Summit in 2021.

Table 1. China's Shifting Perception towards Indo-Pacific

Indo-Pacific Construct	Year	China's Response
Shinzo Abe's "Confluence of Two Ocean" speech	2007	Seeking clarification
The "first" Quad established	2008	Dismissive, suspicious
The "second" Quad established	2017	Dismissive, underestimating
"Indo-Pacific" term adopted in various national strategies	2017-2018	Opposing, referring to as the threat for regional peace and development
ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific adopted	2019	Acknowledging shared interest, yet not explicitly support the document
Quad Summit	2021	Strongly opposing, referring to the "Cold War mentality" rhetoric

Source: Author's formulation from the mentioned data

Quad's revival sent a clear signal from U.S.' allies that countering China outweighs the benefit from maintaining cordiality with the country. Strategic necessity to contain China had

underpinned the re-establishment of the Quad and the proliferation of the Indo-Pacific concept (Kliem, 2020). Quad's security dimension has inevitably engendered China's perception of threat which perceives the Indo-Pacific concept solely as the strategy to foil Beijing's aspiration. The domination of such narrative was later proven to be self-confirming when several countries, mostly the West, began to adopt tough policies using the Indo-Pacific concept, such as the FONOP, Quad, and AUKUS trilateral security pact that provide Australia with eight nuclear submarines.

China's opposition to the Indo-Pacific strategy becomes closely intertwined with its renouncement of the Indo-Pacific as a concept. Chinese officials are persistent in still using the "Asia-Pacific" term, even when they were asked to respond to the "Indo-Pacific" (Liu, 2020). For instance, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying said, "For a long time the U.S. has been grossly interfering in the affairs of regional countries in the *Asia Pacific* [emphasis added]. Politically, it has tried to drive a wedge between them by promoting the so-called 'Indo-Pacific'" (Xinhua, 2019a). In contrast to the Indo-Pacific, the Asia-Pacific concept is still closely associated with China's pre-eminence. This implies how China perceives power relations that operates behind the Indo-Pacific construct, which is still dominated by the so-called West.

Power Relations behind the Indo-Pacific Construct

The Indo-Pacific concept has been closely associated with the U.S.'s containment strategy. Asymmetric power relations characterised the construction of the region, where the U.S. and its allies serve as a "core," while surrounding countries act as "periphery." With such as a power structure behind the Indo-Pacific concept, China's officials and most academic debates have viewed the U.S.'s allies as the only dominant actors that shape the Indo-Pacific discourse (Ma, 2020). This, in turns, leads China to perceive that such as regional construct is not neutral and only cement the U.S.'s foothold in the region.

This perception fits China's growing narrative that foreign power attempts to build a coalition to hinder China's rising influence in the region. Speaking during the 100th Anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, Xi Jinping stated that China "will never allow any foreign force to bully, oppress, or subjugate us" and later added that China would not "accept sanctimonious preaching from those who feel they have the right to lecture us" (Xinhua, 2021, pp. 8-9) The centenary address portrayed China in the victim position, besieged by foreign powers that attempt to hinder the country from further ascent. The construction of

the Indo-Pacific region and proliferation of its strategies are consistent with this growing narrative.

China's aspiration to be a regional leader has been enunciated frequently since Xi Jinping started his presidency in 2013. In alignment with this policy shift, China has become more assertive in exerting its dominance, such as building artificial islands and military bases in the South China Sea, increasing military presence in the Taiwan Strait, and growing more aggressive in asserting its territorial claim (Shambaugh, 2018). China's departure from Deng Xiaoping's era "hide and bide" and "low-profile" foreign policy to Xi Jinping's "strive for achievement" are accompanied by two factors. First, China seeks to become a dominant player in the international stage and, more immediately, in the region. China's self-portrayal as a "benign power," in contrast to the U.S. as a "malign power," also pushes the country to advocate its own vision as an alternative to the *status quo* (Hao, 2015).

