THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORETICAL DISCOURSE IN CHINA: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

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by

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The International Relations Theoretical Discourse in China: A Preliminary Analysis

Ren Xiao *

What is the theoretical or intellectual basis of China's foreign policy? Are there any international relations (IR) theories in China? What roles do they play in Chinese foreign policy, and how? These are hard-to-answer and controversial questions. They involve complicated issues such as what theory is, and what role theory plays in foreign policy thinking. Naturally, Chinese and Western academic communities often have a different understanding of the question. According to the Chinese understanding, the effort “to summarize past practices, generalize regularities, and make them orderly and systematized, creates a theory. We use the theory to guide our future behavior. So is the case for an international relations theory.”1 Cautiously, I tend to argue that, even though there are not systematic theories of international relations, there is indeed rich IR theoretical discourse in China. It more or less reflects China's diplomatic thinking, and implicitly or explicitly affects its foreign policy making. During the fifty years of the People's Republic, a unique IR theoretical discourse was generated in China. This paper is a preliminary attempt to synthesize and analyze that discourse. Under five sub-topics, I will discusses Chinese discourse on war, peace, and development, the concept of contradiction, power configuration and multipolarization, the new international economic and political order, and the five principles of peaceful coexistence.

War, Peace and Development

Chinese thoughts on war and peace have greatly impacted both China's domestic agenda and foreign policy. Analysis and judgment on the issue of war and peace have never been pure academic explorations. Rather, they have been directly related to the decision making of domestic and foreign policies. In the 1960s, given the assessment that the danger of war was imminent, China decided to build “three fronts” ranging from the coast to inland areas. Part of the “three fronts” strategy involved moving considerable key industries and enterprises into the interior, a change that later became a lasting problem to adjustments in the Chinese national economy.

China's thinking on war and peace has undergone successive changes over the last thirty decades. This has been related to Chinese identification of different eras (shidai). In the past decades, a fundamental transformation occurred in China's cognition of the current epochal subject, i.e., from “war and revolution” to “peace and development,” and, in Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan words, therefore laid a theoretical foundation (ilun jichu) for China's “building a new foreign strategy in a new period.”

In the 1970s, significantly impacted by the ultra-left extremism in its domestic politics, China

I would like to thank Deborah Toy for her kind assistance and Bruce Dickson for his encouragement in the preparation of this paper. I am also grateful to participants in a talk I gave at the RAND Corporation in Washington, DC on July 14, 1999.

1 Huan Xiang, “guanyu jianli guoji guanxi xue de jige wenzi,” (Some Issues Concerning the Establishment of International Relations as a Discipline), in Shanghai International Relations Society, ed., Guoji guanxi ilun chuan, (Shanghai: Shanghai waiyu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991).


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grossly exaggerated the danger of war. The basic tone then was that a new world war was unavoidable and pending.

For instance, in January 1975, the Government Work Report read by Zhou Enlai before the National People’s Congress (NPC) claimed that, “the United States and the Soviet Union, the two superpowers, are the biggest contemporary oppressors, exploiters, and the new origins of world war. Their fierce rivalry will sooner or later lead to a world war. Thus we must remain vigilant, strengthen our defenses, and prepare to fight.” Clearly, the danger of invasion or aggression by enemies was seriously overestimated.

In 1977, against the backdrop of the formal end of the Cultural Revolution but also with the ultra-left radical ideology still around, the eleventh Party Congress was held. In his report to the Party Congress, CCP Chairman Hua Guofeng argued that while “revolutionary” factors continued to grow, factors of war apparently would too. The two superpowers, USSR and the U.S., competed everywhere and this would sooner or later lead them into conflict. Considering that imperialism and social imperialism may initiate a new world war, China would have to be highly vigilant and be completely prepared.

In February 1978, the Government Work Report submitted to the fifth National People’s Congress reiterated that “Factors of war apparently increase at the same time as revolutionary factors grow.” It further argued that “The danger of a world war increasingly and seriously threatens people in various countries. War is inevitable as long as social imperialism and imperialism exist,” and from the perspective of the entire world, a common strategic task for the people in various countries was to consolidate and expand the international united front against hegemonism and try to postpone the outbreak of a world war.

This sort of assessment persisted until approximately late 1978, when “seeking truth from facts” was stressed in the spirit of pragmatism and the CCP started to shift its focus to economic construction.

