

# Ten Observations on China's Relations with the World

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According to the report of the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, historic changes have occurred in the relations between contemporary China and the rest of the world, resulting in ever closer interconnection between China's future and destiny and those of the world. This important conclusion is vindicated by the developments in China's relations with the rest of world over the past five years. Both China and the world will agree that there have never been such close ties, frequent interactions, and broad and deep mutual influence between the two. It is fair to say that the relations between China and the world have implications for not only China's destiny but also the world's future.

## How Do We See the World?

**1. The most prominent change of the world is that countries get woven together.**

Looking around the world, you will agree that it is undergoing unprecedented changes. The biggest one is that countries are increasingly linked and interdependent. During the Cold War era, the world was segmented by visible and invisible walls. In

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Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Le Yucheng delivered a speech at CIIS Forum on “China’s Relations with the World at a New Starting Point” on April 10, 2012.

some cases, countries had no contacts even though they were in arm’s reach. For example, while China and the Soviet Union shared the longest border in the world as each other’s biggest neighbor, there was little interflow of personnel and the two-way trade was as small as US\$50 million in the 1960s. Even the trade between the Soviet Union and the United States, the two superpowers, was below US\$100 million at one point. Now, things are different. Countries are woven into visible and invisible webs. The world is becoming a “global village” of shared destinies. It is said that the Internet connects four billion of the world’s population and 50 billion electronic devices. Every year, 90 trillion emails are sent and 2 trillion electronic transactions are conducted online. Two people may be far apart, but when they log onto the Internet, they feel like next-door neighbors. Thanks to closer links and exchanges, countries have never seen their interests so entwined and their destinies so closely tied. That is why when the Wall Street sneezes, the whole world catches cold. That is why the entire

Europe and even the international community go all out to bail Greece out of the debt crisis. And that is why countries join hands to tackle a broad spectrum of global challenges such as terrorism, climate change, and nuclear proliferation. In today's networked world, even the strongest country can not deal with the myriad challenges alone. Win-win cooperation is not a choice but *the* choice. Countries must abandon the so-called "seesaw mentality" which contends one's rise is another's fall and stop playing the "zero-sum" game which builds one's gain on other's loss. Instead, we should embrace the concept of peaceful development and win-win cooperation and foster new-type state-to-state relations in keeping with the changing times. All in all, interdependence is what fundamentally differentiates contemporary international relations from those in the Cold War. It will determine the evolution of international relations in the days to come.

## **2. The rise of emerging countries brings opportunity not trouble.**

Emerging countries, notably the BRICS countries, are rising rapidly as a group. This adds a unique skyline to the international landscape of the 21st century and profoundly shifts the international landscape and balance of power. How should one approach the rise of emerging countries? Reaction to this new phenomenon is not uniform: some applaud it; others are more negative. There are even those who "cry wolf" and see emerging countries as monsters and blame them for one's own inherent difficulties and problems. In his recent remarks, a senior US military official even put the rise of emerging countries on the list of international security threats alongside terrorism, nuclear proliferation and natural disasters. Some even advocate a larger West made up of the US, the EU and Russia to balance the East. Such views are misguided and unfair. To put it more bluntly, they smack of Cold

War mentality. Former French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine recently said that the predicament some Western countries find themselves trapped in is not because of the rise of China and other emerging countries, but because of the strategic blunders they have made due to their obsession with the “era of Western conquest” and the “era of counterterrorism”, and because of the speculation and impulsive borrowing resulting from neoliberalism. A soul-searching attitude like this is really commendable. One must recognize the important contribution of emerging countries to the world economy. They hold the key to global recovery. While the world economy contracted by 0.5% in 2009 due to the international financial crisis, quite a few emerging countries maintained a growth of over 6%. China, India, Brazil and some others have become irreplaceable markets in the world with more potential to be unleashed. Without the engines of these emerging countries, the ability of the world to sustain its growth and overcome the financial crisis and debt crisis will be thrown into question. The BRICS Leaders Meeting held in New Delhi in March produced key outcomes on such issues as improving global economic governance and advancing global development, and the establishment of a BRICS development bank was also explored. This is a significant attempt by BRICS countries to contribute to global development. In a nutshell, emerging countries are by no means trouble-makers, and their rise is not a challenge, still less a threat. On the contrary, it is an important contribution and a rare opportunity to the world. One must not let this

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historic opportunity slip through their fingers. Rather, one should make use of it and partner with emerging countries to promote development and stability in the world.

