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Diplomatic Transformation and Developing a New Type of International Relations: A Perspective to Observe and Understand New China's Diplomacy

Summary: Since 1949, diplomacy of the People's Republic of China has successively undergone transformation for three times, namely diplomacy of establishing the PRC, diplomacy of enriching the country and major-country diplomacy. Developing a new type of international relations is an effective way to achieve diplomatic transformation of New China, but its connotations vary with different periods of history.

During the two turnarounds from 1949 to 2012, New China's diplomacy, which holds up the Principle of Independence and Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, took shape in the practice of developing a new type of international relations. The former principle have played an important role in safeguarding China's sovereignty and dignity, protecting national security and promoting the country's development. The latter became basic norm of international relations and basic principle of international law due to its openness and inclusiveness.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, in face of profound changes unseen in a century and a new posture for China to increasingly move toward the center of the world arena, President Xi Jinping made great endeavors to promote major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, and actively touched upon building a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation, which innovates on and develops the Principle of Independence and Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, as well as pushes forward the world multi-polarization process and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Keywords: A new type of international relations, diplomatic transformation, China's diplomacy

The founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 marked the greatest turning point in Chinese political history and Chinese diplomatic history of the 20th century. The Communist Party of China

(CPC) seizing the political power of a major country in the East with a 5000-year history of continued civilization gave rise to the necessity and possibility for China's diplomacy to open a new situation and

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write a new chapter. In the past 70 years, under the firm leadership of the CPC, China's diplomacy has undergone three rounds of transformation against an international situation amidst winds of change^[2], and eventually been engaged in developing a new type of international relations, as a result in achieving the said transformation.

Three Rounds of New China's Diplomatic Transformation: Diplomacy for Establishing the PRC, Diplomacy for Enriching it, and Major-Country Diplomacy

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The first round of New China's diplomatic transformation took place in 1949 and came to basic fruition in the middle of the 1950s, whose core was to turn the diplomacy of humiliation to that of establishing the PRC. Through the transformation, New China changed for good the embarrassing posture of "kneeling on the ground to run diplomacy" that had lasted for nearly a century, and established a foreign policy with independence as its base-color that combined patriotism with internationalism, aiming to achieve a truly equal status in international relations and effectively safeguard the country's sovereignty, dignity and security. The diplomatic transformation enabled China to set up normal diplomatic relations immediately with socialist countries, and gradually with countries of national

independence in Asia, Africa and Latin America and some of the capitalist countries in Nordic area, which signified that the basic framework of New China's foreign relations took initial shape. Between the middle of 1960s and early 1970s, China once adopted a foreign policy for "world revolution", presenting a diplomatic posture of "fighting with two fists and attacking in all directions", by which for the time being the country found itself in a very stern international situation (Yang, 2000, pp.45-50). However, as China regained its lawful seat in the United Nations and all legitimate rights, and as China-US relations thawed and China-Japan relations was normalized, the vision and conduct of "revolutionary diplomacy" was gradually phased out, and a new round of diplomacy transformation was ready to hit the ground running.

The second round of New China's diplomatic transformation happened between the end of 1970s and the beginning of 1980s, with the normalization of China-Soviet relations in 1989 marking its conclusion, the core of which was to turn from diplomacy of establishing the PRC to that of enriching the country. The 3rd Plenum of the 11th CPC Central Committee made a major strategic decision of shifting the focus of energy of the Party and the country to socialist modernization drive, accompanied by a corresponding major change in the main task and objective of China's diplomacy. In his opening speech at the 12th CPC National

[2] The academic community has reached no agreement on the concept of diplomatic transformation. This article holds that it refers to the act of a country to make some critical changes in the components, levels and contents of its diplomatic affairs. Regarding the components, diplomatic transformation contains diplomatic concept, principle, goal, strategy, policy, system and way of external action, etc. For the levels, three basic ones are involved, namely global, regional and bilateral level. In terms of contents, economic, political, security fields are included.

