

1. New Chinese Foreign Policy under the Hu Jintao Leadership

After end of the Cold War, Mr Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese leader, put forward the “24 Character Strategy” as the basic principles for Chinese foreign policy, which include “Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership” (冷静观察, 稳住阵脚, 沉着应付, 韬光养晦, 善于守拙, 决不当头)¹. Another 4 characters were added later, “do something” (有所作为). The strategy is the guideline for Chinese foreign policy under the leadership of both Mr Jiang Zemin (1989-2002) and Mr Hu Jintao (2002-now).

Entering into the 21st Century, many Chinese government officials and scholars believed that China had a twenty-year “Strategic Opportunity”. This idea first appeared in the Political Report of the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2002 when Mr Hu Jintao replaced Mr Jiang Zemin as the Secretary General of the Party and then the President of the State in 2003. The assumption behind the “Strategic Opportunity” is that China has had a peaceful international and stable neighbouring environment due to China’s economic growth and more active international engagement.

In order to take advantage of this Strategic Opportunity, in October 2007 the 17th National Congress of the CPC highlighted certain new tendencies in Chinese foreign policy.

1.1. Strategic objectives of Chinese foreign policy and the harmonious world

The strategic objectives of Chinese foreign policy include three points. (1) Sharing opportunities for development; (2) Rising to challenges together; (3) Promoting the noble cause of peace and development of humanity. In order to reach these goals, the proposition of China is to join hands with the people of all countries and strive to build a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity.

What is the real meaning of a harmonious world? There are two key words and five main elements. The two key words are *lasting peace*, and *common prosperity*. The five elements are: (1) Politically, all countries should respect each other and conduct consultations on an equal footing in a common endeavour to promote democracy in international relations. (2) Economically, they should cooperate with each other, draw on each

¹ The translation is according to the *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People’s Republic of China, 2007* (Washington, DC: Office of Secretary of Defence, 2007, p.6)

other's strengths and work together to advance economic globalization in the direction of balanced development, shared benefits and win-win progress. (3) Culturally, they should learn from each other in the spirit of seeking common ground while shelving differences, respect the diversity of the world, and make joint efforts to advance human civilization. (4) In the area of security, they should trust each other, strengthen cooperation, settle international disputes by peaceful means rather than by war, and work together to safeguard peace and stability in the world. (5) On non-traditional security issues such as energy and climate change, they should assist and cooperate with each other in conservation efforts to take good care of the Earth, the only home of human beings.

Although many Chinese commentators have emphasized that the Harmonious World is the initiative of Mr Hu Jintao, if we look at the official documents of the Communist Party of China, there are some pre-conditions for attaining the ideal harmonious world, which include upholding the tenets and principles of the United Nations Charter, observing international law and universally recognized norms of international relations, and promoting democracy, harmony, collaboration and win-win solutions in international relations. In other words, the Chinese concept of the harmonious world is based upon universal norms that come from the Western tradition rather than the ancient Chinese cultural tradition.

1.2. China's relationships with the outside world

In the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2002, the Chinese leadership started to rank the relationship with the developed countries, or Western countries, as its first priority. The ranking of Chinese foreign relations put developed countries first, neighbouring countries second, and third world countries or developing countries last. The 17th National Congress of the CPC kept the same ranking with different definitions or priorities.

Relationships with developed countries. In 2002 the emphasis was to improve and develop relations with the developed countries. Proceeding from the fundamental interests of the people of all countries concerned, we would broaden the converging points of common interests and properly settle differences on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, notwithstanding the differences in social system and ideology. In 2007 the focus was to continue to strengthen strategic dialogue, enhance mutual trust, deepen cooperation and properly manage differences to promote long-term, stable and sound development of bilateral relations. We can see that the Chinese leadership puts the relationship with developed countries as the most strategic one and would like to have a long-term, stable and sound bilateral relationship with them.

Relationships with neighbouring countries. In 2002, China would continue to cement our friendly ties with our neighbours and persist in building up a good-neighbourly relationship and partnership with them. We would step up regional cooperation and increase our exchanges and cooperation with our surrounding countries. In 2007, the emphasis was to follow the foreign policy of friendship and partnership, strengthen good-neighbourly relations and practical cooperation with them, and energetically engage in regional cooperation in order to jointly create a peaceful, stable regional environment featuring equality, mutual trust and win-win cooperation.

Relationships with developing countries. In 2002 what the Chinese leadership stressed was to enhance solidarity and cooperation with other third world countries, increase mutual understanding and trust and strengthen mutual help and support. We would enlarge the areas of cooperation and make it more fruitful. In 2007 China would like to continue to increase solidarity and cooperation with them, cement traditional

friendship, expand practical cooperation, provide assistance to them as far as we are able, and uphold the legitimate demands and common interests of developing countries. The key words here are traditional friendship, practical cooperation, assistance as far as we are able.

To summarise, China upgrades its relationship with developed countries to the level of a strategic relationship, and pays more attention to pragmatic cooperation with its neighbours and other developing countries.

Within the Chinese foreign policy agenda, the position of two major countries is not very clear, i.e. Japan and Russia. Japan should be part of the developed countries, as well as neighbouring countries. Russia is not one of the developed countries, and only a neighbouring country.

According to this agenda, the United States and the EU as well as the EU member states are the most important partners for China, and Japan and Russia are next. Other neighbouring countries such as ASEAN and the South and North Koreas are third. Developing countries in Africa and Latin America are at the lowest level.

1.3. Keeping a low profile in international affairs

There were big debates on the issues of the ‘peaceful rise’ several years ago in China, especially in 2003. The major argument regarding the concept of the peaceful rise was if China should continue to keep a low profile or it should take a more active role in global affairs. The Chinese leadership gave up the peaceful rise concept and changed it to the concept of peaceful development.

The 17th National Congress of the CPC emphasized very strongly that “China will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development. This is a strategic choice the Chinese government and people have made in light of the development trend of the times and their own fundamental interests”. And at the same time, the major contribution of China to regional and global development is “through our own development, and effort in the areas where our interests meet with those of various parties”.

China’s low profile diplomacy can be reflected by some very important changes in its foreign policy statement in the 17th Party Congress.

First, there is no mentioning of setting up a new international order, a slogan China started to use from the 1970s. There is even no mentioning of reforming the old international order, but only an emphasis on “working to make the international order fairer and more equitable”. It seems that this is the first time that the Chinese leadership clearly recognizes the legitimacy of the current international order in an official document.

Secondly, there is no mention in the report of the so-called comprehensive national capabilities and China as a great power in world affairs. There is continued emphasis on China still being a developing country. There is also no word regarding China as a responsible power. The emphasis is on China being part of the interdependent world, and that China would like to work with everybody in the world. There is a mention that China will continue to take an active part in multilateral affairs and assume its due international obligations. In comparison with the 16th Party Congress in 2002 when the CPC stated that “we will continue to take an active part in multilateral diplomatic activities and play our role in the United Nations and other international or regional organizations”, this is a more active stance.