### How Do We See China?

#### **3. China is the world's second largest economy, not the second strongest country.**

Anne-Marie Slaughter, former Director of Policy Planning of the US State Department, once said to me that the world has never seen a country that is at once the largest developing

country and the second largest economy. This makes it harder to properly understand and define China. Recently, some people accuse China of being a “selective stakeholder” who switches between the role of “elephant” and “ant” as it sees fit. They

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want China to be a “full stakeholder”. Such expectations are understandable. But China is, after all, an emerging country, a growing country with unbalanced development. For all its remarkable progress and strengths in certain aspects thanks to over 30 years of reform and opening-up, China still has many weak links. It is not *unwilling* — but *unable* — to take on more international responsibilities and fully play the role of a major country. Just like in sports: Though it won the most gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and has a comfortable lead in diving and table tennis, it is almost impossible for China to win a gold medal in football. Not that we don't want it — it is the dream of Chinese football fans — it is simply beyond our ability. Therefore, what we are talking about is not a matter of choice, but a question of capability. And make no

mistake: when it comes to safeguarding world peace, stability and development, China, as a responsible member and major stakeholder in the international community, has always done its best and our track record is as good as anyone's. Our cooperation with the rest of the world in fighting piracy in waters off the coast of Somalia and tackling the financial crisis in recent years is a case in point.

**4. China's development is the result of hard and honest work, not trickery.**

Some people say China's fast growth comes at others' expense and China has moved others' "cheese". They say China has gamed the system. We cannot agree with this. True, China cannot develop without peace and development of the world, globalization and advancement in information technology, and advanced managerial expertise and technologies from outside. We never forget the long-standing support and help from the international community, especially, the outpouring of selfless assistance from across the world in the wake of devastating disasters such as the massive earthquake in Wenchuan. But China's development is attributable, first and foremost, to the diligence and dedication of the Chinese people. There was an article titled "How the US Lost Out on iPhone Work" in *The New York Times*. According to this article, Apple chose an assembly line in a Chinese plant because only the Chinese can work six days a week and 12 hours a day and only they can be summoned in the dead of night to complete last-minute assignments without a hitch. This article is a faithful depiction of the diligence and dedication of the Chinese, and, in no small measure, a revelation of the important reason behind China's success story. It is reported that President Obama once asked Steve Jobs whether Apple could move its assembly lines back to the US. The answer from Jobs was "no", because no Americans are willing to

work extra-time and as tirelessly as the Chinese. People in many European countries are entitled to 20 to 30 days of paid vacation each year, while employees in China only have 5 to 15 days. Many Chinese, including my colleagues and myself, often work beyond office hours and seldom have the luxury of a paid vacation. Premier Wen Jiabao said in an interview that during his 25 years of service in the central government, he has virtually had no holiday. We can say with pride that China's development is mainly attributable to the advantage of socialism, the correct leadership of the CPC and the hard work, ingenuity and sacrifice of the 1.3 billion Chinese people, not taking advantage of others.

**5. China's development path is the result of "path dependence" over 5,000 years.**

Over the recent years, there have been various comments around the world on China's development path. Some are appreciative, some are doubtful, and others simply reject it as unsustainable, concluding that China will sooner or later convert to the Western model. That reminds me of what my American friends used to say about "path dependence" when I was posted in the US over 10 years ago. They regard everything the US has today, values, social management, economic model, etc. as the sure outcome of its past. To use an academic jargon, this is "path dependence". And it is based on this concept of "path dependence" that the notion American "exceptionalism" was put forward. As a matter of fact, each country has its "path dependence". If the US, a country with a history of less than 300 years, feels the need to stress "path dependence", then China, with a 5,000-year history, is certainly in a position to say that it depends more on a much longer path. Along this line of thinking, it is by no means a coincidence that China has chosen a path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese values, way of thinking, way of behavior, state

system, political system, religious culture, strong sense of family and so on can all find their roots in China's long and profound history. There may be changes, developments and improvement in the process, but the core, fundamental elements stay constant. In the early 1980s, I met a Chinese who had lived abroad for nearly 30 years. He told me he took that trip back to China simply because he missed a bowl of authentic Beijing soybean-paste noodles. This is a Chinese who has spent most of this life-time abroad but sticks to his dietary habit after all these years, a typical example of "path dependence". Likewise, the humility, eagerness to learn, frugality, collectivism, patriotism and even the concept of peaceful development of the Chinese people are all integral parts of China's history and cultural traditions. There are things that will stay with you forever once they get into your blood. China's development path is a historical choice. History has its inherent laws which cannot be disrupted, abandoned, blindly copied or transplanted. One can learn what is fine from others, but should never forget his own root or lose his own identity. On the contrary, we should respect history, follow the laws of history and accept the choice of history and people.

