

Smart Talk No. 27

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This product presents a policy-oriented summary of the Smart Talk.

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G2 and the Future of the Asia-Pacific Region

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On July 13, 2012, the East Asia Institute invited Yeh-chung Lu, assistant professor in the Department of Diplomacy at the National Cheng-chi University in Taiwan, to discuss on the G2 concept and its implications for the future of the Asia-Pacific region. The following are some of the main points of the presentation and the subsequent discussion with South Korean experts and scholars.

Summary of the Seminar

With the rise of China and the relative decline of the United States since the economic crisis in 2008, the debate on concepts like G2 or “Chimerica” has intensified. The G2 derives from the Gx process that began in 1975 with the creation of the G7. This process ideally aims to strike a balance between effectiveness and legitimacy in international governance.

Beyond these theoretical considerations, Professor Lu outlined how the G2 has also been a practical proposal made by the United States to China. With China’s rise, this approach by Washington was a new way of handling the bilateral relationship. Although Beijing liked the idea of being put on an equal footing with the United States, it expressed official disapproval of the G2. Indeed, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao publically conveyed disagreement with the suggestion of the G2. He highlighted three reasons for his country’s opposition to such an idea, the first was that China is still a developing country and not ready for such a role, the second is that it remains committed to an independent foreign policy, and third is that it firmly believes in-

ternational issues should be dealt with in a multilateral framework. Despite these stated concerns, Beijing’s main worry is that the G2 concept could be used by the United States to intervene in its domestic politics. Therefore, China prefers a C2 process or the coordination of two.

The Obama administration began with the “strategic reassurance” approach to China, which built on from the “responsible stakeholder” of the Bush administration. Under “strategic reassurance,” the Obama administration combined three pillars, bilateral, global, and regional. The bilateral approach consisted of a welcoming attitude towards China’s rise, while the global approach was an institutional one focused on making sure Beijing was consistent with international law. At the same time, the regional approach made efforts to ensure that China’s rise is a stabilizing force rather than a disruptive one for the Asia-Pacific region.

Professor Lu believed that although “strategic patience” weathered the difficult issues of the arms sales to Taiwan and the Dalai Lama’s visit to Washington in early 2010, the *Cheonan* incident was the moment when the Obama administration changed course. As a result of this more assertive behavior from China, the United States began to place less emphasis on “strategic reassurance” and instead focused on the notion of “pivot,” or rebalancing to Asia.

From this, Professor Lu concluded that divergent interests remain between China and the United States which makes the prospects for sincere cooperation as envisioned by the

notion of a G2 unlikely. Rather, he believed that a more informal G2 was possible that cooperated on a case-by-case basis.

The discussion focused on the question of Taiwan related to the G2, as cross-strait relations continue to be a source of tension between the two superpowers. It had been expected that the recent improvement in cross-strait relations would bolster peace and stability in the region, particularly between China and the United States. However, improved relations with Taiwan has actually allowed for China to be more assertive on other issues, such as the South China Sea.

Professor Lu stated that although ties between China and Taiwan have improved, the political status of the Republic of China remains as one of the main problematic areas. He suggested that the opening of a representative office in Mainland China could help to reduce tensions on this political issue.

The discussants also considered the complex challenges facing the region, and the role that South Korea can play. Indeed, the challenges are transnational and interconnected and therefore cannot be handled by countries individually. In this regard, network diplomacy can help to address these challenges. As a middle power, South Korea is well-placed to take the lead on these regional issues and play an active role. ■

About the Speaker

Yeh-chung Lu

Yeh-chung Lu is assistant professor in the Department of Diplomacy in National Cheng-chi University in Taipei. His research focuses on the US-China relations, as well as on the foreign policies of both countries. More generally, his interests include international security issues, international institutions, globalization and nationalism. He had experience in both the private sector and the government branch in Taiwan, where he provided policy suggestions on Taiwan's participation in APEC and WTO. His publications appeared in *New Asia*, *Journal of Contemporary China*, *Wenti yu Yanjiu* and in edited books. Currently working in liberalism in UR theory and how it applies to the Sino-American relations and American foreign policy, he published a book chapter on this topic this year. Yeh-chung Lu received a doctoral degree in Political Science from George Washington University in Washington DC.

Moderator

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