

China's Diplomatic Theory Construction in the Four Decades of Reform and Opening-Up

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In the four decades since the launch of reform and opening-up, under the strong leadership of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), China has withstood the tests of changes both at home and abroad and become more confident in its own path, theories, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics. While previous Chinese leaders put forward their respective diplomatic ideas in the theoretical inheritance, accumulation, summarization, development, exploration and innovation of different stages, the Xi Jinping Diplomatic Thought is a comprehensive expression of them all and further advances China's diplomacy. At a new starting point under the guidance of the Xi Jinping Diplomatic Thought, China's diplomacy is making new efforts and contributions to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Remaining True to Original Aspiration and Keeping Up with the Times

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China and especially since the beginning of reform and opening-up, China's diplomacy has, under the guidance of localized Marxism, carried forward the outstanding traditional culture of the Chinese nation, adhered to the socialist road and the CPC's leadership, and constantly marched forward along the path of reform and

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opening-up.

Initiating and upholding reform and opening-up

The Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee held in December 1978 commenced the great course of China's reform and opening-up. In his speech at the plenary session, Deng Xiaoping stressed, "A team of path breakers with the courage to think, to explore, and to innovate is always needed to carry out revolution and construction. Without such a large number of path breakers, we will not be able to get rid of poverty and backwardness, let alone surpass the advanced international level."¹ The communiqué of the plenary session proposed, "On the basis of self-reliance, we should actively develop economic cooperation featuring equality and mutual benefits with other countries in the world and strive to adopt world-class technologies and advanced equipment."² Xi Jinping has spoken highly of the historic event, "How did we start reform and opening-up? The most important thing is that our Party correctly judged the world's defining trend, and identified peace and development as the theme of the times, which led to the shift of the Party and the state's focus of work and the beginning of the new era of reform and opening-up."³

Amid the drastic changes in Eastern Europe, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in late 1980s and early 1990s, China faced a testing situation at home and abroad. Would it continue reform and opening-up? In his report at the 14th CPC National Congress, Jiang Zemin made a firm and clear answer, "In the face of the new international situation, the Communist Party of China, the Chinese government and the Chinese people will continue to actively develop foreign relations and strive for a favorable international environment for China's reform, opening-up and modernization, so as to contribute to

1 *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol.2, People's Publishing House, 1994, p.143.

2 "Communiqué of the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China," <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64563/65371/4441902.html>.

3 "Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech at Opening of Study Session on 18th CPC National Congress for New Central Committee Members," *People's Daily*, January 6, 2013, p.1.

world peace and development.”⁴ Under the strong third-generation central collective leadership with Comrade Jiang Zemin as its core, China broke the diplomatic “sanctions” and containment of the United States and the West, and formulated and implemented the strategic layout of relations with major countries, neighboring countries and developing countries as well as multilateral diplomacy. Moreover, China expanded its opening-up and played its role as a responsible major country in response to the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

In the 21st century, the central collective leadership with Comrade Hu Jintao as General Secretary has continued to follow the path of reform and opening-up. Despite the global financial crisis that dealt the world a severe blow in 2008, China became the mainstay of the international community and demonstrated the great achievements of its reform and opening-up. As stressed by Hu Jintao, “Reform and opening-up has always been a powerful driving force for the cause of the Party and the people. We must unswervingly promote reform and opening-up, and never be rigid or stagnate.”⁵ During this period, China’s GDP continued to rise, and it grew from the fifth-largest economy in the world in 2003 to the second-largest in 2010. The focus of domestic reform and opening-up at this stage was scientific development and the building of a harmonious society, while the country’s diplomatic priority was adhering to peaceful development and the building of a harmonious world.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China’s reform and opening-up has entered a new stage. As pointed out by Xi Jinping, “Improving and developing the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics and modernizing China’s system and capacity for governance should be the overall goal of deepening reform in every field.”⁶ He also noted that, “The Chinese people have made opening-up a fundamental national policy,

4 *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin*, Vol.1, People’s Publishing House, 2006, p.242.

