

# On Evolutionary Geoeconomics and the RCEP Case: A Correlative SWOT Analysis

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*This integrative review introduces the correlative and evolutionary perspective of SWOT as a strategic analysis mechanism of geoeconomics. We use the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) as a case study. Thus, we establish the emerging challenges and threats by correlating the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the RCEP, its members, and the global system. We conclude that this evolutionary approach of SWOT in geoeconomics can contribute to a holistic understanding of the current phase of the new globalization. It appears that evolutionary geoeconomics studies dialectically opposing views and interests. In this direction, we find that the vision and ambitions of the RCEP do not delve into significant socioeconomic depth compared to other multilateral organizations. This fact poses strategic risks to this new trade bloc's longevity and socioeconomic sustainability. At the same time, we examine how these geostrategic dimensions are linked to the gradual construction of the broader framework of the new perspective of global socioeconomic development.*

**Keywords:** Evolutionary Geoeconomics, Correlative SWOT Analysis, RCEP, Socioeconomic Development, Global Liberalism

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper integrates the correlative and evolutionary SWOT analysis into the geoeconomic theoretical horizon.<sup>1</sup> This gap in the literature concerns an apparent analytical insufficiency of some quasi-static and relatively shallow approaches to international political economy.<sup>2</sup> Recent developments following Russia's invasion of Ukraine seem to confirm this relative theoretical myopia. For example, many saw Germany's low gas prices due to its trade relations with Russia as a lasting and solid opportunity.<sup>3</sup> Today, however, this energy dependence is transformed into a significant threat-perhaps one of the most critical challenges for the security of Western powers in the post-Cold War era-due to an insufficient theoretical understanding of the evolving potential threats to the international regime.

Specifically, this paper will explore (a) the prerequisites for an evolutionary SWOT analysis in the geoeconomic approach and (b) the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) as a case study on forecasting global developments through contributions of evolutionary theory. This multipolar cooperation created by the RCEP seems to be one of the most representative expressions of the new globalization and its gradual formation.<sup>4</sup>

This paper is composed of four parts including Introduction and Conclusion. Part II will introduce the conceptual prerequisites to contrast the key elements and rationale of a formal and conventional SWOT versus a correlative one. Part III will synthesize an evolutionary SWOT analysis for the RCEP to establish potential opportunities and threats for the participating countries and the global system through this case study. Finally, Part IV will discuss the findings, makes predictions, and explores prospects for further research as Conclusion.

Regarding the methods followed, this paper conducts an integrative and critical review of relevant literature - it synthesizes the correlative SWOT analysis with geoeconomics and the dynamic trends of the RCEP.<sup>5</sup> We contend that this approach belongs to the evolutionary international political economy.<sup>6</sup> We also note that the integrative review method appears to be the most effective approach when the research questions are broad and when the field appears relatively fragmented when a synthesis would help its theoretical development.<sup>7</sup> We reviewed the literature on the RCEP from many sources, focusing mainly on publications indexed in Scopus.<sup>8</sup>

## **II. SWOT ANALYSIS: CONVENTIONAL VS EVOLUTIONARY APPROACH**

The long-term survival and growth depend on the ability of any socioeconomic organization to formulate and implement an effective strategy.<sup>9</sup> To achieve this, it must first compare its performance with counterpart organizational systems by evolutionarily perceiving their internal and external environment.<sup>10</sup>

According to the conventional SWOT model, analyzing the internal organizational environment leads to identifying the organization's strengths and weaknesses without comparing and correlating with other socioeconomic organizations. In this dichotomic approach, identifying opportunities and threats to the organization results from examining the external environment only from a generic perspective and in terms of equivalency.

This traditional and analytically conventional SWOT cannot account for the fact that an apparent strength of an organization such as companies, sectors of economic activity, or national entities may be a comparative weakness when the respective potential of competing entities is considered. Thus, in a non-correlative conception of things, often something that appears as a weakness may relate to a comparatively strong point that has been underestimated. As a result, there are opportunities for development that turn into actual threats. Because of a similar myopic perception, a seeming weakness of the organization, which is strong compared to competing actors, creates extraordinary opportunities within the evolution of competition.

