

Wang Jisi*

School of International Studies, Peking University

Thoughts on the Grand Change of World Politics and China's International Strategy**

A series of social and political turmoil in the Broader Middle East and North Africa, at the beginning of 2011, ushered in the second decade of the 21st century in a surprising way. Regardless of their difference in nature and root cause, these events clearly highlighted the increasingly important role in domestic and international politics, played by ethnic and religious groups, social organizations and even individuals (especially the young generation equipped with Internet communication tools), albeit nations remain the most important players in the international arena. Domestic politics and social stability will still be key factors which affect international security, and international interventions in domestic politics have intensified and taken on complicated forms. In this sense, internal politics in countries and regions around the world has, in fact, constituted a significant variable in assessing China's international strategic environment, which must be

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taken into consideration when China deliberates and designs its future international strategy.

China's national strength and international influence has increased rapidly in recent years, which has drawn attention from many countries in the world. They have gradually incorporated the China factor in designing their development strategies and formulating foreign policies. Such a rapid increase in national strength and international prestige has also influenced the attitude the Chinese people adopt so as to observe international affairs and the approach they take to deal with international relations. Therefore, how China defines its international role has become another key consideration when policymakers, think tanks, and scholars study and discuss China's international strategy.

For the above-mentioned reasons, this paper focuses on two topics: one is the nature and the trend of the world political changes; the other is the issue of China's international role today and in the future. Finally, the paper will comment on China's grand strategic choice.

1. BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GRAND CHANGE OF WORLD POLITICS

The current changes in the Broader Middle East and North Africa are attributed to some accidental factors and the broader context of world political changes, since the end of the Cold War. With the acceleration of globalization and the spread of information technology, the political dynamics occurring in one country has exerted a growing impact on its immediate neighbors and remote corners. Therefore, compared to the regional features and national character, which are more familiar to the observers of international politics, the ramifications and the characteristics of the world political changes deserve a closer scrutiny.

The development of world politics in the past three decades can be roughly divided into two phases. In the first phase, political liberalization and economic marketization are the basic trends of world political changes, on account of which a US political scientist Francis Fukuyama enthusiastically declared that history has ended.¹ In the second half, liberalization and

¹ Francis Fukuyama's essay "The End of History?" was published in the international affairs journal *The National Interest* in 1989 and his book *The End of History and the Last Man* was published in 1992. In the book, Fukuyama argues that the advent of *Western liberal democracy* may signal the end point of humanity's *sociocultural evolution* and the final form of human government.

marketization face new challenges and suspicions. Those nations which have adopted a liberal democracy painfully have to explore the localization of democracy so as to improve and cement their basic institutions. Market fundamentalism was resisted and criticized to a certain degree and neo-liberalism, the ideological base for political democratization and economic marketization, was also frequently questioned. In the meantime, a rapid development of civil societies, growing prominence of the non-traditional security challenges (i.e. environmental issues, energy and food security, and public health, etc.), politicization of religious and ethnic issues, and the rise of extremism of various forms around the world, all have posed new challenges to governance capacities of the national governments and redefined world politics. A preliminary study of the dramatic changes of world politics in the past three decades helps shed light on the following conclusions.

First, the pursuit of freedom and democracy is universally recognized. The degree of democracy and freedom in a country has become one of the fundamental yardsticks of political legitimacy worldwide. Under any national condition or political condition, it is hard to defend dictatorship, family ruling, information blockade, and a lack of transparency in government work and abuse of human rights. Developed countries in the West have always enjoyed such a stable democracy that neither serious financial crises nor minor social unrest has fundamentally shaken their political systems. Few countries adopted a competitive multi-party system in the 1970s, but most countries had done so by the latter half of the 1990s. Today, even countries such as Burma and Iran, which are deemed as dictatorships, have nominally maintained multi-party politics or universal suffrage. From a long-term perspective, there is an irreversible trend of the transition of non-West countries toward democratic politics. But it is noteworthy that while a mature democracy is yet to emerge among Muslim countries, and the Central Asian countries are returning from imitating Western democracy to strongman politics, which is more familiar to them, Eastern and Central European countries, which have maintained the Western cultural tradition, are in a better position to adapt quickly to the multi-party democracy. It shows that, on the one hand, religious, cultural, and political traditions all play an important role in democratization; on the other hand, the timing and progress of democratization is not necessarily determined by the degree of economic development. Nevertheless, the latter is definitely related to the maturity of democratization.