**6. Nothing is more important for China than the well-being of its 1.3 billion people.**

China's sheer size and fast development has brought many expected and unexpected problems. We have heard from the outside world both kind reminders and ill-intentioned hype or even harsh criticisms aimed at stirring up trouble for China. I want to emphasize that we Chinese understand far better than anyone else what our problems are and how to prioritize.

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According to the latest census, China's population has reached 1.34 billion. This is China's basic reality and what we need to bear in mind when making every decision. In Europe, a country of 13 million people is a big country. China has a population 100 times as large. In terms of population, many Chinese provinces are the equivalents of big countries and China's Henan Province is ten times Hungary. The population of many European countries equals that of a prefecture-level city or a district of a big city in China. For instance, Ireland has a smaller population than the Chaoyang District of Beijing. Let me share with you some interesting statistics. Last fall, about 150,000 tourists flocked to the Fragrant Hill in Beijing every day to see the red maple leaves, but altogether there are only 70,000 trees, so it's one tree for two people. I'm afraid only in China can you find such things and it can be very difficult for foreigners to imagine this. Every year, China needs to create 25 million jobs, roughly five times the population of Denmark. As many as 6.8 million university graduates will enter the job market this year alone, and that's about the population of Switzerland. There are 83 million disabled people in China, the same as the population of Germany. The most important task for China is to make sure that the 1.3 billion people can lead a good life, and you can imagine how challenging this task is and what enormous pressure this puts on the government. I believe nothing is more important than this. Everything else must serve this central task.

## **How Do We See China's Diplomacy?**

### **7. China's diplomacy is more active, vigorous and productive.**

Since the beginning of this year, China's diplomacy has been vigorous on all fronts. President Hu Jintao successfully

participated in the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul and the BRICS Leaders Meeting. This was a significant step of our summit diplomacy this year. Premier Wen Jiabao had a regular meeting with EU leaders, visited Nepal, Saudi Arabia, the UAE where he attended the 5th World Future Energy Summit, Qatar, Iceland, Sweden and Poland, and attended the HANNOVER MESSE. These events have promoted the political mutual trust and mutually beneficial cooperation between China and relevant countries in Europe and Asia.

Chairman Jia Qinglin's visit to Ethiopia and attendance at the 18th AU Summit strengthened the traditional friendship and strategic partnership between China and Africa. Vice President Xi Jinping's visit to the US, Ireland and Turkey after the Chinese Spring Festival enhanced the friendship and cooperation between China and relevant countries. Vice President Xi's visit on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of President Nixon's visit to China and the issuance of the China-US *Shanghai Communiqué* was a visit to review history, deepen friendship and look to the future. It gave a strong boost to the building of a cooperative partnership between the two countries in the new era. Moreover, China also took an active part in the mediation of regional hotspot issues. We put forward a six-point proposal for the political resolution of the Syrian crisis, sent special envoys to the region, and pushed the UN Security Council to reach important consensus on the Syrian issue. On the Iranian nuclear issue, we stayed in close contact and coordination with the other members of the P5+1 and contributed to the resumption of talks between the P5+1 and Iran in search for a proper solution to the issue. On

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the DPRK's satellite launch, China kept in close contact with the relevant parties, including the DPRK, the US, Japan, the ROK and Russia, and did its best to prevent a reversal of the trend toward reduced tension on the Korean Peninsula. While holding its ground on matters of principle, China made active efforts to promote regional peace and stability, thus playing the role of a major country with a distinctly Chinese approach. In doing so, we have won extensive appreciation and support from the international community.

**8. China is being responsible by upholding principles and saying “no” to what is wrong.**

China is a big, responsible country. It follows an independent foreign policy, upholds justice and defends principles in international affairs and does not seek self-interests. Being responsible means China does not do things just to please certain countries. China never takes its cue from others or pays the bill without asking the price. Instead, we look at whether it conforms with international law and norms of international relations, whether it serves the fundamental interests of the Chinese people and people of the world, and whether it goes along with the trend of the time. Being responsible also means keeping to principles and saying “no” to things that are wrong. For example, China and Russia vetoed the relevant UN Security Council resolution on the Syrian issue. Some countries were displeased and accused China of being “uncooperative” and “irresponsible”. But I think China has been exactly the opposite of “uncooperative” and “irresponsible”, because it made this decision with a view to upholding the purposes of the UN Charter, the principle of non-interference in internal affairs and the fundamental interests of people in the Middle East. The concept of the “Responsibility to Protect” was incorporated into the Outcome Document at the 2005 World Summit commemorating