5 “Hu Jintao Delivers Important Speech at Opening of Seminar for Major Provincial and Ministerial Officials,” *People’s Daily*, July 24, 2012.

6 *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, Vol.2, Foreign Languages Press, 2017, p.39.

pursued development with an open door, and accomplished a great transition from seclusion and semi-seclusion to all-round openness. In this process, China has lived up to its responsibility as a major country. From ‘bringing in’ to ‘going global,’ from WTO accession to the Belt and Road Initiative, China has made significant contribution to mitigating the Asian financial crisis and the global financial crisis. Contributing over 30% of global growth in recent years, China has become a key anchor and driver for the world economy and a positive force in advancing the noble cause of global peace and development.”⁷ In short, upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics has been a distinct theme of all theories and practices of the CPC since the launch of reform and opening-up.

Adhering to an independent foreign policy of peace

Over the past 40 years of reform and opening-up, China has adhered to the path of socialism, the leadership of the CPC, the principle of non-alignment, and the guideline of independent and peaceful diplomacy.

On July 18, 1981, when meeting with Hong Kong guests, Deng Xiaoping first proposed that “China should pursue Socialism with its own characteristics.”⁸ China fended off the pressure from the US and the West in the 1989 political turmoil and in subsequent drastic changes in Eastern Europe, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, and adhered to independence in diplomacy. As Deng pointed out, “China will never accept others’ interference in its internal affairs. Our social system is determined by our own conditions and supported by the Chinese people, so how can we allow foreign interference to change it? The most important principle of the new order of international relations should be non-interference in the internal affairs and social system of other countries.”⁹

7 “Xi Jinping Attends Opening Ceremony of BFA Annual Conference 2018 and Delivers Keynote Speech,” April 10, 2018, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1550206.shtml.

8 Han Zhenfeng, “When Did the Concept of ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’ Come Up?” *Beijing Daily*, July 22, 2008, <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/49150/49152/7542100.html>.

9 *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol.3, p.359.



The first China International Import Expo (CIIE) was held in Shanghai from November 5-10, in the year that marks the 40th anniversary of China's landmark launch of reform and opening-up. The Expo demonstrated China's determination to pursue an open world economy and a community with a shared future for mankind.

The CPC Central Committee with Comrade Jiang Zemin as its core resolutely implemented an independent and peaceful foreign policy. In the new situation, Jiang elaborated on the inevitability of socialism with Chinese characteristics from a perspective of global diversity. He repeatedly emphasized on different occasions, “We must respect the world's diversity. The world today is colorful in which all countries have the right to choose social systems, development strategies and lifestyles that are in line with their national conditions. The affairs of each country must be managed by its people, while international affairs should be decided through discussion.”¹⁰ In addition, Jiang developed China's independent and peaceful foreign policy in both practice and theory, effectively handling the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the mid-air collision between Chinese and US warplanes over the South China Sea and the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US, completing the process of China's accession to the World Trade

10 *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin*, Vol.2, p.40.

Organization, and maintaining and expanding China's national interests.

Led by the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Hu Jintao as General Secretary, China's comprehensive strength kept growing, its socialism with Chinese characteristics continued to demonstrate vitality, and the independent and peaceful foreign policy was further implemented. The Chinese government published two white papers on peaceful development in 2005 and 2011, expounding on China's path of peaceful development from practical and theoretical perspectives. The 2005 white paper pointed out, "China persists in its pursuit of harmony and development internally while pursuing peace and development externally; the two aspects, closely linked and organically united, are an integrated whole, and will help to build a harmonious world of sustained peace and common prosperity ... It is an inevitable choice based on its national conditions that China persists unswervingly in taking the road of peaceful development ... It is an inevitable choice based on China's historical and cultural tradition ..." and "It is an inevitable choice based on the present world development trend ..." ¹¹ The 2011 white paper further noted that the most distinctive feature of China's peaceful development is its "path of scientific, independent, open, peaceful, cooperative and common development." "China's peaceful development has broken away from the traditional pattern where a rising power was bound to seek hegemony." ¹²

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as its core, China has adhered to the socialist road and the independent and peaceful foreign policy in a more comprehensive and dialectical way. Xi Jinping stressed, "We must uphold the leadership of the Communist Party of China and socialism with Chinese characteristics, as well as our development path, social system, cultural

11 Information Office of the State Council, "China's Peaceful Development Road," December 2005, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2005/Dec/152669.htm>.