Second, democratization in different countries is in different stages of development and, thus, has various goals and features. The traditional democracy in developed countries displays some deficiencies

and shortcomings. For example, the rights of minorities are undermined under “competitive majority voting”, as a result of which “consensus democracy” and “deliberative democracy” have come into being. Western countries have also carried out reforms in electoral systems, parliamentary system, power-sharing mechanism between the central government and local governments, and the strengthening of the oversight of government activities through public opinion. After the end of the Cold War, many non-Western countries have been able to explore their own development strategy in a relatively easy environment. Despite the fact that the US employed military means to “liberate” Iraq and Afghanistan to promote local “democratization” and “street politics” by force, and that “color revolution” in some countries occurred against the background of Western influences, democratization in non-Western countries, as a whole, charts an inherent and independent course and reflects the political will of the general public. All the problems arising in the course of democratization, such as bribery, corruption, violence, and political discords, cannot belittle the value of democracy itself and the significance of their efforts of “trial and error” in the process of experimenting democracy. The process, form, and outcome of democratization may vary from country to country. Nevertheless, it has been generally acknowledged that democratization does not necessarily mean westernization.

Third, apart from civil liberties and democratic system, stability and order are also the political goals which each and every country pursues. Historical experiences demonstrate that, be it in developed or developing countries, a dynamic balance needs to be maintained between freedom and democracy on one side, and stability and order on the other side. Excessive freedom enjoyed by either individuals or minority groups can result in social divisions, value distortions, civil strife, social disorders, and even and violent confrontations. The combination of liberalism, materialism, and consumerism has not only elicited a serious scarcity of resources and the deterioration of the ecological environment, it also led to a general decline of public morality and a flagrant expansion of individual greed. These problems are even more severe in those newly democratized non-Western countries. The political system and rule of law in these illiberal democracies are not mature enough. But under the temptation of Western lifestyles and the influence of Western values, the growing expectations of the general public have far exceeded the pace of their economic growth and social progress. In some countries in the Broader Middle East and North Africa, some people have expressed their complaints in such a violent way that their actions are posing a threat to social stability and political order. Meanwhile, the efforts to maintain social order have often resulted in the

abuse of power, which infringes upon individual freedom and undermines the rights of the underprivileged. Countries around the world have been seeking the solutions to keeping a dynamic balance between the guarantee of individual freedom and the maintenance of social order. Nevertheless, be it traditional socialism, or traditional liberalist ideas, or even the return to a political system which integrates politics with religion such as Iran since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, all have failed to provide a right answer to the accomplishment of social justice.

Fourth, with regards to the relations between state and society and between government and market, liberal capitalism, guided by neo-liberalism and its thoughts, has undergone a process of “negation of negation,” while a really competitive revolutionary force has yet to come. It was deemed as a universal value between the 1980s and the 1990s, so as to reduce state interventions in the society and government interventions in the market, however the blind worship of neo-liberalist thoughts and institutions was widely questioned and denied in the past decade. However, it remains a problem which demands a solution, in practice, on how to find a proper balance between a state intervention and market freedom. The wealth gap is drastically widening, in every country around the world. Environmental deterioration, ecological imbalance, financial instability, and social cleavages all call for government efforts to check greed, safeguard justice and maintain social harmony. But the more the government works for vested interests and is not transparent in decision-making, the more power it has and more serious will the social imbalance become. That is why the “Third Road” can hardly find any substantial spiritual connotation and policy support. At the beginning of the 20th century, revolutionary ideas represented by Leninism had sparked remarkable social movements which aimed to end the rule of capitalism and establish communism. Yet, such movements are rare at the beginning of the 21st century. Sporadic violent activities that ostensibly aim to overthrow “the evil hegemony of American capitalism” have been labeled as “terrorism” and despised by the international community. The so-called “anti-globalization movement” can only be promoted by disorderly crowds lacking thoughts for guidance, an economic base, and organizational force. Global governance, aiming to address a series of global challenges, is hindered by quiet inter-governmental cooperation, competition and bargaining, and thereby unable to generate any revolutionary force.