According to Vlado and Chatzinikolaou,<sup>11</sup> a refocused view of SWOT analysis in correlative and evolutionary terms is essential for this fundamental strategic function. We also identify some converging criticisms of the conventional SWOT. These approaches argue that this traditional form of SWOT appears limited to the same analytical patterns used in business planning for over fifty years when SWOT first appeared. For example, Hill and Westbrook<sup>12</sup> have argued that the standard form of SWOT is simplistic and narrowly descriptive. Also, Panagiotou<sup>13</sup> has argued that the implementation of SWOT is usually unclear in organizations, while Nixon and Helms<sup>14</sup> have noted a relative lack of theoretical underpinning.

These criticisms of the traditional form of SWOT seem to be in the right direction. However, they do not appear to derive directly from evolutionary theory,

criticizing its comparatively static perspective.<sup>15</sup> We contend that the linear and “mechanistic” approach of SWOT proves to be relatively myopic and inefficient in perceiving the real opportunities and threats for any socioeconomic organization at any level of analysis (macro–meso–micro). Although the conventional SWOT has not been produced and does not fall within the overall framework of the neoclassical paradigm in economic analysis, it seems to incorporate all the disadvantages of quasi-static models in “business dynamics.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus, we argue that evolutionary economics is a theoretical perspective that seems fruitful for overcoming the inadequacies embodied in the conventional SWOT. Evolutionary economics has at least three theoretical contributions at its foundation that make it distinct as a discipline.<sup>17</sup> First, evolutionary economics rejects the conventional *ceteris paribus* neoclassical simplification, arguing that economic agents make “imperfect” decisions without fully aiming to maximize profits.<sup>18</sup> Second, the evolutionary firm theory increasingly uses biological metaphors, arguing that these are a more critical measure of survival ability than static models that tend to cluster seemingly identical quantities. In particular, this biology-related economic paradigm helps to discover deeper qualitative differentiations.<sup>19</sup> Third, evolutionary economics places institutions at the analytical center, examining long historical periods and innovative structural changes in a socioeconomic system.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, the correlative and evolutionary form of SWOT gives a comparative content to the strategic analysis of organizations. The central premise of this counter-proposed SWOT is that there are neither absolute strengths and weaknesses, nor horizontal opportunities and threats that are universal and open to all organizations.

Everything starts from the vision (A); the more audacious goals it sets, the more it alters the current reality. In evolutionary strategic planning, the next step (B) is understanding the external organizational environment. Then (C), a correlative SWOT analysis can illuminate the comparative strengths and weaknesses, which always correlate to the organization’s particular nature, dynamics, and evolutionary physiology.<sup>21</sup>

In this direction, opportunities and threats are always “potential” and arise through these specific mutational strengths and weaknesses. Thus, evolutionary changes in the internal and external environment (macro–meso–micro) create over time pairs of specific strengths-opportunities and weaknesses-threats, leading to

successful or unsuccessful strategic choices that return as accumulated feedback. Thus, the organization can discern the alternative strategic paths it rejects (D), evaluate the current possible alternatives (E), and select the one that best fits its objectives (F). All implemented tactics in the chosen strategic path must follow the overall organizational design (G). According to Vlados and Chatzinikolaou, the effective glocal (global and local) integration of socioeconomic organizations in the current restructured globalization requires an accumulation of successful strategic decisions and implementations.<sup>22</sup>

The conventional form of SWOT is increasingly used in other fields than business planning, such as policy<sup>23</sup> or industry-specific studies.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, these approaches usually do not make clear why this analysis has the potential to understand different evolutionary levels of strategy making - nor employ a correlative perspective. These approaches primarily acknowledge absolute strengths-weaknesses and respective opportunities-threats. In contrast, the correlative and evolutionary form of SWOT investigates strong potential opportunities-threats and relates them to comparative strengths-weaknesses by exploring missed opportunities, spaces of defense (at the intersection of strengths and potential threats), and actual opportunities-threats.