12 Information Office of the State Council, "China's Peaceful Development Road," September 2011, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/whitepaper_665742/t856325.shtml.

traditions and values. We must adhere to the independent foreign policy of peace and insist on putting the development of the country and the nation on the basis of our own strength. We will firmly follow our own path and pursue peaceful development. At the same time, we must never give up our legitimate rights and interests and shall not sacrifice the core interests of our country.”¹³

Following the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics

Over the 40 years of reform and opening-up, there has always been the question of whether to establish socialism and how to develop socialism. In diplomacy, the question is how to show the world the achievements of socialism with Chinese characteristics and its historical inevitability.

Deng Xiaoping pointed out that the reform and opening-up is by no means abandoning original ideals, and “we must still follow the socialist road and adhere to the lofty ideals of communism. The younger generation must understand this in particular.”¹⁴ Deng also said with assurance, “China’s socialism will not change and China must always pursue the socialist road of its own choice. No one can overwhelm us, and as long as China is not overwhelmed, one out of five people in the world is adhering to socialism. We have full confidence in the future of socialism.”¹⁵ Jiang Zemin developed socialism with Chinese characteristics through the Theory of Three Represents and Hu Jintao through the Scientific Outlook on Development, which forms a distinct contrast with the ever-deepening political, economic and social crisis of the United States and the West, and reflects the vitality of the socialist road with Chinese characteristics.

Combining theory and practice, Xi Jinping systematically answered the question of what kind of socialism with Chinese characteristics should be pursued in the new era and how it should be developed. In this regard, he made the most incisive summary in his report at the 19th CPC National Congress, “the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics is

13 *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, Vol.2, p.443.

14 *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol.3, p.115.

15 *Ibid.*, pp.320-321.

the leadership of the Communist Party of China ... the path, the theory, the system, and the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics have kept developing, blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization. It offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.”¹⁶

Grasping the Laws and Following the Trends

The Marxist worldview has never simply described the status quo of the world, but strives to explore the laws and direction of the world’s development and transform the world on this basis. China has been guided by the crystallization of localized Marxism during the reform and opening-up, from Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development, to the Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, which is how China has grasped the laws of the international situation and world trends, overcome difficulties, and triumphantly moved forward in its diplomacy.

Focusing on key points and developing both in scope and depth

In the 1970s and 1980s, major changes took place in the domestic and international situation. It is in this context that the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee proposed to shift the focus of the whole Party and the whole country to economic affairs. After profoundly analyzing the situation at the time, Deng Xiaoping concluded that it is possible to avoid another world war. He also insightfully pointed out that peace and development are the two major themes of the current era, which provided a theoretical basis and action guide for China’s reform and opening-

16 Xi Jinping, *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era – Report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*, People’s Publishing House, 2017, p.10.

up. Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao both made new developments in grasping the international trends. They theoretically analyzed the “20-year period of strategic opportunity” from the perspectives of world multi-polarization and economic globalization, and continuously proposed new thinking and new concepts in line with the trend of the times, non-traditional security, and regional and international cooperation.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, Xi Jinping has actively fostered internal and external strategic opportunities with a higher political and strategic consciousness, and clearly pointed out that “under an integrated judgment, China’s development is still in an important period of strategic opportunity in which we can make a big difference. Our biggest opportunity is self-development and growth, but we should also pay attention to the various risks and challenges, and be good at turning crises into opportunities and security.”¹⁷ China’s diplomacy is more proactive in safeguarding the country’s core interests, global governance, the international system, and supporting developing countries. It advocates a new form of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation, promotes the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, and seeks for an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity. All these are the latest understanding of the international trend and reflect China’s active creation of a favorable external environment.