Fifth, the new generation of social movements and rapid growth of civil societies are going beyond the understanding of the traditional political motives and the border of national states and have become key factors and driving forces in correcting global social and economic imbalances. On

the global scale, such issues as peace, environmental protection, human rights etc. have gained unprecedented political weight and become an inseparable part of every country's policy-making. Meanwhile, such new social identities as ethnic identity, cultural identity, religious identity, idea identity, and interest identity, deriving from concerns over ecological and environment deterioration and public health, have also gained tremendous weight. Concepts such as individual freedom, individual rights, diversity of thoughts and culture have taken root in every corner of the globe. From a global perspective, the opposite of liberalization and diversification is no longer naked ideological dictatorship in the name of state, but is reflected in the form of soft and non-national social identities. Sovereign states will still be the major players in world politics and will enjoy the loyalty of their citizens. By carefully studying the world political and intellectual history, it is not difficult to find that the world composed of sovereign states is not permanent in mankind's history. For instance, in some countries in the Broader Middle East and North Africa, a large number of people identify more with their clans, tribes, ethnic and religious groups than with their traditional sovereign states. That is why Sudan has been divided into two countries and Syria is now faced with the danger of disintegration.

The past 30 years are just a "fleeting moment" in the history of mankind. But within this period, world history has realized an upward spiral. Compared to the Cold War period, world politics has become more colorful and, in a sense, more uncertain. The world is confronted with new problems and challenges. The earthquake which happened in Japan on March 11, 2011 is case in point. In the face of natural disasters such as tsunamis and earthquakes, and non-traditional security challenges such as environmental degradation, energy and food shortage, public health, and the rise of extremisms of various forms, how can states deliver good governance? How can the international community achieve co-governance? And how can humans respond to the common challenges? The history of the past over 30 years shows that although the Soviet model has become a historical endeavor, the West nowadays cannot provide a proven model and a ready-made answer to help achieve national unification, economic development and social progress, either. Emerging markets Nye, *The Future of Power*, p. 167 such as China, India, Brazil, South Africa, and Russia have inspired new hopes, but everything they have achieved is still on the nascent, experimenting stage and their universal significance is yet to be tested by history. In this sense, the old history has indeed ended and a new world history is just unfolding.

2. WHAT KIND OF A COUNTRY IS CHINA?

In the last 30 years or more years, since the reform and opening-up, China has always been changing itself and influencing the world. The relationship between China and the world has undergone accelerating historic changes that propel China to constantly rethink its “international role” and “national identity.” The pre-requisite for us to consider China’s international strategy in the next decade is: against the broad background of world politics, how can we clearly understand China’s role in international affairs, and how can we define the question “what kind of a country is China?”

In terms of national strength, one question is still open to debate. After China’s GDP surpassed Japan’s, has it become the strongest nation in Asia, and, therefore, is it second only to the US? I think that compared with Japan, China not only boasts an immense population, vast territory, and large economic size, but it also possesses a larger scale national defense system and nuclear weapons. It is fair to say that in the Asia-Pacific region, China overtook Japan in the political influence, geopolitical advantage and geo-economic advantage. Therefore, it should be a generally accepted view that China is the most powerful Asian country. However, other factors must also be taken into account. Although China’s comprehensive “hard power” slightly exceeds Japan’s, Japan’s status as a developed country and its alliance with the US significantly compensate for its geopolitical disadvantage. Moreover, in terms of people’s living conditions and breeding, culture and education, and scientific and technological levels, Japan does far better than China, and its cultural power in Asia is no less than China’s. It is equally important not to ignore the fact that Japan has strong national cohesion, solid political institutions, long-term social stability, and a good ecological environment. Furthermore, the economic recession over the past two decades and frequent changes of the government have not led to political turbulence. Nor has the initial panic precipitated by the unprecedented earthquake and its subsequent tsunami developed into hysteria, thanks to Japan’s ability to cope with natural disasters in an efficient and timely manner. In brief, Japan’s slow, but stable economic growth, solid political institution, despite the frequent administration transitions, steady social progress, efficient disaster-addressing mechanism, advanced science and technologies, and expanding cultural influence in East Asia, put Japan in an equal, if not a more advantageous, position in its competition with China, a fast-growing economic power with increasing regional and international weight. With all that said, it would, therefore, be a big mistake to overlook Japan’s strength in China’s foreign relations.