the 60th anniversary of the UN. It underscores that each individual State has the responsibility to protect its population, that military intervention is considered the last resort only when peaceful measures have failed and that the authority to do so rests solely with the UN. Obviously, some countries sought to replicate the Libya model in Syria under the pretext of the “Responsibility to Protect”. To put it bluntly, this is an attempt to bring about regime change through force, which is a far cry from this concept of the “Responsibility to Protect”. We cannot afford to endorse such attempts. We must not forget the lesson from Libya. On the first day of the NATO-led multinational forces’ “protection” mission in Libya last year, 64 civilians were killed and 150 were injured. The entire “protection” mission resulted in the deaths of over 20,000 civilians and the displacement of 900,000 people without bringing the country together or ending violence there. One region even declared autonomy. Such “protection” has been likened to a “successful surgery that kills the patient”. Obviously, it has failed completely. It is irresponsible “protection” and in truth, intervention under the name of “protection”. The developments of the Syrian situation further demonstrate that what we need is only the “Responsibility to Protect”, but also “responsible protection”.

**9. A good game is based on rules, but rules should not be altered unilaterally or at will.**

China’s diplomacy not just upholds principles, but also abides by rules. Nowadays, I often hear some European countries and the United States complain that the existing international rules are unfair to them and that globalization is detrimental to their interests, even though they were the ones that set the rules and championed globalization and have been the biggest beneficiaries. Now, when they are no longer happy about these rules, they use their privilege to remake them to their own

advantage. A good game should be based on not only fair and just but also relatively stable rules. Rules apply equally to everyone. We are not afraid of rules but we are afraid of rules being bent at will. We think it is inappropriate to be utilitarian about rules, i.e. follow them when they work in one's favor and change or abandon them when they don't.

Some countries, when unable to compete and win, resort to changing the rules rather than improving their own competitiveness. Take table tennis for example. China has some very good table tennis players, so in order to weaken China's

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advantage, the rules have been changed over and over again. First, they first say the ball is too small to be seen by those tall guys; then, they say white balls are barely discernible and should be replaced by yellow ones; and they also say the 21-point game is too long and should be changed to an 11-point system. Some people now want to do the same in the economic field and change investment, trade and environment rules. They used to preach to us the virtue of free trade, but now they engage in rampant protectionism, making China one of the biggest victims of protectionism. As you know, the rules of the Doha Round now run the risk of irrelevance just because some countries don't like them. Indeed, some have started reinventing the wheel by negotiating a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which they tout as being inclusive. But a closer look will reveal that the TPP has a really a high "threshold" and seems to serve exclusively the interests of a certain big country. How can it claim to be inclusive and fair? Now, if the international rules are not fair, it is the developing countries, including China, that feel it most acutely and have most reasons to complain, because we have lived them for decades.

We do not have the privilege enjoyed by the US dollar, nor can we appoint the head of the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. China has to sell rare earths at a low price, but is barred from buying the weapons and high-tech products made using these minerals. And we end up only allowed to buy soybeans and airplanes. Some countries have made big money in the Chinese market, yet they refuse to recognize China as a market economy. You want unfair rules that need fixing? Take a look at these. If nothing is done about it, we will never be able to balance the world economy or avoid economic and financial crises.

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**10. The international community should explore a new pattern of interaction between major countries.**

Undoubtedly, major countries should shoulder special responsibilities for world peace and stability. To a large extent, how major countries get along determines whether the world is tranquil or not. In an era when countries are increasingly interdependent, new ideas and approaches are required in handling relations between major countries. They should not repeat the history of maximizing one's own interests, vying for sphere of influence, conducting arms race or competing viciously in a zero-sum game. Otherwise, we would be going against history and not being responsible to mankind. I appreciate the point recently made by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that we need to "find a new answer to the ancient question of what happens when an established power and a rising power meet". I think we already have the answer: win-win cooperation, which should be the hallmark of the new pattern of interaction between major countries. Due to differences in history, culture, values

and level of development, it is natural and understandable that rising powers and established powers have differences and problems. What is important is that we need to respect each other's core interests and major concerns, and do not create trouble for each other or cross each other's bottom line. Rising powers do not challenge established powers,

and established powers should accommodate rising powers. The building of the path to a new pattern of interaction between major countries will not be plain sailing. It calls for strategic vision and patience on both sides to enhance dialogue, deepen communication and expand consensus. We need

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to view each other's strategic intentions in an objective and rational way, properly manage differences, and avoid strategic misjudgment, mutual irritation and vicious competition. The China-US relationship is a good example. It is one of the most important, dynamic and promising bilateral relationships in the world. In the 21st century, the only choice for China and the United States is to accommodate each other and carry out win-win cooperation. Like it or not, China and the United States are destined to form a community of shared interests, responsibilities and destinies. I believe our two countries have the responsibility, ability and wisdom to forge a new type of relationship marked by sound interaction and win-win cooperation. In doing so, we will set an example for other major countries and for international relations in general. 