Taking the moral high ground with a clear position

China’s diplomatic theory has the distinct socialist and political attributes of developing countries, representing the direction of world development and the advance of the times, and thus reflecting progressiveness in position and morality.

First, opposing hegemonism and power politics is the political guiding principle of China’s diplomacy. As early as January 16, 1980,

17 *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, Vol.2, p.442.

Deng Xiaoping clearly pointed out that “The first thing we must do in the 1980s is to oppose hegemonism and safeguard world peace in international affairs.”¹⁸ On August 21, 1982, when meeting with then UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, he further emphasized, “It is our true policy and guiding principle of foreign policy to oppose hegemonism and safeguard world peace.”¹⁹ Over the past 40 years of reform and opening-up, China has resolutely opposed hegemonism in international affairs, resolutely opposed playing the bully, and advocated the equality of all countries regardless of size. It has repeatedly rejected hegemony after becoming strong.

Second, maintaining international fairness and justice is a consistent position of China’s diplomacy. Since the launch of reform and opening-up, fairness and justice has been upheld throughout China’s foreign relations, which is enriched and developed with the changes of the times and the external environment. China has been better at transforming philosophy into practice after the continuous improvement of its overall national strength. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has placed greater emphasis on safeguarding international fairness and justice in global and regional systems, and continuously proposed and implemented various concepts, institutions and measures in the United Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, and other multilateral cooperation mechanisms between China and developing countries.

Last, supporting the vast number of developing countries is a basic principle for China’s diplomacy. Since the launch of reform and opening-up, China has partnered with many developing countries both economically and politically. China has also promoted the BRICS mechanism and increased the overall strength of developing countries to narrow the North-South gap. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has paid even greater attention to cooperation with developing countries. As Xi Jinping pointed out, “The vast number of developing

18 *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol.2, p.239.

19 *Ibid.*, p.417.

countries are natural allies of China in international affairs. We must uphold justice while pursuing shared interests and do well in the solidarity and cooperation with developing countries.”²⁰ The Belt and Road Initiative, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, the China-CELAC Forum, as well as bilateral and multilateral cooperation between China and many other countries, are important carriers and platforms in this regard.

Seeking truth from facts and advancing step by step

By following the principle of seeking truth from facts and being pragmatic in its foreign relations, China does its best and does what it can. As the goals and capabilities of China’s diplomacy are not exactly the same, and the international situation is changing rapidly, China’s diplomacy particularly emphasizes that it must be stable and long-term with the world situation and national conditions taken into account.

China’s diplomatic theory pays attention to the dialectical relationship between quantitative and qualitative changes. In advocating the reform of the international system and the community with a shared future for mankind, China has divided the overarching goal into a series of objectives for different regions and realms, and achieved the overall goal step by step by accumulating small incremental achievements. For example, besides the community with a shared future for mankind, China also advocates the communities of shared future, common interests and joint responsibilities with ASEAN and African countries. Another example is the double-track approach pioneered by China as a means to resolving the North Korean nuclear and the South China Sea issues. In view of this, more and more countries have recognized and responded positively to China’s short-, medium- and long-term diplomatic goals and are willing to work with China to build a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future for mankind.

20 “Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs,” *Xinhua*, June 23, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2018-06/23/c_1123025806.htm.

Strategic Theory and Strategic Thinking

Strategic theory occupies a very important position in the treasure house of Chinese diplomatic theories. It represents the grand thinking and macro blueprint of China's diplomacy, and also reflects the systemic arrangement and long-term operation to manage and realize the overarching diplomatic goal.