Europe is another entity which cannot be belittled as well. China's economic strength has surpassed that of any single European power. However, the EU as a whole has an economy as large as the US, and the euro has already become an international currency which can compete with the dollar, but the internationalization of the renminbi still has a long way to go. The gap between China's comprehensive power and global political influence, and that of the EU is still large. So, in terms of the GDP, the Chinese economy has become the world's second largest and is developing with sound momentum. But it is completely unrealistic to conclude that China's power has overtaken Japan and the EU and become the world No. 2, and will catch up with the US in one or two decades. China is far from becoming the world No. 2, particularly given its underdeveloped cultural soft power and weak voice in the international arena. A proper evaluation of China's position among global powers is that China is the strongest developing country. But the booming economies such as India, Brazil and Russia all have their own strengths and weaknesses.

Furthermore, China is located in the center of traditional geopolitically defined Asia (with the exception of West Asia, and Siberia, which is often referred to as Russia's Far East). As its economic interdependence with neighboring countries increases, China becomes the geo-economic center of the Asia-Pacific region, and plays a leading role, bigger than that of the US and Japan in the regional economic development. China has participated in almost all regional economic organizations in East Asia and is also a core member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In spite of the economic prominence, the geopolitical situation China faces is quite different. As a firm believer and a staunch supporter of non-alignment movement, China does not form any formal political or military alliance with any neighboring country, which puts China in a more disadvantageous geopolitical position in the face of the US alliance network in East Asia. What's even more problematic, China has many hard-to-solve territorial disputes over land and water with Japan, India, and Vietnam and some other neighboring countries. The US-led "hub-and-spoke alliance network" is playing a pivotal role in East Asia security, and China is a concern in such military arrangements. Under such circumstances, China cannot speak on behalf of East Asia on the international political arena as Germany, France, or Brazil does for Europe or South America. In other words, from geographical perspective, China is identified as an Asian country, which gains increasing recognition as an economic powerhouse. However, few countries in Asia are willing to share China's political values and recognize it as a political "leader" or "spokesman" for Asia. Although some Chinese people are enthusiastic regarding talking about "Oriental culture" or

“Asian civilization,” the Chinese civilization, more specifically the Han civilization, is only a part of diverse Asian cultures, along with the Indian civilization, the Persian civilization, the Japanese civilization and others. The Chinese civilization differs from other Asian cultures, as much as it does from the Western civilization. Hence, China is one of Asia's centers, but not the “leader” above all other major nations. There is indeed a rapid global expansion of China's interests and influence, but in no way is China in a position to rank itself as an equivalent to the US, the only global superpower, in the coming few decades.

Furthermore, in terms of the nature of the political system, China is one of the few socialist countries in the world with unique political-economic institutions, a political value system, and mainstream ideology. China faces many uncertainties in its development path because it is undergoing reforms of profound and long-term significance. China has yet to realize complete territorial unification and is threatened by ethnic separatism. Despite the rapid economic growth, China faces many such challenges as social disharmony, the deterioration of ecological environment, daunting tasks of social governance, and sluggish transformation of economic development model. While its national coffers are strong enough to fund grand projects with concentrated effort, China's per capita income remains low and its wealth gap has grown. Despite the firmness of the political system, China is short of capability for institutional innovation, and its social cohesion is yet to be enhanced. Although the mainstream socialist ideology remains unchallenged and the socialist nature of its public education remains dominant, social trends of thoughts and public opinions have become increasingly diversified, and the government is increasingly concerned about and has taken precautionary measures against the political and thought penetration by overseas hostile forces. Out of domestic and international concerns, China has adopted an attitude starkly different from that of Western countries towards the multi-party system, democratic transformation, and national division in many developing countries. The above-mentioned national conditions and policies indicate that the institutional and ideological differences between China on one side and developed countries and even some developing countries on the other side remains colossal and shows no signs of narrowing in the foreseeable future. China is thus regarded by Western developed countries as “different” in the international community.