In December 1978, the CCP’s far-reaching Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in Beijing marked a major watershed which symbolized the beginning of a new historical period. The Plenum’s Communiqué no longer emphasized the inevitability of a new world war and softened its view on the issue of war. Yet it still argued that “the danger of war still seriously exists. We must strengthen national defenses and be prepared to beat the aggressors from anywhere at any time.”

Thereafter, with the CCP focused on economic construction, the Chinese leadership became more and more pragmatic. Obviously, a peaceful international environment is a must if a country wants to concentrate on economic development.

Entering the 1980s, the Chinese view on the issue of war and peace gradually shifted to the following view: the danger of war still exists, but power constraining war and power for peace was growing. In March 1985, Deng Xiaoping told his Japanese guests that, for many years, China kept stressing the danger of war, and later Chinese opinion somehow changed. “We feel that, although the danger of war still exists, the power constraining war is encouragingly developing.” If people around the world make an effort, a new world war can be avoided.

Again, in October 1985, Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang made a speech at a special session commemorating the United Nation’s 40th anniversary and said, “The era of a few great powers dominating the world has gone, and the growth of power for peace is overriding the growth of war factors. As

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5 Hua Guofeng, Tuanjie qilai, wei jianshe shehuizhuyi de xianzhaihua qiangguo er fengdou (Unite and Strive to Establish a Modernized Socialist Power), (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1978).
long as all the peace-loving countries and their people unite and strive together, world peace can be maintained, and a new world war will be avoided." One of the reasons for this judgment was the role of the Third World. "The rise of the Third World and the emergence of a multipolar power configuration in the world is an obvious restraint to a new world war." Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Chinese government gave up the notion of the existence of a "war threat" and started to focus on the existence of "hegemonism and power politics."

Given that a world war was avoidable and a long period of peace could be maintained, the notion of development or common development for nations began to break out in Chinese diplomatic discourse. Combining "peace" and "development" started in the mid-1980s. In October 1984, a leading foreign affairs expert in China, Mr. Huan Xiang, delivered a speech at an international conference in Osaka, Japan entitled "Peace, Cooperation, and Development," in which he advocated friendly cooperation and common development on the basis of peaceful coexistence. This might be the first instance where the notion of putting peace and development together appeared.7

On March 4, 1985, when meeting with a group of Japanese guests, Deng Xiaoping pointed out that there are two truly significant issues in the world, one is the issue of peace, the other is the issue of economics or development. Peace was seen as an East-West question, while development a North-South one. To sum up, he simply used four words: East, West, South, and North.8 This was a brilliant generalization. From then on, the phrase and view that "peace and development are the two great issues in the contemporary world" has continued to be used and has become standard language in official documents.

For China, peace and development are closely related, in that peace is a premise of development. They affect and condition each other. There could be no development without peace, while world peace and stability cannot be based on the economic poverty of the developing countries. So far neither of the two problems have been solved.

In China's view, NATO's war against Yugoslavia in 1999 was a great shock and setback to peace and development. In a speech delivered in Beijing on September 18, 1999, Jiang Zemin claimed that in the world today, peace and development are still the historical "trends" (chaoliu) rather than "subjects" (zhuti) as previously stated. This small change possibly reflects the fierce debate the war in Kosovo stirred up and its subtle impact. However, the basic goal of China's diplomatic work is, in Qian Qichen's words, "to create a peaceful environment for our country's modernization construction." This is China's determined policy and will remain unchanged.

The Concept of "Contradiction" (maodun)

One salient characteristic of China's IR theoretical discourse is the preference for the concept of "contradiction" (maodun) and for looking for major contradiction(s) in international relations. The intellectual origin of this preference is Mao Zedong's philosophical work On Contradiction, published in the 1930s. In this treatise, Mao argues "There exist many contradictions in the developmental process of complex matters. There must be a major one among them, and its existence and development stipulates or affects the existence and development of other contradictions.... In any process, if there exist a number of contradictions, there must be a major one which plays a leading or decisive role,

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6 Chen Qimao, "Shilun zhanhou guoji guanxi de bianhua yu zhengqu shijie chijiu heping de kenengxing" (On the Changes in Post-War International Relations and the Possibility of a Sustainable World Peace), Hong Qi (Red Flag), No. 13, 1986.
7 See the Year of International Peace China Organizing Committee ed., Weile heping de renlei de weilai (For Peace and the Human Future), (Beijing: Shiijie zhiyi chubanshe, 1986), pp. 35-42.