Reviewing the situation and making strategic innovation

Since the start of reform and opening-up, China has adhered to the Marxist standpoint and method, inherited the extraordinary traditional strategic thinking, emphasized the general trend of the world, and put forward the international strategic theory with a sense of the times, thus winning the strategic initiative.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Deng Xiaoping paid close attention to the development and changes of the international and strategic situation. He deepened and innovated the international strategic theory with regard to historical propositions such as peace and development, international multipolarization, competition of comprehensive national strength, scientific and technological revolution, and the future of socialism, which has created a necessary and favorable international environment for China's reform and opening-up. In the lead up to the 21st century, Jiang Zemin put forward the strategic idea of "three focuses": focus on the world strategic pattern to manage major-country relationships, focus on the geostrategic situation to proactively manage relations with neighboring countries, and focus on expanding strategic space to carry out multilateral diplomacy.²¹ In the first decade of the 21st century, Hu Jintao put forward the proposition of managing domestic and international situations, emphasizing that "officials at all levels must constantly keep in mind both our internal and international imperatives."²² This idea expands the scope of China's thinking

21 *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin*, Vol.2, pp.352-356.

22 *Selected Works of Hu Jintao*, Vol.2, People's Publishing House, 2016, p.245.

on international strategy, which serves as a new strategic guide for China to develop from a regional power to a global power.

As Xi Jinping is leading China closer to the center of the world stage, he has attached great importance to the scientific and objective analysis of international strategies. Since the CPC's 18th National Congress, he has proposed that "to grasp the international situation, we should establish a correct view of history, overall situation and our own position."²³ In short, the correct view of history is to understand the past. The correct view of overall situation is to grasp the essence of the whole landscape. The correct view of one's own position is to ensure the accurate strategic positioning for China. The above-mentioned three views is a highly concise theoretical summary of the international strategic situation, and a theoretical guide for China's diplomacy in this period, which remains favorable for development yet contains severe challenges.

Establishing strategic objectives and maintaining strategic resolve

An important feature of China's diplomatic strategy is to maximize the country's institutional and mechanism advantages and strive to achieve its goals with unwavering strategic patience and resolve.

As far as diplomatic strategic goals are concerned, China has remained committed to putting the diplomatic blueprint into practice since the start of reform and opening-up. For 40 years, China's diplomacy has adhered to the grand strategic goals put forward by Deng Xiaoping and strived to create a favorable internal and external environment for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Meanwhile, China has also adjusted its diplomatic strategic goals according to real changes, so as to keep them in line with the needs of the changing situation. As Xi Jinping pointed out at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs on June 22, 2018, "Since the 18th CPC National Congress, under the strong leadership of the Central Committee and in the face of ever-changing international situation, we have undertaken

23 "Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs."

an arduous journey in overcoming difficulties in foreign affairs and keeping marching forward. We have innovatively promoted the major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. Bearing the test of multiple risks, we have tackled many hardships and made various major difficult and historical achievements.”²⁴

In the process of establishing and implementing strategic goals, China has also placed great emphasis on strategic resolve. Despite confidence in achieving its strategic goals, China is fully aware that the road to their realization will be long and difficult and calls for strategic resolve. Deng Xiaoping, who proposed the theory of the primary stage of socialism, claimed that China will long remain a developing country. He made incisive judgments on the abrupt changes in the international situation at that time, and timely put forward strategic guidelines such as observing calmly, handling with composure, holding the ground, keeping a low profile and making a difference, etc.²⁵ Both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao put forward similar arguments, emphasizing that difficulties and challenges should be fully considered. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the international situation has undergone new changes. China, in its transition from a regional to global major country and even a global power, has encountered more complicated and severe challenges, such as the East and South China Seas issues and the trade frictions with the United States. China is also currently confronted by a United States who regards China as a strategic competitor and leads a Western bloc to collectively exert strategic pressure on China. Facing up to these challenges, Xi Jinping has repeatedly stressed strategic confidence and resolve in handling foreign affairs.²⁶ China fully realizes that the more severe the challenges, the more China must guard against conceit and impetuosity and get rid of interference, and resolutely move toward the established strategic goals.