These aspirations are shaped by various ideas that pushes China's rise, notably "China dream" and "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." After the end of the "century of humiliation," China strives for a leading position in the global stage.³ The notion of "China dream" constitutes four parts by which China aims to be "strong" economically, politically and militarily; "civilised" by upholding fairness and culture; "harmonious" by maintaining amity with various partners and diverse class inside the country; and "beautiful" with environment and arts upon reaching its 100th Anniversary of People's Republic of China in 2049 (Kuhn, 2013).

China's optimism through the above narratives notwithstanding, China's rise also carries along the paranoia that foreign powers are actively trying to thwart China's effort to achieve its goals. This perception of threat has been further reinforced when other countries, particularly the U.S. who views China as a rival, attempts to limit China's influence. Responding to the declassified U.S.'s Indo-Pacific document, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian (2021) stated that regional countries should be "clear-headed and vigilant enough not to be hijacked onto the U.S. chariot or be used as a tool to maintain U.S. hegemony." In this narrative, the construction of the Indo-Pacific region is perceived as the U.S.'s act of hindrance that China has previously anticipated in achieving its vision.

Most of the Chinese academic community views Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy as the continuation of Obama's "Pivot to Asia" or "Rebalancing" (Liu, 2020; Zhang, 2019). For instance, Zhao Qinghai from the Chinese Institute of International Studies in Ma (2020, p. 188), referred to the FOIP as an "old wine in a new bottle." Zhao referred to the continuity of Western

ambition to compete with China. This view was later evidenced with the proliferation of security initiatives built under the umbrella of the Indo-Pacific concept.

Different from Obama's rebalancing, the Indo-Pacific concept lay a more concerted effort by explicitly naming China as a common threat and building a set of coalitions in the region (Choong, 2019). This sentiment was echoed by Wang Yi during China's high-level visit to Malaysia in October 2020. Answering to the *South China Morning Post* interview, Wang stated that the US and its allies "aims to build a so-called Indo-Pacific NATO underpinned by the quadrilateral mechanism involving the U.S., Japan, India and Australia" (Jaipragas & Sukumaran, 2020).

Although Quad initially appeared as a single and unified front, its strategic alignment varies across members. India, for instance, does not exclusively label China as a common threat in the region. The country remains wary that exclusive alignment will reduce its diplomatic manoeuvre, given its tradition of non-alignment (Rajagopalan, 2020). Moreover, Medcalf and Mohan (2014) also argued that India' and Australia's self-conception as middle powers may shape their approach to find a strategic autonomy, instead of following and relying exclusively on the U.S.. Initially, Australia's middle power role could also push the country to seek a more mediational role in the upcoming conflict, following Indonesia and ASEAN states that took similar approach (Taylor, 2020; Pertiwi, 2020).

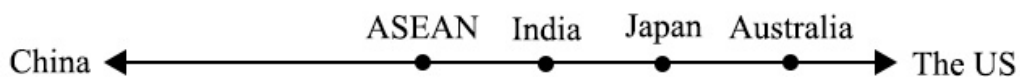
While the Indo-Pacific "troika"—the U.S., Australia, and Japan—endorse the term "free and open" in their Indo-Pacific visions, India remains cautious by advocating the terms "inclusive" that suggest its convergence with China, as ASEAN attempt to do through AOIP (Zhang, 2019). India's hesitance to follow the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategy altogether is also driven by its close cooperation with China in various areas. Looking upon the past withdrawal of India and Australia from the "first Quad," it can be inferred that India does not always share the similar sentiment to that of the U.S. in confronting China (Kliem, 2020), at least until the AUKUS was established.

China's fear is becoming a "self-fulfilling prophecy" as Quad and other minilateral arrangements is becoming more institutionalised, isolating China. By forming a security and economic network across the newly-constructed Indo-Pacific "super region," China feared that other Indo-Pacific countries, particularly Indonesia and other ASEAN states, will be subsumed into the U.S.-led containment network (Ho, 2019). With most ASEAN members still perceive China as a main security threat (Prajuli, 2013), Beijing's policymakers fear the possibility that ASEAN's Indo-Pacific vision might be turned against China. The lack of clarity surrounding

AOIP further affirms China's perception that the AOIP is still deficient. It becomes clear that the Outlook cannot convince China to secure its interest in the region by adopting a similar arrangement.