Congress, Deng Xiaoping made it clear that “While the Chinese people value their friendship and cooperation with other countries and other peoples, they value even more their hard-won independence and sovereign rights. No foreign country should expect China to be its vassal or to accept anything that is damaging to China’s own interests”. He also announced that to accelerate socialist modernization, to strive for China’s reunification, and to oppose hegemonism and work to safeguard world peace were the three major tasks of the Chinese people in the 1980s, the core being economic development (Deng, 1993, p.3). Centering on the above three tasks and based on assessment of the main theme of the times and on systemic summarization of historical experience and lessons, China made major readjustments on ideological guidance of diplomacy and on concrete foreign policy, establishing a diplomatic guideline that no longer made similarity or difference in social system and ideology a condition for good relations, and firmly pursuing a policy of refraining from entering into alliance or setting up strategic relationship with any major country or any bloc of countries. From then on, China’s diplomacy took an increasingly active posture. Between 1978 to the end of 1980s, the country established relatively stable relations with all major countries of the world, set up diplomatic ties with most of the neighboring countries, maintained friendly relations with overwhelming majority of the Third World countries, and joined many important international organizations and global and regional multilateral mechanisms, its framework of foreign relations being further perfected. From the early 1990s to the first decade of the 21st century, in face of a new posture of the

international pattern induced by the end of the Cold War, China continued to go by Deng Xiaoping’s foreign policy principle, to “observe calmly, secure our position, cope with affairs calmly, be good at keeping a low profile, never claim leadership, hide brightness and nourish obscurity, and strive for some accomplishments”, to unswervingly take the road of peaceful development, and to firmly pursue an independent foreign policy of peace. It continued to make positive progress in its relations with major countries, with neighboring countries, and with other developing countries, to be active in multilateral diplomacy, and to further enhance its representation and say in international affairs.

The third round of New China’s diplomatic transformation occurred after the 18th CPC National Congress, whose core is to turn from “diplomacy of enriching the country” to “major-country diplomacy”. The extraordinary performance of the country in the international financial crisis of 2008 and its becoming the world’s second largest economy foretold the necessity of China’s diplomatic transformation this time around. The 18th National Congress held in November 2012 set the goal of completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects and deepening reform and opening up in an all-round way, emphasizing that China would continue to hold high the banner of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit and strive to uphold world peace and promote common development. In the same month, Xi Jinping put forward for the first time the important proposition that “National rejuvenation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since modern times began”. In October 2013, Xi Jinping

40 | put forward the new thinking of conducting the neighborhood foreign policy in an “enterprising and pioneering way” and made overall arrangements for it. The term of “enterprising and pioneering” was in so sharp a contrast with that of “hiding brightness and nurturing obscurity” that had been in place for a long time that it instantly attracted broad attention of the international community. At the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs held in November 2014, Xi Jinping stressed that “China must pursue a major country diplomacy with its own characteristics”, and it was necessary to “on the basis of summing up our past practice and experience, enrich and further develop principles guiding our diplomatic work, and conduct diplomacy with distinctive Chinese vision, style and way of doing things” (Xi, 2018, p.200). In October 2017, Xi Jinping made it clear in his report to the 19th CPC National Congress that major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics for a new era aimed to foster a new type of international relations and build a community with a shared future for humanity. The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs held in June 2018 underlined the formulation of Thought on Diplomacy of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, signifying an important initial progress of the third round of New China’s diplomatic transformation.

In the process of diplomatic transformation this time around, the guiding position of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy has been established and promoting the construction of a community with a shared future of humanity, become a salient standard for China to guide the trend of the times and the orientation of human progress; a diplomatic

layout featuring comprehensive, diverse, and multi-dimensional has been deepened and improved; on the premise of strengthening the Party’s centralized and unified leadership over diplomatic work, reform on diplomatic system and mechanisms has steadily moved forward, bringing about a situation of greater coordination of work relating to foreign affairs where the Party always provides overall leadership and coordinates the efforts of all involved; and China’s diplomatic posture has become more enterprising, emphasizing on taking the initiative to make overall planning and top-level design, launching and pursuing the “Belt and Road” Initiative, deeply participating in reforming and developing the global governance system, and taking an active part in the process toward political settlement of international hotspot and difficult issues.

The three rounds of New China’s diplomatic transformation stand for development and progress of Chinese diplomacy, demonstrating its capacity of innovation. Not only does Chinese diplomacy work for a favorable external environment for security, development and prosperity of a socialist China, it has also made significant contributions to peace and development of mankind.