24 “Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs.”

25 Qian Qichen, “Studying Deng Xiaoping’s Diplomatic Thought in Depth and Further Improving Diplomatic Work in the New Period,” in Wang Taiping, *Research Papers on Deng Xiaoping’s Diplomatic Thought*, World Affairs Press, 1996, p.7.

26 “Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs.”

Identifying strategic priorities and taking a problem-oriented approach

The CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as its core strongly advocates the problem-oriented approach of practice and theory. Marxists have always attached importance to asking questions and solving problems because “the problem is the slogan of the times and represents the most practical voice of an era to express its own state of mind.”²⁷ In his important speech at the seminar of major leading cadres at the provincial and ministerial level on July 26, Xi Jinping pointed out, “In order to win the initiative in the rapidly changing era and win the victory in the new great struggle, we must adhere to the basic principles of Marxism and adopt broader horizons and long-term vision to consider and grasp a series of major strategic issues facing the country’s future development, and constantly expand new horizons and make new generalizations in theory.”²⁸

Being problem-oriented here has three meanings. First, the life of a strategic theory lies in its ability to solve real problems. Diplomacy has extremely strong significance in application, and it is often necessary to respond quickly and correctly under urgent conditions. Therefore, the strategic theory of Chinese diplomacy cannot be based only on theory or logical reasoning. On the contrary, it must identify and address problems in practice, serve the practice and endure its test. Second, China must seize the strategic priorities of diplomacy. The problems facing China’s diplomacy are so numerous that it is impossible to deal with them indiscriminately. Rather, once the principal contradiction and the principal aspect of the contradiction are grasped, all problems can be readily solved. Guided by the strategic thinking, since the launch of reform and opening-up, China has always handled relations with other major countries (especially the United States) and relations with neighboring countries as issues of strategic priority. In recent years, the list further incorporates global governance and the

27 *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Vol.40, People’s Publishing House, 2006, p.289.

28 *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, Vol.2, pp.62-63.

international system. Third, China should enhance its agenda-setting ability. When its national strength was still not very strong, China had stood at the forefront of the trend of the times, advocated the establishment of a new international economic and political order and the reinforcement of regional economic integration, which won it much say in international affairs. Now, as its comprehensive power grows tremendously, China has proposed seeking advantages and avoiding disadvantages on the issue of economic globalization, and dealing more effectively with major global challenges such as climate change, economic growth, free trade and unilateralism, thus contributing Chinese ideas and Chinese wisdom to the international community.

Enhancing Consciousness and Academic Construction

Since the launch of reform and opening-up, China's academic circle has made great progress in the construction of international relations and diplomatic theories, but there are also many obvious shortcomings, for example the lack of systematization and originality.

At present, under the guidance of the Xi Jinping Diplomatic Thought, the Chinese academic circle is summing up the country's diplomatic practices and theories since the start of reform and opening-up, and strengthening the theoretical construction of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. The research and analyses of Chinese scholars have different focuses, but they can be roughly divided into three categories, namely the stage approach, the holistic viewpoint, and the systematic perspective.

Most scholars who follow the stage approach summarize China's diplomatic theory by referring to major historical periods or important meetings of the CPC. Gao Fei, for instance, believes that China's foreign policy over the past 40 years can be divided into three stages. The first stage (from the end of the 1970s to the end of the 1980s) was characterized by "independence and non-alignment." The second stage (from the end

of the 1980s to the end of the 1990s) featured “keeping a low profile and making a difference.” The third stage (from the end of the 1990s to the 18th CPC National Congress) was themed by “peaceful development, mutual benefits and win-win outcomes.”²⁹ Yue Peng argues that China’s diplomatic concept has experienced four stages since the start of reform and opening-up. The first stage (1978-1992) was characterized by “serving the economy and keeping a low profile.” The second stage (1992-2001) featured “taking responsibility and building mutual trust.” The third stage (2001-2012) was themed by “promoting harmony and serving the people.” The fourth stage (2012 to present) is distinguished by “taking the initiative and making pragmatic innovation.”³⁰