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On different occasions, three different words are used: wenti or issue, zhuji or theme, and keti or task. Basically they mean the same thing.
while others are in secondary and inferior positions. Thus, when studying any process in which there exist two or more contradictions that make it a complex process, an effort has to be made to find the major contradiction. All issues will be readily solved when it has been grasped."\(^{10}\) Therefore, major contradiction refers to the one that “is playing a leading or decisive role” and “stipulating or affecting the existence and development of other contradictions.”

In the early years of the People’s Republic, Zhou Enlai once remarked in a foreign affairs meeting, “What actually is the world’s major contradiction? While the confrontation between the two camps is certainly basic, what actually epitomizes it? Is it the rivalry between the U.S. and USSR at daggers drawn? No. The present contradictions largely appear to be between war and peace, democracy and anti-democracy, imperialism and the colonies, and between and among the imperialist states.” Later in the same talk he gave his answer, “The major contradiction in the world today is the issue of war or peace.”

After the Cultural Revolution, in February 1978, the Government Work Report argued that, “Presently, the world’s basic contradictions are intensifying. The rivalry between the USSR and the U.S., the two hegemons, and the contradiction between them and the rest of the people in the world is particularly acute and has become the central issue of international relations.” But, what is the difference between “basic contradiction” and “major contradiction”?

For some Chinese analysts, in the two issues (i.e. the East-West and North-South that Deng Xiaoping summarized in 1985), the East-West issue refers to the contradiction between the West bloc, led by the U.S., and the East bloc, led by the former Soviet Union, while the North-South issue refers to a North- South contradiction between the developed North and the underdeveloped South.

In the early 1990s, against the backdrop of the great changes occurring in the world arena, a leading Chinese scholar, He Fang, proposed that in the post-Cold War era, a “West-West contradiction” had become the major contradiction in international relations. The so-called “West-West contradiction” refers to the one between and among developed countries in the West. This provocative view stirred up enormous controversies and received much criticism. Opponents mostly disagreed that the so-called West-West contradiction was the major contradiction in international relations because the basic aspects in the relationship between and among Western countries were still coordination and cooperation. In 1994, a leading international relations journal organized a symposium on “The Major World Contradiction” based on the theory that “when the Cold War ended, the bipolar power configuration disappeared and the trend toward a multipolar world emerged, in which there exist a variety of complicated contradictions. Under such circumstances, the method of recognizing the major contradictions has fundamental implications for both international relations theory and the practice of diplomacy.” Mr. He Fang wrote to the symposium and proposed that it try to answer two questions: could it be possible that no major contradiction existed in international relations, even though, philosophically, there has to be one?; and, if there is a major contradiction, what is it?\(^{12}\)

The discussions centered on the following five questions:

1) Must there be any major contradiction(s) in every period of the developmental process of international relations? And, is the West-West contradiction the major contradiction in the post-Cold War world?
2) What are the basic contradictions in the world today? Is there any one that has emerged and


\(^{11}\) Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxuan (Selected Diplomatic Works of Zhou Enlai), (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1990), pp. 58-62.

\(^{12}\) “Shijie zhexiao maodun wenti yantaohui jiyao” (A Summary of the Symposium on The World Major Contradiction), Xindai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations), No.1, 1995.
become the major contradiction?

3) Does the major world contradiction include various basic contradictions or is it comprised of several basic contradictions? Is it possible that during transitional periods of international relations, several major contradictions or comparatively main contradictions might emerge?

4) Is the major contradiction the one between the hegemonism of the U.S. on one side and other countries opposing hegemonism on the other side?

5) In the post-Cold War world, is the major contradiction an economic development or economic competition question, or one between common development or non-common development?

What is the major contradiction in the post-Cold War world after all, if there is one? The question aroused various answers in China.

Opinion 1: When the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War ended, the struggle between the U.S., Europe, and Japan for global economic dominance immediately emerged as the major international contradiction affecting the world’s historical process of development. A similar view argues that the contradiction between the U.S. and other leading capitalist countries is the major contradiction. Another similar answer is that if we have to figure out a “major contradiction,” “the economic wars between and among developed countries” seems more like the major contradiction in the world today.

Opinion 2: The North-South contradiction is the major world contradiction.

Opinion 3: The major world contradiction remains a national interest contradiction.

Opinion 4: The contradiction between hegemonism and anti-hegemonism is the major world contradiction. A closely related view argues that the U.S.’ pursuit for new hegemonism and power politics clashing with many other countries’ interests is the major world contradiction.