China's sentiment was captured on Wang Yi's remarks on the AOIP when he stated that the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategy might derail ASEAN's aspiration from building an open and inclusive region, including for China. He later added that "the Chinese side has always maintained an open and constructive attitude in this cooperation" (Yi, 2019). Wang's statement exhibited the reticent response from Beijing, rather than clear acceptance that ASEAN had expected by promoting its outlook. Similarly, in the joint statement to commemorate the 30th anniversary of China-ASEAN dialogue in November 2021 (ASEAN, 2021, p. 1), China only "reaffirms the principle of the AOIP" without explicitly stating its support to the document. Despite ASEAN's attempts to promote inclusivity, China remains cautious that the concept might only serve the U.S.'s interest due to its lack of deliverability that can allay China's concerns.

Figure 1. Countries' Relative Alignment in the Indo-Pacific Concept



Source: Formulated by author from the mentioned data

AOIP's weakness is also demonstrated by unwillingness of the individual ASEAN states to push for the adoption of the Indo-Pacific concept. Their mixed-responses were reflected with dithering to the Quad (Laksmana, 2020). After AOIP was adopted, only two ASEAN countries, Indonesia and Vietnam, have incorporated the concept into their national policies.⁴ Worse, the two countries' approaches diverge remarkably. Indonesia's Indo-Pacific strategy is driven by a normative approach (Pertwi, 2021), while Vietnam's is driven by a rather realist orientation (Ha, 2021). Moreover, AOIP is still lacking operational policies. Most of the documents are filled with typical ASEAN languages with indecision and no clarity to address pressing issues such as maritime security. As Laksmana (2019, p. 110) put it bluntly, AOIP is "defective at birth as far as strategic outcomes are concerned."

While China delivers a positive response towards the AOIP, it is evident that China also accounts for AOIP's weakness in its strategic calculus (Chongkittavorn, 2019; Ho, 2019).

As a consequence, the lack of clarity surrounding the AOIP makes it susceptible to foreign influence, including from the U.S. who had initially supported the ASEAN's proposal. This condition affirms China's perception on "core and periphery" relations that underpin Indo-Pacific power structure, where the U.S. and its allies have a dominant role in shaping the Indo-Pacific construct. Instead of pushing for an inclusive Indo-Pacific concept, China advances its own vision for the region.

Appropriation of the Indo-Pacific Concepts

Before the Indo-Pacific concept was rearticulated in 2017, China had long introduced its own vision for the region. Instead of adopting the existing term, China seeks to build the region by using its own initiative. This sub-section details China's own strategy to build the Indo-Pacific region as its sphere of influence. Most Chinese scholars on the issue argued that the BRI is the China's equivalent of Indo-Pacific strategy (Ma, 2020). On another observation, Rory Medcalf (2018) opined that the BRI can be seen as Indo-Pacific strategy with "Chinese characteristics."

On many occasions, BRI were often compared to the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategy in terms of its significance and deliverable for regional development. For instance, in response to Mike Pompeo's remarks during the Indo-Pacific Business Forum, *People's Daily* (2018) editorial wrote that the U.S.'s investment for the "open" Indo-Pacific region will not cripple the Belt and Road Initiative." In another editorial at *Global Times*, Peng (2019) contended that the BRI is "not a countermeasure to the Indo-Pacific strategy" and later added that the Indo-Pacific strategy "seems to be moving more in the direction of confrontation." These sentiments presented BRI as an equivalence and better alternative to U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategy.

Instead of adopting the "Indo-Pacific" term, China has been appropriating various elements of the Indo-Pacific concept in its regional strategy. He (2018) argued that China adopted a "hybrid" Indo-Pacific strategy, different from the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific construct that privileges maritime over continental features from the surrounding region. China's "Indo-Pacific strategy" combines both maritime and continental approaches in addressing the region. The equivalence of the U.S.'s strategy is manifested through various China-led initiatives, such as BRI and SCO that cover both maritime and continental spans of the Indo-Pacific region.