Scholars who adopt a holistic viewpoint summarize the theoretical development of Chinese diplomacy from the start of reform and opening-up and beyond, with a focus on the Xi Jinping Diplomatic Thought. As Su Changhe points out, “For 40 years, China has continuously summed up practical experience and promoted theoretical innovation in the realm of diplomacy. The theory of international relations and diplomatic theory with Chinese characteristics have their own unique inherent values, logical characteristics, and institutional basis ... China has established a network of relationships featuring peaceful coexistence, peaceful development and win-win cooperation with countries around the world ... and has created a new model of major-country diplomacy and become an important representative of a new type of international political civilization. China’s diplomatic theory has provided important ideological and theoretical resources for building a new type of international relations.”³¹

Scholars who analyze China’s diplomacy from a systematic perspective can be further divided into two types. The first carries out research by

29 Gao Fei, “Course and Enlightenment of China’s Diplomacy in the 40 Years of Reform and Opening-Up,” *Contemporary World*, No.5, 2018, pp.17-18.

30 Yue Peng, “China’s Diplomatic Concept Advances with the Times in 40 Years of Reform and Opening-Up,” *Guangming*, June 13, 2018, http://www.gmw.cn/xueshu/2018-06/13/content_29258021.htm.

31 Ministry of Education Research Center for Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, “The Valuable Experience of China’s Diplomacy in Reform and Opening-Up,” *People’s Daily*, June 22, 2018, p.7.

studying the ontology, epistemology and methodology of systems in a general sense. For example, Wang Hongxu studies diplomacy with Chinese characteristics by decoding its ontology, epistemology and process.³² The other type concentrates on major ideas within the theoretical system. For example, Qin Yaqing believes that the diplomatic theory with Chinese characteristics is mainly premised on the views of the times, the international order, and China's basic positioning in the international system.³³ Wang Dong and Zhu Xiaofan argue that since the 18th CPC National Congress, in the face of the new international environment, Xi Jinping has creatively proposed a series of diplomatic thoughts, which leads to the formation of major-country diplomatic theory with Chinese characteristics that involves "consciousness of mission", "spirit of the times", "innovative thinking" and "strategic insight."³⁴

Drawing on research under the abovementioned three approaches, I hereby put forward four systematic elements in the construction of China's diplomatic theory: the internal and external environment and the historic mission, the overall ideology and basic theory, strategic thinking and layout, policy principles and working methods.³⁵

The internal and external environment mainly refers to objective reality, but also includes people's understanding and judgment of it. It is the basis for the emergence, development and innovation of China's diplomatic theory, and also the foundation for final judgment, application and testing of the theory. Therefore, the internal and external environment since the introduction of reform and opening-up is both the starting point and destination of the theoretical system of contemporary Chinese diplomacy. Given this, the historic mission of China's diplomacy is to create a favorable

32 Wang Hongxu, "Thoughts on Diplomatic Theory with Chinese Characteristics," *Contemporary World*, No.6, 2011, p.32.

33 Qin Yaqing, "Thoughts on Building Diplomatic Theory with Chinese Characteristics," *Foreign Affairs Review*, No.1, 2008, p.9.

34 Wang Dong and Zhu Xiaofan, "Analysis of Major-Country Diplomatic Theory and Practice with Chinese Characteristics," *Global Review*, No.6, 2017, p.113.

35 Yang Jiemian, *Construction and Innovation of China's Diplomatic Theory and Strategy*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2015, pp.53-92.

external environment for the realization of the two centenary goals³⁶ and the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation.

The overall ideology and basic theory is the essence of Chinese diplomacy. The overall ideology of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics is to safeguard and advance the country's interests under the CPC's strong leadership and facilitate the building of a community with a shared future for mankind with the purpose of maintaining world peace and promoting common development. Localized Marxism, which is adapted to the Chinese context and represents the combination of fundamental Marxist principles and contemporary global and national conditions, constitutes the basic theory of China's diplomacy. Its diplomatic connotations are mainly reflected in the Deng Xiaoping Diplomatic Thought and the Xi Jinping Diplomatic Thought.