China's “international role” is defined as the role China plays and the responsibility China assumes in world affairs. What role China plays is determined by the above-mentioned three factors: China's overall power, complicated geopolitical and geo-economic position, and unique political

system. For instance, China's power position as the largest developing country determines that China is not a dominant force in the current international political and economic order. In consideration of its own interests and the limited strength compared with the western industrialized countries, China has accepted international rules advocated by Western countries on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, counter-terrorism, trade and investment liberalization, protection of intellectual property rights, and climate change while joining in the dollar-led international currency system. Meanwhile, the increase of national strength gains China an increasingly significant weight to its opinion in international organizations as well as more international responsibilities on foreign aid and peacekeeping. China's geopolitical position determines that its input of political and economic resources and influence in neighboring countries is much bigger than in other areas around the world. The nature of China's political system determines that it is under tremendous political pressure from the Western value system which advocates democracy, freedom and human rights. China resists such pressures and insists on the principle of non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs in the international community.

Another problem related to the international position is whether China's unique development path can become a model for other countries to learn from and copy. Although debates among domestic and international academics about the "China Model," also known as the "Beijing Consensus," are very hot, the Chinese authorities have no intention of promoting its development path and experience in countries around the world. Prime-minister Wen Jiabao even directly said for a news conference during the annual sessions of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in 2011 that there was not a "China Model." I have always believed that China's development and experience cannot yet be summarized into a model because the China Model under exploration is still in the making and far from success. There are indeed some countries in the world which want to learn from China. But no one is able to copy the set of China's systems.

Of course, the above-mentioned roles interact with each other and cannot be clearly separated. In short, China's international role can be summed up into the following four points: (1) China is a developing country with the strongest national power and still falls far behind the US, the EU, and Japan regarding the maturity of economic development, science and technology, education, and overall cultural power; (2) China is an Asian power which sees a global expansion of its interests and influence, but has still not assumed a dominant role in Asia; (3) China is a major socialist country with a unique

political structure and value system, but it is undergoing profound reforms and has yet to realize complete territorial unification and is threatened by ethnic separatism; (4) China is a beneficiary, a participant in, and a reformer of the current international political and economic order, although limited by Western-led international rules. These standpoints have been created with the help of some basic conclusions reached based on facts, not wishes. Because of the above-mentioned four conclusions, I believe that there will be little change in China's international position, situation and "identity" in the next decade.

3. WHAT TYPE OF AN INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY DOES CHINA NEED?

When thinking about and analyzing China's international strategy, the characteristics of world politics and China's international role are undoubtedly among the decisive factors that need to be considered first. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, world politics was dominated by the struggle for hegemony between the US and the Soviet Union, and the third world also witnessed the rise of national liberation movements, also known as "decolonization" in the West. China's international position, at that time, can be summed up as a big Oriental country featuring the Soviet model, a "rebel" against the international order and an isolated, poor, country. So it was natural that China's international strategy was then called "Chairman Mao's revolutionary diplomatic line" guided by "proletarian internationalism." Today, world politics and China's international role are utterly different from what they used to be several decades ago.

Any country's international strategy must at least answer the following three questions: (1) what is the country's core interest? (2) What is the major external threat the country faces? (3) How can the country properly and effectively deal with the external threat? During the Mao era, China's core interest in international relations, a concept which was not available at that time, was maintaining the stability of the revolutionary political power; the major external threat was the US or the Soviet Union, the US and the Soviet Union together for a period, and China's primary means to deal with the threat, in addition to military struggle, were diplomatic efforts to establish a united international front against the US or the Soviet Union, or both.

Today, the Chinese authorities' definition and understanding of the country's core interest is clear, consistent, and based on a prevailing

consensus. Policy measures and strategic choice closely related to core interest decide that this concept does not permit ill-conceived alteration or hasty interpretation. In December 2012, China's State Councilor Dai Bingguo made it clear in his published article *Sticking to the Path of Peaceful Development* that China's core interests in international affairs are: (1) China's form of government, political system and stability; (2) China's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity; (3) the basic guarantee for sustainable economic and social development of China. And these interests do not brook violation.² Dai Bingguo's article has not linked any region or problem beyond China's border to the concept of core interests. In the past months, some Chinese analysts have declared the South China Sea and North Korea as China's core interests. Such unauthorized statements, to a certain extent, have deepened foreign suspicion about China and exerted a lasting negative effect.

After a country's core interests are clearly defined, identifying the major external threat will then become the most important challenge in its international strategy. In world history, an external threat for one country was often another one. Yet, in today's era of globalization, profound changes have occurred in world politics and international relations. A noteworthy international political phenomenon in the post-Cold War era is that, be it developed countries such as the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan, or booming economies such as India, Brazil, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, and Turkey, no single country has identified any other country as their biggest external threat or their enemy in their official statements. Although every country still faces external threats nowadays, few have identified any specific country as their definite enemy.