Continued Commitment of New China’s Diplomacy to Developing a New Type of International Relations

In the spring of 1949, Mao Zedong put forward a foreign policy principle for a soon to be New China to pursue, called “making a fresh start”, which included two connotations: first, to reconstruct China’s international relations, and second, to

reconstruct its diplomatic system and diplomatic contingent. The principle of “making a fresh start” achieved remarkable and positive results, and as the outstanding founder and great practitioner of New China's diplomacy Zhou Enlai observed, thanks to the principle, “China is no longer a semi-colonial country and has established independent diplomatic relations with other countries” (Zhou, 1990, p.49). Therefrom, the objective of New China's first diplomatic transformation was achieved.

In fact, back in the early years of New China, the CPC put forward the important concept of “a new type of international relations”, the base color however being proletarian internationalism, which was originally limited to designate relations between socialist countries only. Later on, as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were put forward, changes happened to both its connotations and denotations. Having put forth and held up the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence is a successful practice of New China in constructing a new type of international relations.^[3] The Five Principles have evolved into basic norms for international relations and basic principles of international law. The Ten Principles adopted by the Bandung Conference of 1955 were its extension and development; the Non-Aligned Movement that came to the fore in the 1960s took the Five Principles for its guiding principles; and relevant declarations of the general assemblies of the United Nations 1970 and 1974 unequivocally adopted the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence respectively.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, as New China's second round of diplomatic transformation began, readjustment of “the new type of international relations” in cognition and practice was underway. It was within the framework of constructing a new international order that Deng Xiaoping considered the issue of “a new type of international relations”. In his view, “Hegemonism, bloc politics and treaty organizations no longer work.” As for what principle should be applied to guide the new international relations, Deng Xiaoping called for continuing to use the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, as they are very clear and simple, of greatest vitality and withstanding all tests; they can serve countries different in social system and level of development; and they can serve China's neighbors (Deng, 1993, pp.282-283). Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao inherited and carried forward Deng Xiaoping's aforesaid thinking. Jiang Zemin called for “observing norms of international relations whose core is equality of sovereignty and non-interference into each other's internal affairs”, and proposed “to develop a new type of international economic relations featuring mutual benefit, complementarity and common development” (Jiang, 2006, pp. 478-479). In his view, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were consistent with the purpose of the UN Charter and reflected the essential features of a new type of international relations (Jiang, 1997). In expounding on the new type of international relations, Jiang Zemin underscored respecting and upholding the world's diversity, pointing out that all countries

[3] In June 2014, Xi Jinping, on the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, said “these Five Principles, as an integrated, interconnected and indivisible concept, capture the essence of today's international relations, and can apply to relations among all countries regardless of their social system, stage of development or size”.

42 | had the right to choose their own social system, development model, and path to development. Hu Jintao agreed with the proposition of “a new type of international relations” and further proposed to “advance mutually beneficial cooperation and develop a new type of major country relations” (Hu, 2016, p.583). No doubt, a new type of major country relations was concretization of a new type of international relations. In sum, between the 1980s and the first decade of the 21st century, the Government and leaders of China emphasized time and again the necessity to construct a new type of international relations, reiterating that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were consistent with the purpose of the UN Charter, conducive to advancing the process toward a multipolar world and promoting the development of democracy in international relations.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, in face of profound changes unseen in a century and a new posture for China to increasingly move toward the center of the world arena, the third round of New China’s diplomatic transformation has been gradually unfolded, innovation on diplomatic theory and practice continuing to achieve new results, of which an important area is to promote the construction of a new type of international relations for a new era. Xi Jinping has on several international and domestic occasions repeatedly touched upon the concept of “a new type of international relations”, and in his report to the 19th CPC National Congress systematically expounded on his proposition of building a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation. Among the three qualifications of a new type of international relations, mutual respect is the basic premise, which

means all countries in their interaction should take one another for equal partners, be willing to resolve their disputes and differences by consultation and peaceful settlement, and oppose the willful use or threat of force, and hence it is in fundamental opposition to hegemonism and power politics. Fairness and justice are the basic principle, which means all countries in their interaction should abide by universal international norms and be ready to realize justice in essence through justice in form, and therefore it is in fundamental opposition to trampling upon rules and being partial and evil. Win-win cooperation is the basic objective, which means all countries in their interaction must reject the means of antagonism and achieve their own goal through mutual coordination, and as such it is in fundamental opposition to unilateralism and the idea of winner-takes-all.