The diplomatic strategy serves to carry out a comprehensive, systematic and long-term deployment of the overall ideology and basic theory, and it includes strategic thinking, objectives, conditions, layout and approaches. Since the start of reform and opening-up, China's diplomatic strategy has basically followed this framework. On the basis of relations with major, neighboring and developing countries as well as multilateral diplomacy, the strategy is now extending its outreach to diplomacy in specific fields, global governance, the Belt and Road Initiative, a new type of international relations, and a community with a shared future for mankind, among other areas.

In terms of policy principles and working methods, China's foreign policy is characterized by a high-degree combination of principle and flexibility. The principles mainly include the independent foreign policy of peace, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and the concept of upholding justice while pursuing shared interests. However, while adhering

36 The two centenary goals are to finish building a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the time the CPC marks its centenary and to build China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious by the time the People's Republic of China celebrates its centenary.

to the principles, China will also demonstrate sufficient flexibility in light of changes in the situation. In addition, as the major approach to implementing foreign policy principles, the working methods of China's foreign relations lay particular emphasis on the dialectical relationships between the overall picture and the composing parts, the long-term trends and the current situation, the Chinese side and other parties concerned, and between key and normal issues. These correct working methods are also one important reason for the continuous progress of Chinese diplomacy in the 40 years of reform and opening-up.

Conclusion

Over the four decades of reform and opening-up, China has accumulated rich practical experience in diplomacy, which constitutes an important pillar of China's overall work, and has achieved significant results in the construction of ideological theory. At different stages of reform and opening-up, successive CPC leadership represented by Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping has adhered to the Marxist standpoint and methods, scientifically analyzed the situation at home and abroad, actively created favorable internal and external environment, and successfully responded to various challenges. They have continuously broken new ground for China's diplomacy and effectively promoted the cause of world peace and development.

At a time when the human society has entered a period of great development, great transformation and great adjustment, and socialism with Chinese characteristics has ushered in a new era, the Xi Jinping Diplomatic Thought comes into being. It is a scientific theoretical system with rich connotations, profound thinking and a complete system. It clarifies the historic mission, general objectives and a series of guidelines and principles that must be adhered to in the new era of China's work relating to foreign affairs, and profoundly reveals the essential requirements, inherent laws and directions of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in the

new era.

At present, China's diplomacy embraces unprecedented opportunities but also faces more and increasingly severe challenges. Therefore, China's diplomacy needs to improve practical and theoretical consciousness under the guidance of the Xi Jinping Diplomatic Thought, foster stronger confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics, scientifically and objectively understand national and global conditions, grasp the laws of historical development, and make good use of the strategic opportunities to effectively respond to foreseeable and unforeseeable challenges and initiate a new stage in China's diplomacy. Under a longer-term time frame and from a perspective of broader regions and issue areas, China's diplomacy will continue to strengthen practical and theoretical construction in the historic process of realizing the two centenary goals and the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. China's diplomacy will further advance reform and opening-up and achieve new victories in understanding and transforming the world.

Under this historical background, the Chinese academic community has a long way to go and shoulders heavy historic responsibilities. It should not only enhance political consciousness but also strengthen academic competence in the theoretical construction of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. Only by enhancing political consciousness can it help build and contribute to reform and opening-up and major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, guided by the Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and the Xi Jinping Diplomatic Thought. At the same time, only by strengthening its competence can the Chinese academic community realize the integration of political and academic theories, establish the international relations and diplomatic theories with Chinese characteristics, promote teaching and research of related specialties, enhance the construction of socialist think tanks, and provide more international public goods. This is how Chinese scholars are expected to contribute their professional knowledge to the world's cause of peace, development and win-win cooperation. 