Focusing in continental area in the north-eastern part of the Indo-Pacific map, SCO incorporates India into the initiative. Ye (2020) argued that China's decision to allow India's accession was not only taken to keep India's rise in check, but also to hedge against the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategy that also relies on India as one of its main partners. Both BRI and SCO

exemplified China's own approach to the Indo-Pacific region that had been initiated even before the Quad in 2017. Based on the analysis above, it can be inferred that China had initially adopted its own regional vision. Therefore, espousing the Indo-Pacific concept will not only harness the U.S.-led regional order, but also dilute China's own regional visions.

At the first image level, embracing the Indo-Pacific concept might also give adverse effect to Xi Jinping's legitimacy that is supported by making diplomatic legacies, such as the concept of CCD and China dream (Zhang, 2018; Lida, 2020).⁵ Similar to Hu Jintao's signature policy of "Peaceful Development" or Deng Xiaoping's "Four Point Modernisation," China's regional visions described in the above section can be perceived as Xi's attempt to build his own legacy. Political legacy is crucial to cement the footprint of Xi's over-a-decade leadership and legitimise his current leadership. Building political legacy has become more urgent since the abolition of the presidential terms limit in 2018. Xi's newly ambitious goals can be perceived as the pretexts to legitimise his terms extension.

As later confirmed by Wang Yi (2016), "The CCD concept is a core achievement of China's diplomatic innovation [under the leadership of President Xi Jinping]. To implement CCD and rejuvenate the Chinese nation have become the objectives of diplomacy with Chinese characteristics" (People's Daily, 2016). The statement shows a close association between Xi's personal aspiration and the regional concept that China proposed.

Table 2. China's Regional Vision on Indo-Pacific

Concept/Initiatives	Coverage on Indo-Pacific Area
China Dream	Global, focusing on Indo-Pacific as China's immediate region
Community of Common Destiny	Indo-Pacific area, focusing on developing countries
Neighbourhood/Peripheral Diplomacy	China's periphery, including Asia-Pacific, Central Asia, and South Asia
Belt and Road Initiative	Global, covering both continental and maritime area of the Indo-Pacific, focusing on developing countries
Shanghai Cooperation Organization	Northwestern part of Indo-Pacific's continental area, Eurasia

Source: formulated by the author from He (2018), Zhang (2018), Summers (2016).

As detailed in Table 2 above, China has advanced its own vision in defining the regional order. The ideas imply how China views itself as leading power in the region and, as the implications, views the Indo-Pacific as a foreign concept that will hinder its vision. Consequently, China has consistently rejected the construction and institutionalisation of the Indo-Pacific region, given the prevalence of the containment narrative and power relations behind it.

Wei Zongyou from Fudan University in Chen (2018) argued that the geostrategic centre of gravity will shift to the Indo-Pacific region in the upcoming years. Along with this shift, Beijing believes that foreign powers will try to foil China's attempts to secure its dominance. To achieve its "rejuvenation" goal and securing its core interests, China has increased its presence in many disputed areas, including the South China Sea and Taiwan, whose reunification is deemed necessary, as stated by Xi Jinping (Xinhua, 2019b). While ASEAN attempt to portray the Indo-Pacific as an inclusive region through AOIP, the "rules-based" principle that is used in the document might be used against China, especially in the South China Sea issue. Fearing that such principles could be iterated as the justification in making an "anti-China" coalition, China decides not to adopt the concept.⁶ Further, considering the robust military ties between most ASEAN member states with the U.S., China feels safer to not espouse the Indo-Pacific concept.

CONCLUSION

With the latest announcement of the European Union's and Biden-led U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategies, the Indo-Pacific concept has become increasingly pivotal in defining the regional order. Many attempts to institutionalise the Indo-Pacific concept has made the regional construct becoming more complex and multifaceted. Notwithstanding this nuance, China has remained steadfast on renouncing the Indo-Pacific concept. This article yields two arguments that explain China's response.

First, despite the call for inclusiveness, the construction and institutionalisation of the Indo-Pacific concept are still dominated by anti-China narratives. Western-dominated power structure that underpins the Indo-Pacific also engenders China's perception of threat in viewing the concept. Second, the Indo-Pacific concept is still viewed as a foreign notion that poses a challenge to China's own regional vision. If China were adopting the "Indo-Pacific" term in its official policies, it could be seen as a compromise on China's ambition and diluting China's

vision for regional order. In this regard, China seeks not only inclusion in the Indo-Pacific concept, but also a leading role in its construction.