Xi Jinping’s thinking on a new type of international relations deeply embeds in valuable experience and theoretical results of New China’s foreign policy, and especially it innovates on and develops the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence; it reflects salient features of the new era and, by integrating the essence of Chinese traditional culture, embodies the idealistic stature of “don’t do unto others what you don’t want others do unto you” and “to achieve success, one should let others succeed as well” and the open mindedness of “harmony in diversity” and “all nations to live in harmony”; it gives new connotations to the purpose and principles of the UN Charter that are visible, practical and followable; it completely fits in with the development trend of human civilization and will lay a solid foundation for a better life for the people all over the world and for constructing a community with a shared future for humanity.

China has already made fruitful endeavors to develop a new type of international relations for a new era. First of all, China persists with developing relations with emerging economies and developing countries as a breaching point for constructing a new type of international relations. As an emerging economy that rises rapidly on the international arena and the most influential member of the family of developing countries, China endeavoring to promote the construction of a new type of international relations is directive, and the fact that China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination that has continued to develop at a high level for more than twenty years leads the way for various countries to construct a new type of international relations. Secondly, China persists with taking its relations with European countries as a focal point of constructing a new type of international relations. Europe is the birth place of traditional international relations, but Europe's international relations today have changed essentially comparing to what they were centuries ago. Between China and Europe, there are quite a few common interests, both sides holding shared or similar views on some of the major international issues. As such, there is practical foundation for China and Europe to build and keep long-term, stable relations. On top of setting great store by developing relations with the EU countries as contemporary Chinese leaders have done all along, Xi Jinping has made a major initiative of building China-EU partnership for peace, growth, reform and civilization (Xi, 2018, pp.102-103).

In a larger sense, the long-term practice of New China to construct a new type of international relations transcends the lastingness and historicalness of the paradigm of traditional international relations.

In traditional international relations, strategic game based on the precautionary mindset is a most typical form; antagonism, conflict and even war are most common means of handling relations between concerned parties, and it is the anticipation of concerned parties to international relations between them to attain equilibrium. The reason why traditional international relations came into being and has continued to exist, according to theorists of the realist school of international relations, rests with the state of international anarchy. With its existence and evolution, the state of international anarchy "makes the international system a ruthless and dangerous arena in which countries for survival have no other options but compete with each other for power. Even those countries content with living in peace are accused of participating in a ruthless competition for power" (Mearsheimer, 2003, p.38). Obviously, mankind will not tolerate repeated performances of such a tragedy of great destruction and must search for a new solution and a new way out. It is to this end that China has made continued efforts to construct a new type of international relations.

Historical Experience and Future Prospect of New China's Diplomatic Transformation and a New Type of International Relations

The three rounds of transformation are important practice in New China's diplomatic history, resulting from comprehensive effects of multiple factors such as the firm leadership of the CPC, continued changes in New China's relations with the rest of the world, continued renewal of Chinese leaders'

cognition of the main theme of the times, and major readjustments of China's national development strategy. The endeavors to construct a new type of international relations are necessary implications and an effective focal point of New China's diplomatic transformation. Diplomatic transformation creates the premise to construct a new type of international relations, and charts the latter course forward; whereas endeavors of the latter embody and enrich the concrete content of the former.

44 | In concrete practice, each round of New China's diplomatic transformation and every effort to construct a new type of international relations on top of shaping a favorable external environment for the country will help continue to increase China's comprehensive national strength, world competitiveness and international influence. As a major country, China's diplomatic transformation and particularly its efforts to construct a new type of international relations have transcended bilateral, regional levels and any single realm, producing global and multifaceted effects.

Looking into the future, in face of increasing instability and uncertainty in the international situation of a world in transformative transition, and in face of a more turbulent external environment during the period in which the timeframes of China's two centenary goals converge, all efforts, be it for steady advance of a new round of diplomatic transformation or for active construction of a new type of international relations, require more innovative thinking, vision and measures. Conditioned that the leadership of the CPC is always upheld, and that the main line of serving national rejuvenation and promoting human progress remains solidly in place, China's foreign policy will surely better benefit the people of all countries the world over as well as the Chinese people by more firmly upholding the interests of sovereignty, security and development of the country, more effectively safeguarding world peace and promoting common development, and more forcefully promoting the construction of a community with a shared future for humanity.

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