Therefore, we could relate the evolutionary form of SWOT to geoeconomics, as both are concerned with strategic issues. We propose that a geoeconomic evolutionary form of SWOT involves exploring the strategic actors' comparative evolving strengths and weaknesses that emerge through economic instruments with a geographical footprint and lead to potential opportunities and threats. This analysis helps to understand the steps required for evolutionary geostrategic planning to be successful.

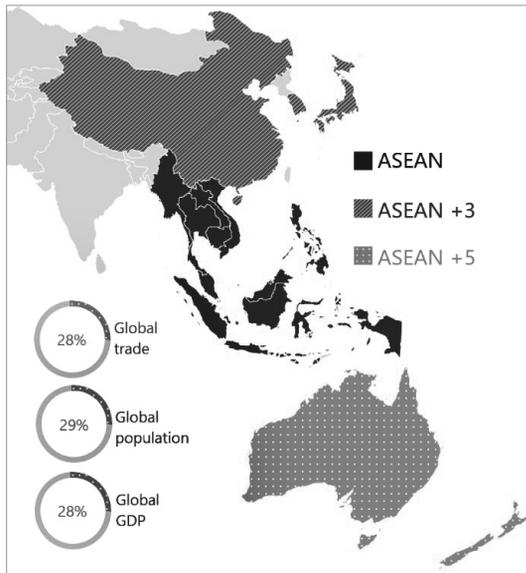
### **III. GEOECONOMIC CORRELATIVE SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE RCEP**

#### **A. Background, Strengths-Weaknesses, and Opportunities-Threats of the RCEP**

In November 2020, 15 Southeast Asian and Pacific countries signed the RCEP, creating the world's largest trade zone. The talks were launched in 2012 by the ten Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members, namely Brunei,

Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam (Figure 1). After eight years of negotiations, the ASEAN agreed with three more East Asian countries (China, Japan, and South Korea) and two Pacific countries (Australia and New Zealand).<sup>25</sup>

Figure 1: The RCEP Map and the Size of this Trade Bloc Worldwide<sup>26</sup>



The RCEP is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that accounts (globally) for about 28% of total world trade, 29% of the population, and 28% of GDP size.<sup>27</sup> The ASEAN was established in 1967, covering provisions on trade, investment promotion, intellectual property rights, labor standards, environment, and security. The RCEP was born as a concept through the ASEAN+3 expansion first proposed in 1990. Therefore, it is a long-term process. India withdrew before the signing, citing political reasons.<sup>28</sup> In terms of its technical characteristics, the RCEP is a purely economic agreement comprising 20 chapters, 17 annexes, and 54 schedules of related commitments:<sup>29</sup>

- Preamble-1: Initial provisions and general definitions-2: Trade in goods-3: Rules of origin-4: Customs procedures and trade facilitation-5: Sanitary and phytosanitary measures-6: Standards, technical regulations, and conformity

assessment procedures-7: Trade remedies-8: Trade in services-9: Temporary movement of natural persons-10: Investment-11: Intellectual property-12: Electronic commerce-13: Competition-14: Small and medium enterprises-15: Economic and technical cooperation-16: Government procurement-17: General provisions and exceptions-18: Institutional provisions-19: Dispute settlement-20: Final provisions

According to Wilson,<sup>30</sup> one of the main challenges of the RCEP relates to a “noodle bowl” phenomenon. Bhagwati<sup>31</sup> first defined this problem to highlight the proliferation of FTAs replacing the World Trade Organization (WTO) in global economic integration. In Bhagwati’s<sup>32</sup> perspective, FTAs are paradoxically counterproductive in promoting what they advocate as the many overlapping agreements allow countries to adopt trade policies that discriminate and reduce the economic benefits of trade. Wilson<sup>33</sup> argues that the RCEP may lead to the opposite outcome from that intended and, rather than limiting the numerous FTAs in the region, lock it into a pattern of low-quality bilateral agreements. For Wilson,<sup>34</sup> the RCEP is merely an attempt to address the noodle bowl problem by multilateralizing existing FTAs from a perspective of limited ambitions. Below we introduce additional specific strengths (S) and weaknesses (W), followed by potential opportunities (O) and threats (T) of the RCEP, as these have been identified in the recent literature (Table 1).