After the 9/11 attacks, the US looks at international terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as the biggest threat to national security and had even once called Iran, Iraq, and North Korea "the axis of evil." However, the Obama administration has made a different judgment and statement from that of the Bush administration on external threats. The National Security Strategy which the US released in May 2010 pointed out: "Instead of a hostile expansionist empire, we now face a diverse array of challenges, from a loose network of violent extremists to states that flout international norms or face internal collapse. In addition to facing enemies on traditional battlefields, the United States must now be prepared for asymmetric threats, such as those that target our reliance on space and cyberspace" (US Presidential Doctrines Handbook, p. 209).

² Dai Bingguo, "Sticking to the Path of Peaceful Development," December 6, 2010. <<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceit/ita/zl/yjj/t807349.htm>>

It is fairly certain ("if something is certain, it will definitely happen or is definitely true" that although American strategists generally recognize that the rise of China will pose a challenge or even a threat to the US, today's US government and mainstream political forces have not defined China as an enemy country.

Where does the major external threat China faces come from? Many Chinese observers will answer in unequivocal terms: "Of course it comes from the United States" or, more broadly speaking, from the West. Some people also think that the US is China's enemy country and argues that this is beyond doubt. Otherwise, one is considered either "unable to distinguish ourselves from the enemy" or as just "a traitor." This is a very serious issue which should be clarified by drawing three clear lines of demarcation.

The first line of demarcation is to distinguish two important and utterly different questions in terms of strategic and political scope. Is a country objectively threatened by one or several enemy countries? Does a country "need" an "enemy country" to consolidate its internal order? A remark made by Mencius that "a state without an enemy or external peril is absolutely doomed" answers the second question. The US political scientist, Samuel Huntington, also admitted that the US "needs" a strong enemy to solidify its national and cultural identity. He said, "The ideal enemy for America would be ideologically hostile, racially and culturally different and militarily strong enough to pose a credible threat to American security" (Huntington, *Who are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity*, p. 292). It is true, at all times and in all countries that some people will always try to achieve domestic political goals by highlighting the threat of a strong external enemy and make it a strategy or a policy. Some Chinese observers often cite Mao Zedong, who said, "It is the number one question for revolution to distinguish whom our friends are from whom our enemies are." The logic goes like this: China's first priority for an international strategy is to distinguish friends from enemies; now that the US is viewed as an enemy, its allies, such as Japan, will naturally be viewed as enemy countries or hostile forces, and the anti-American forces around the world should be viewed as China's friends or allies.

For thinkers, like Huntington, to define China as an enemy country is taken for granted, and there is no need to examine whether China's strategic intentions are benign or hostile, or whether Chinese foreign policy objectives are restrained or expansive. Similarly, for thinkers who insist that "China needs an enemy country" or that "the principal problem for China's international strategy is to draw a clear line between friends and enemies," the intention of the Obama administration's strategy for dealing with China and the significant changes in world politics are irrelevant to their assessment. But the question whether China and the US have become

enemies, or will ultimately become enemy countries, asks for a clear-headed strategic analysis from a much broader and more realistic perspective.

The second demarcation line is the fact that some Americans view China as an enemy country, which does not necessarily mean that the US policymakers and mainstream political forces define China as an enemy country and, therefore, formulate the US long-term strategy on the basis of reciprocal animosity. Equally important, the view to regard the United States as an enemy country is not held by some radical fringe in the Chinese society able to represent the official line of Chinese policymakers and the mainstream political forces. In the joint statement released during his visit to the US in January 2011, Chinese President Hu Jintao confirmed the long-term goal of “building a Sino-US cooperative partnership,” which is entirely different from the argument that defines “China and the US as enemy countries.”