Beijing's perception was affirmed by various initiatives the country perceives as containment efforts, such as the establishment of the "second" Quad—which Wang Yi dismissed as an "Indo-Pacific new NATO" (Patranobis, 2021), AUKUS, and various exclusionary initiatives under the "Indo-Pacific" jargon. The increase of the anti-China narrative affirms Beijing's rhetoric about "Cold War mentality." Further, asymmetrical relations are also evident in the Indo-Pacific power structure. The Quad countries are able to incorporate the Indo-Pacific concept into deliverable strategic policies. On the opposite, ASEAN's visions, which champions inclusivity, remains unclear at the policy level. As the implications, China fears that Western's dominance could dilute ASEAN's vision and turn it against China.

To maximise its power and achieve the "great national rejuvenation," China seeks a leading role in shaping the regional order. Defining its peripheral region at the material and ideational levels is no exception to this goal. The Indo-Pacific concept is thus viewed as a threat against China's aspiration. Without adopting the "Indo-Pacific" term into its official lexicon, China has moved forward with its own "Indo-Pacific strategy," mainly through the BRI that covers both maritime and continental area of the Indo-Pacific. China seeks not only an inclusive Indo-Pacific, but also a regional concept in which Chinese influence rest at the centre. In this regard, the inclusivity that ASEAN offers through AOIP is not sufficient to leverage Beijing's interest. Not only because China cannot capitalise on the concept, but also because China has long sought to project its own vision to the region.

Understanding the Indo-Pacific solely as a U.S.-led containment strategy risks not only overlook the complexity surrounding the regional construct, but also various factors that constitute China's renouncement. By taking both ideational and material factors into the analysis, China's rejection can be analysed beyond a reductionist lens. China will likely maintain its posture over the Indo-Pacific as a broad concept, given the proliferation of initiatives aimed to offset the country's influence. However, apart from its rejection, it is equally important to note that China also appropriate several elements of the Indo-Pacific concept. It is evident that China has begun to incorporate the Indo-Pacific elements in its regional strategy. Moving beyond the ideational debate, future study can delve deeper by analysing China' strategy to the Indo-Pacific region, both as a space of competition and cooperation on its periphery.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research would have not been possible without supports from my colleagues. I would like to express my appreciation to the academic community at the Department of International Relations, Universitas Gadjah Mada and Research Center for Politics, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), especially Hayati Nufus and Lidya Christin Sinaga for providing invaluable insights for this study. Without their remarkable contributions, this article could have not been made.

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Note:

¹ The process and shortcomings of the Indo-Pacific institutionalization are discussed in He & Feng (2020)

² The "first" Quad was formed in 2007 by the initiation of then-Japanese PM Shinzo Abe, yet ceased to active after Australia and India withdrew from the initiative in 2008 in response to China's opposition. The "second" Quad re-established in 2017 amidst increasing tension between China and the four countries, then managed to convene its first summit in September 2021.

³ "Century of humiliation" refers to the period marked by the subjugation and defeat of China by foreign powers. The period spans from the downfall of Qing's dynasty after the Opium War in the late 19th century until the Communist Revolution 1949 when People's Republic of China is declared.

⁴ The term "Indo-Pacific" is adopted in various national policies. For instance, Vietnam's 2019 Defence White Paper, 13th Vietnam Communist Party Congress, Indonesia's laws related to the Global Maritim Fulcrum (Poros Maritim Dunia), and various Indo-Pacific policies advocated by Indonesia to the external audience.

⁵ "First image" refers to three level of analysis or "image" conceptualized by Kenneth Waltz (1959). The "first image" refers to the individuals who mainly assume the leading role in defining state's foreign policy, "second image" refers to the state, while the "third image" refers to the international system where state interacts.

⁶ ASEAN defines the Indo-Pacific as an open and inclusive region through AOIP (see ASEAN, 2019, p. 3). However, some principles are deemed threatening for China, including the rules-based order and respect for UNCLOS that China has violated based on the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration decision.