Table 1: Potential SWOT of the RCEP

SWTO	Additional Specific Potential
S1	The agreement is based on the flexible generic East Asia economic partnership FTA model. <sup>35</sup>
S2	Lower ambition level and integration of previous FTA agreements. <sup>36</sup>
S3	A slow and gradual process, open to accession by other members. <sup>37</sup>
S4	Consistency with international law. <sup>38</sup>
S5	Trade provisions for different development levels. <sup>39</sup>
S6.	Protection against bilateral pressures and indirect promotion of a global trade liberalization agenda. <sup>40</sup>

S7	Growing business ties among the existing bilateral trade partners in Asia. <sup>41</sup>
W1	The ongoing historical disagreements (primarily based on geography) and India’s cautious approach to FTAs. <sup>42</sup>
W2	This mega-agreement does not have an inherently acceptable and indisputable leader. <sup>43</sup>
W3	Relatively slow progress due to development discrepancies. <sup>44</sup>
W4	Such agreements for peripheral integration appear now the primary norm for economic development (see the “noodle bowl effect”). <sup>45</sup>
W5	Not ambitious enough. <sup>46</sup>
O1	The ASEAN’s role in the multipolar global regime might be enhanced. <sup>47</sup>
O2	A prospect of reducing protectionism in the region and globally. <sup>48</sup>
O3	Reinforcement of interdependences between the US and China as the RCEP is a platform for economic diplomacy. <sup>49</sup>
O4	Expansion of investment and trade flows among Asian nations and mitigation of the “noodle bowl” effect (i.e., the multiplication of FTAs). <sup>50</sup>
O5	The RCEP could help spread an economic integration culture, eventually benefiting the global system. <sup>51</sup>
T1	There is a risk of deteriorating diplomatic relationships among the signatories and other countries in East Asia. <sup>52</sup>
T2	Development contradictions can lead to the exploitation of regulations by powerful economic interests in the region. <sup>53</sup>
T3	There is a challenge of not attracting newcomers due to provisions that preferably exclude certain products. <sup>54</sup>
T4	A danger of further regional fragmentation in East Asia through inefficient FTAs. <sup>55</sup>
T5	Abandoning current world-order regulation instruments in favor of other multipolar architectures can be a trap for global development. <sup>56</sup>
T6	China’s slowing growth pace threatens the agreement’s long-run effectiveness. <sup>57</sup>

## B. Discussion: A Correlative SWOT Analysis of the RCEP

Therefore, we conclude by discussing the opportunities and threats that seem to be emerging for the RCEP nowadays. (Table 1) Based on the evolutionary principles presented for SWOT, we should identify areas where the RCEP can potentially “strategically defend” itself due to the existence of strengths. In addition, we identify opportunities that appear unrealizable due to the presence of weaknesses there.

Table 2: Correlating the strengths-weaknesses and opportunities-threats of the RCEP<sup>58</sup>

	Strengths (C1–7)	Weaknesses (W1–5)
	<b>I. Real opportunities</b>	<b>II. Space of missed opportunities</b>
<b>Potential opportunities (O1–5)</b>	1. The RCEP is another sign of shifting economic power in East Asia, leading this time to formal partnerships with developed Pacific countries. Its low ambitions can make it immediately operational without significant political consensus.	1. In the absence of cooperation among East Asian countries on civil liberties, ASEAN’s multipolar role will diminish compared to the other poles worldwide.
	2. All indications are that the RCEP can help reduce tariffs practically and directly, following to some extent trade provisions already in place and provided for in earlier FTAs and the WTO.	2. A relatively modest speed of developments in the RCEP may contribute to the further spread of the “noodle bowl” effect. Other agreements are likely to emerge that will further complicate existing ones. As a result, the opening to global trade may be less than expected.
	3. A broadly ranged tariff removal can also benefit US-China relations as they are the two largest global economies.	3. The absence of a “natural leader” in the RCEP may lead to its bypassing as a tool to mitigate trade tensions. Thus, China will likely not benefit from the RCEP and will only use it as a platform to conflate its economic interests with the US.