The third line is that the attitude that the United States constitutes a security threat, political challenge, and economic competition to China, does not **necessarily** mean that the US is China’s enemy country, let alone the largest external threat to China. The US, Japan, and other western countries hold a negative view on China’s political values. Western politicians sympathize with and even support Dalai Lama and the separatists from the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. The US continues to sell arms to Taiwan. The US-led military alliances bring heavy pressure on China’s security. The US business community and Congress wage “currency war” and “trade war” against China. All these challenges posed to China, by the United States, certainly call for consistent efforts to cope with. But this does not necessarily justify the “enemy country” argument. China needs to address these challenges with concerted efforts; that is for sure. Moreover, when we concentrate all our efforts on tackling our domestic challenges, such as boosting economic development, transforming the economic growth models, improving people’s living standards, advancing education, science and technology, we will come to realize that China’s biggest challenge or even threat does not necessarily come from the United States. As long as we keep our own house in order, the pressure from the outside can be greatly alleviated, and we will have a fresh understanding of China’s external strategic environment.

For a long period during the Cold War when class struggle was taken as a top priority in national policy, China faced a severe and even hostile external environment. A major threat to China’s national security came from the United States (1949–1972) and the former Soviet Union (1969–1989). In the era of reform and opening up, China’s definition of external threat differs enormously from that of the Cold War era. At the present time

and in the foreseeable future China views accelerating the transformation of economic growth model as the pivotal mission. In this context, the challenges China faces are multifaceted and multifold, which, in some aspects, are more complicated and more severe than ever before. Here are a few examples: in the economic field, the fluctuation of international financial situation, economic recessions in some countries and consequent shrinkage in imports and the rise of economic nationalism and trade protectionism; in the traditional security field, the escalation of territorial land disputes and territorial water disputes, the danger of military conflicts at sea, the problem of the development and proliferation of nuclear weapons in neighboring countries, and international terrorism; in the non-traditional security field, energy shortages, soaring resource prices, climate change, safety for overseas Chinese citizens and companies, public health, and food safety. The challenges engendered by the current turmoil in the Middle East all the way to China are also multifaceted. Meanwhile, interaction between domestic and international conditions has become much closer and deeper than 20 years ago. Domestic and international challenges are interwoven and interchangeable, and increasingly difficult to prevent and to deal with. It is still a long way to go before China translates its growing national strength into policy measures, so as to effectively safeguard its core interests. So, it will be more sensible to define the major external threat to China's core interests as multifaceted challenges than as one or two specific countries.

The US and the whole western world have indeed posed clear strategic, political, and security challenges to China, but it is neither practical nor sensible to define and formulate China's international strategy on the basis of "making the US the target enemy." The reason is simple: If China views its largest trade partner, also the world's largest economic and military power, as its enemy, it is impossible to stick to the path of peaceful development. In terms of feasibility, there is hardly any country in the world that would like to join China in establishing a long-term anti-American coalition. For the benefits of both countries and the world, China and the US should make joint efforts to build "a cooperative partnership based on mutual respect and mutual benefit", so as to advance the common and shared interests of the two sides, make better use of the opportunities and more effectively cope with the challenges of the 21st century.

Another related key problem is whether China will stick to the strategic thought — "keep a low profile and make due contributions", which is intentionally or unintentionally mistranslated as "hide one's capacity, bide one's time and seek achievements." If the answer is yes, how can its development keep up with the times? This far-sighted strategic thought, to

keep a low profile and make due contributions, proposed by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1980s, means to guard against western political conspiracies, avoid confrontation with the west in implementing China's foreign policy, and promote the stability of domestic and international situations. The two decades that followed the 1980s witnessed the dramatic rise of China and the relative decline of the West. In this historical context, some people in China suggested that such a non-confrontational approach is outdated and should be replaced by a more assertive attitude, i.e. by taking every possible measure to defend China's rights and interests, even at the risk of breaking up relations with other countries, and showing no fear of confrontation with the outside world, particularly with the west. But a thought-provoking question is: why do people feel that China has faced mounting international pressure in recent years, particularly in 2010 when the US and Japan were plagued by difficulties at home and abroad, and the EU was troubled by sluggish growth and decreasing cohesion. To answer this question, we need to examine the root cause of the drastic transformation in world politics and understand the domestic and international factors at play.