<b>Potential opportunities (O1-5)</b>	<p>4. The RCEP member states may experience the highest growth rates in the region, which may contribute to the phasing out of other complex agreements. The Asian economies will likely reach an acceptable deal through which they will gradually deepen their political cooperation.</p>	<p>4. The RCEP is characterized by the inherent contradiction of “noodle bowl agreements,” which do not go into the depth of social and political issues. Although the largest of its kind to date, the RCEP will not mitigate the emergence of similar agreements unless member states immediately renegotiate a clear ideological and political vision for the RCEP.</p>
	<p>5. The world system may eventually benefit in terms of growth as the participating members of economic integration agreements gradually develop mechanisms to ensure democratic freedoms.</p>	<p>5. If another significant FTA is created in the region soon, the culture of deep economic integration (not just superficial, like the RCEP) will not change. On the contrary, it may get worse.</p>
<b>Potential threats (T1-6)</b>	<b>III. Area of possible defense</b>	<b>IV. Real threats</b>
	<p>1. East Asia’s political and economic stability is a fact to which all these numerous trade agreements have contributed. The RCEP member states could continue slowly building this less ambitious agreement and gradually add provisions that help develop their trade relations.</p>	<p>1. The agreement’s disintegration in the absence of ambitious provisions for the gradual resolution of historical disagreements based on promoting democracy, human rights, and international law. It is a purely economic agreement without being built on such a vision (cf. universal values on which the European Union is made).</p>
	<p>2. A further invocation of international law provisions could countervail the political power of the significant RCEP economies.</p>	<p>2. A widening of socioeconomic disparities due to favorable exploitation of the agreement by some of its more developed members.</p>
	<p>3. Further tariff elimination in the region could have a spillover effect and gradually attract the interest of other countries to join this trade bloc.</p>	<p>3. A pause in the deepening of economic integration due to slow convergence among the RCEP participants and the signing of a new FTA covering more ambitious objectives.</p>

<b>Potential threats (T1-6)</b>	4. The inherent flexibility of FTAs in East Asia means that the RCEP could be transformed into an agreement with a vision of securing civil liberties beyond trade liberalization.	4. A deepening fragmentation in East Asia may lead to a reigniting of past tensions instead of having a calming effect due to the intended economic interconnection.
	5. The RCEP's less ambition is inevitable, given the reluctance in East Asia (especially in China) to modernize democratic institutions. Thus, de facto, the RCEP has not penetrated visionary dimensions of an ideological nature, which makes it another economic agreement with limited social depth. The RCEP can only contribute little to the region's sociopolitical stability.	5. A growing multipolarity worldwide, resulting from regional agreements such as the RCEP that transcend and surpass existing mechanisms of international regulation such as the WTO.
	6. The member states could pursue among themselves the tariff elimination carried out by the RCEP, leading the region to higher growth rates.	6. An abandonment of the agreement because it does not provide the Chinese economy with its intended increase in exports to the region.

Therefore, we identify an apparent lack of an ambitious and inclusive vision of broader socioeconomic development in the provisions and policy aspirations of the RCEP.<sup>59</sup> This mega-deal is an organic continuation of the East Asia Free Trade Area (EAFTA) based on the 2001 ASEAN+3 proposal under the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) to promote economic growth in the region and overcome the crisis.<sup>60</sup> All these policy initiatives in East Asia, amidst a flurry of acronyms and other agreements, reveal the importance that these states attach to not only economic progress, but also the political-cultural fragmentation of the region.<sup>61</sup>

This contradictory combination has led to a timidity in the political deepening of East Asia that is limited to the commercial dimension. According to the principles of evolutionary strategic planning, however, a sufficiently ambitious vision that transcends existing boundaries is a

prerequisite for organizational development (see Part II). In the official legal text of the RCEP, for example, we read the word “provision” 45 times - the “vision” does not exist as a word. However, in the ASEAN Joint Statement when the RCEP was signed, we see the importance attached to development and inclusion dimensions:<sup>62</sup>

We were pleased to witness the signing of the RCEP Agreement, which comes at a time when the world is confronted with the unprecedented challenge brought about by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic. In light of the adverse impact of the pandemic on our economies, and our people’s livelihood and well-being, the signing of the RCEP Agreement demonstrates our strong commitment to supporting economic recovery, inclusive development, job creation and strengthening regional supply chains as well as our support for an open, inclusive, rules-based trade and investment arrangement. We acknowledge that the RCEP Agreement is critical for our region’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic and will play an important role in building the region’s resilience through inclusive and sustainable post-pandemic economic recovery process.

Nevertheless, this policy statement is not included in the legal text. On the contrary, in comparison, we see in the Lisbon Treaty (Functioning of the EU) a clear defense of universal values:<sup>63</sup>

1§1a: Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.

“2§1. The Union’s aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples.

“2§2. The Union shall offer its citizens an area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers, in which the free movement of persons is ensured in conjunction with appropriate measures with respect to external border controls, asylum, immigration and the prevention and combating of crime.

“10A§b: ... consolidate and support democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law.

Thus, we contend that it would be preferable for the ASEAN countries to focus on further integration among themselves, gaining critical bargaining

power in political and socioeconomic terms. The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)<sup>64</sup> could be merged with political integration dimensions, as in the EU.<sup>65</sup> We assess the RCEP as another relatively superficial regional trade integration agreement, which uses only specific provisions of international law and surpasses others. Thus, the RCEP's dual approach to the WTO is evident. On the one hand, its member states support dimensions of openness, transparency, and consistency in the WTO standards.<sup>66</sup> On the other, *de facto*, all these multilateral agreements bypass the WTO, contributing to a multipolar world where existing global governance institutions are used selectively.<sup>67</sup>

In this dialogue, it is also worth mentioning the BRICS. As a group, these countries have perhaps the most explicit ideological position compared to their counterpart institutions - new multipolarity ambitions that do not seem capable at present of leading to the construction of new global regulatory mechanisms despite the apparent desire of these member states.<sup>68</sup> The defense of democratic institutions is at the core of socioeconomic development in the future and any deviation leads to comparative disadvantages eventually.

The RCEP, as a mega-agreement, creates economic partnerships between China's "closed" political regime, some developed Western democracies (Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea), and the other smaller ASEAN countries. The RCEP may cause a normalization of past geopolitical and geoeconomic tensions through the diffusion of soft economic power. However, the real threats are its practical neglect in the absence of strengthening democratic institutions. Thus, China's role is perhaps the most critical of the developments brought about by the RCEP and other regional integration agreements in East Asia. According to Tae Yoo and Chong-Han Wu,<sup>69</sup> China is an authoritarian regional hegemon, comfortable with this piecemeal move from bilateral to multilateral agreements, easing fear and reducing suspicion among member states. We think it is with a similar hegemonic rationale that China is now discussing a new trade agreement with the EU.<sup>70</sup>

Therefore, Tan and Soong's<sup>71</sup> prediction that the RCEP members will not accept China as a natural leader seems valid. This inherent weakness<sup>72</sup> appears to create multiple comparative disadvantages for this mega-deal (Table 1), given that the current new globalization is leading to the emergence of a reshaped multipolar regime.<sup>73</sup> Within this restructured global balance, the different poles ostensibly play a vital geopolitical and geoeconomic role as central actors of effective coordination and regulation at a time when challenges in terms of resilience and environmental sustainability are becoming urgent, threatening the global system as a whole.<sup>74</sup>