It should be noted that the political, economic, and military alliance systems formed during the Cold War among the western industrialized countries still remain intact, and the West as a whole enjoys a marked advantage over China in the current international political and economic order. Their advantages in science and technology, culture, education, and innovation capacity, relatively stable domestic politics and rule of law are the foundation upon which they can maintain their international superiority in the foreseeable future. The rise of some emerging markets has, to a certain extent, undermined the dominance of the western industrialized economies in the international system and partly alleviated the pressure of the West on China. But it has also brought about new and unpredictable factors which further complicate China's international strategic choice. It is fairly certain that the dramatic changes in international relations, such as the rise of the emerging markets and the relative decline of the West, do not necessarily or naturally bring about the improvement of China's international strategic environment. Under these circumstances, the international challenges China faces at present and in the foreseeable future are increasing instead of decreasing. In this context, it is still of utmost realistic significance to stick to, not to abandon, the strategic thought, "to keep a low profile and make due contributions".

Nevertheless, sticking to this strategic thought does not mean clinging to established practices. The essence of this strategic thought cannot be inherited if it is not replenished and adjusted in line with the development and change of domestic and international situations in the past two

decades. This strategic thought was originally meant to deal with the US-led West world when relations with Western countries were the top priority for China's diplomatic work. But today, China's diplomacy faces a broader horizon, a more complex situation, more cooperative partners, and more competitors. If "to keep a low profile and make due contributions" is made a guideline for China, so as to deal with its relations with other emerging markets or global challenges, such as financial crisis and climate change, it is obviously inappropriate and pointless.

In order to stick to the essence of this strategic thought and avoid the negative connotation as a result of mistranslation or misinterpretation, I would like to make two suggestions. First, shy away from using the phrase as a declaratory policy statement to avoid its negative connotation, due to mistranslation and misreading, and replace it with "being modest and prudent." The phrase "to be modest and prudent" conveys no derogatory sense at home and abroad. It is more explicit in its meaning and properly reflects the essence of the Chinese culture. The Chinese government, Chinese enterprises, and Chinese citizens should all display the spirit of "being modest and prudent" in their exchanges with developed and developing countries, in their international economic and other activities, and in their overseas travel, work and study.

The second suggestion is to understand and express China's long-term strategic goals and development direction more accurately. Dai Bingguo once commented: "The objective of China's development boils down to one sentence: To build a harmonious society at home and help build a harmonious world abroad. This means China will, first of all, be responsible to its 1.3 billion people and then, also, to people around the world, it will contribute to world peace and development, so that the fruits of China's development can benefit both its own people and the international community" (Bingguo, "Sticking to the Path of Peaceful Development"). He also said: "Some say China wants to replace the US and dominate the world. That is simply a myth" (Bingguo, "Sticking to the Path of Peaceful Development").

But sometimes we can also hear another kind of thought and statement about the objective of China's development, the so-called "catch-up" idea, a typical example for which the slogan of "surpassing England and overtaking the United States" was popular during the "great leap forward" era in the 1950s. Now, some people pick up this cliché again and propose that surpassing the US economy and military should be a long-term objective of China's development. Some people believe that whatever the Chinese people want to build or do, they should set their sights high, and make it the world's highest, largest, strongest, most expensive, and most elegant and

realize “the Chinese dream” the same as “the American dream.” They are willingly drinking from the poisoned chalice of illusion and are oblivious to the fact that this is simply a myth.

Not to mention how the outside world will look at us if the second objective was publicized with great fanfare, given the realities of China’s large population, limited natural resources, deteriorating ecological environment, largely unfavorable geographic conditions, and relatively weak economic base, all of this would make the myth to rebuild an American-style superpower even stronger. The realistic strategic objective for the country should not be to overtake the US, but to surpass China itself. This should take into account domestic and international situations, based on the requirements of the Scientific Outlook on Development, it should also accelerate the transformation of the economic growth model, while putting emphasis on quality, not size, on people’s welfare, not projects for political scores, on social justice and harmony, not escalating social unrest, and on real efficiency, not various world ranks.

Internationally, China’s objective should evolve from saying “what it does not want” to saying “what it wants”, from pursuing the accumulation of power to making a contribution to the world through thought innovation and institutional innovation, from seeking overseas market shares and the expansion of demand for resources in the process of globalization to facilitating improvement of market rules and international institutions, and from promoting multi-polarization of the world of power politics to joining with countries around the world on developing the rule of law and justice in the international order and improving global governance. Only when China evolves from a major power with a large population, impressive economic power, and significant political influence to the one with great harmony, education, science and technology, and culture, can the dream of rejuvenating the Chinese nation come true.

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