The global and regional integration problems examined are part of the following dialogue. In particular, Vlados and Chatzinikolaou<sup>75</sup> have recently argued that, in today's new globalization, pursuing a "realistic and innovative global liberalism" can lead to higher socioeconomic returns if promoted as a new ideological or political horizon. According to Vlados and Chatzinikolaou,<sup>76</sup> this opportunity for the global system subverts the limiting incompatibility between national sovereignty, democracy, and globalization proposed by Rodrik's trilemma.<sup>77</sup> A new and pragmatic global liberalism would lead to the simultaneous development and preservation of democratic institutions, and the redefinition of national sovereignty priorities as different socioeconomic systems are integrated into a restructured overall global development path. The RCEP seems to align with these worldwide visionary directions to some extent, but with specific weaknesses. The RCEP appears realistic, as it is an organic continuation of previous regional bilateral and multilateral agreements. It is also innovative, to some extent, as it supports specific forces of renewal and greater efficiency. However, the RCEP falls short in promoting global liberalism, as it does not mention or emerge from sound and legally enshrined principles of freedom, democracy, and pluralism.

## IV. Conclusion

According to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian nations into civilization.<sup>78</sup>

We investigated the prerequisites for an evolutionary SWOT in geoeconomics, taking the RCEP as a case study. We concluded that, first, a re-approach to strategic analysis in geoeconomics could shed light on essential aspects of contemporary international political economy. We have found that this new understanding should be based on the principles of evolutionary theory and predict the long-term trajectories of socioeconomic systems. To this end, we have proposed a reorientation of SWOT analysis, a strategic approach widely used in the comparative assessment of specific micro-environments. Thus, we have introduced an evolutionary view of SWOT (macro-meso-micro) that departs from its conventional and dichotomous perspective, which seems to discover “absolute” strengths and weaknesses of organizations amid an environment that brings about “horizontal” threats and opportunities.<sup>79</sup>

Secondly, we have argued that East Asia is characterized by strong “competitive cooperation,” which creates threats and opportunities for the global system.<sup>80</sup> A relative distrust among the RCEP members, which led to India’s withdrawal, is reminiscent of the failed TPP and the incentives that led to the US exit.<sup>81</sup> Overall, the world system is experiencing an evolutionary crisis and restructuring, from which a new phase of restructured multipolarity is emerging.<sup>82</sup> The RCEP is yet another expression of regional economic integration, pulling the less developed states toward development directions-in socioeconomic and institutional terms-as Marx and Engels would say, towards civilization.<sup>83</sup> However, it remains to be seen how the growing multipolarity and relative rejection of existing formal international institutions will lead to a potentially better world. The contemporary global society seem to be in the midst of a transition toward the end of an old-world

system and the gradual emergence of a new one.<sup>84</sup>

The following points summarize the specific originalities of this paper. They also present the inevitable limitations, which seem to lead toward new research horizons.

A. There are risks in using the SWOT approach without a correlative and comparative character.<sup>85</sup> The evolutionary perspective of SWOT in international relations and geoeconomic strategic planning form a framework that can be used as a compass for analyzing future developments. It seems that the correlative SWOT has the necessary realism for a holistic understanding of the current reorganization of the world system and the gradual formation of the new globalization.<sup>86</sup>

B. Evolutionary geoeconomics examines opposing interests and dialectically conflicting views. Some scholars argue that the RCEP's limited ambitions are strength, while others view it as an inherent weakness. This finding is consistent with the dialectical approach to geoeconomics.<sup>87</sup>

C. The RCEP is an expression of multipolarity in the new globalization, in which the relations of competition and cooperation are being redefined globally, leading to new threats and opportunities. The RCEP aims to liberalize specific markets for which provision was made in previous bilateral agreements (see the "noodle bowl" effect). Thus, the RCEP seems to be realistic and innovative to some extent but not sufficiently liberal in the sense that it does not promote democracy and pluralism.

Based on the proposed framework for understanding the evolutionary geoeconomic strategies, the RCEP vision appears not to penetrate toward a sufficient socioeconomic depth. More study appears necessary on the comparative juxtaposition of different multipolar international organizations and their visions (e.g., EU, BRICS, ASEAN, and RCEP).

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