Opinion 5: The contradiction between the wide gap between poor and rich countries, and a desire for improved economic conditions by people in the Third World has become the major contradiction. A similar view argues that the contradiction between common development and non-common development is the major global contradiction.

Opinion 6: The major contradiction in the post-Cold War world is economic competition.

Opinion 7: The situation where the development level of world productivity cannot meet the demands of the world population (i.e. the issue of development) is the major contradiction of the world today because it reflects the fundamental characteristic of the era and the objective reality of post-Cold War international relations.

Opinion 8: After the Cold War, the main feature of the global contradiction is its multiplicity and complexity. Today it is impossible to find a dominant major contradiction such as the U.S.-USSR confrontation during the Cold War that affects or even determines all the other contradictions. The world has entered into a new era, and our way of observing phenomena needs to change accordingly. People holding this view are not in favor of the method of trying every means to find a “major world contradiction.”

It is evident that the issue of the major contradiction in the post-Cold War world gave rise to considerable controversies. The key question here is what “major contradiction” really means. One author, Xia Xudong, defines “major world contradiction” as a contradiction that impacts the whole world and can affect all aspects of that world, such as the U.S.-Soviet contradiction during the Cold War years. A related question is how we should define the concept of “basic contradiction.” And, how does the major contradiction relate to basic contradictions? Another author, Chen Qimao, argues that there are three basic contradictions in the world since the collapse of

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13 Ibid.
bipolarity. First is the contradiction between Russia and the U.S. and other Western countries. Handed over from the East-West confrontation, this differs from earlier East-West contradictions. Second, the North-South contradiction. And third, contradictions between and among Western countries, which have always been one of the world’s basic contradictions. That is to say, in the eyes of some Chinese analysts, there can be several basic contradictions in the world while there is only one major contradiction. In their view, looking for the major contradiction is a matter of success or failure. Wrongly identifying the major contradiction can lead to wrong assessments of the overall strategic situation and bring about great loss.

However, using the concept of “major contradiction” in the analysis of international relations is troublesome. It is supposed that “when the major contradiction has been grasped, all questions will be readily solved.” In that way, can we say that, if the “West-West contradiction” is the major contradiction, all other contradictions can be easily solved? If the South-North contradiction is the main one, what policies should be pursued, and is this knowledge really useful for making foreign policy? If the major contradiction is between hegemonism and non-hegemonism, is it necessary to rebuild an “international anti-hegemonic united front?” Clearly, questions would immediately follow. It seems to me that looking for the world’s major contradiction not only creates many difficulties, but also could, if it is inappropriately employed, mislead. What merit arises from finding the major contradiction remains unclear.

A recently posed view is that the contradiction between the trend toward multipolarity and the unipolar orientation has emerged as the major contradiction in the present world. While this likewise becomes a disputable idea, it seems that the Kosovo crisis and the U.S.-led NATO attack on Yugoslavia provides support for this argument, which can be described as the rise of the unipolar orientation (danji qingxiang).

The Notions of “Power Configuration” and “Multipolarization” (duojihua)

In the study of international relations in China, “geju” or “power configuration” is a widely used concept. When the Chinese try to analyze international relations, “international configurations of power” (guoji geju) or “world configuration of power” (shijie geju) appear to be the most frequently employed phrases. The issue of “world configuration of power” is regarded as “an area that was researched long before, on which more books and articles have been produced, and on which more controversies have been concentrated.”

“World configuration of power” is defined as “referring to a general framework or structure shaped by the contrast, combination, and allocation of the various basic forces in the world arena. It is relatively stable, objective, and historical.” It differs from the international situation, which can change greatly during a short period of time. In contrast, international or world configuration of power, though it changes as well, enjoys relative stability. The Yalta system, which emerged as a consequence of the Second World War, is unanimously regarded as a bipolar power configuration in China. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the study of geju once again became a hot subject, and all sorts of works have appeared.

In the Chinese government’s view, when the Cold War ended, the bipolar power configuration collapsed and the transition of geju entered into a multipolar power configuration. The discourse is

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14 Chen Qima, ed., Kua shijie de shijie geju da zhuanghuan (The Great Transformation of World Power Configuration at the Turn of the Century), (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996).
15 Ibid., p. 35.
16 “Guoji wenli yanjiu” (International Studies), in Quanguo zhexue shehui kexue guihua bangongshi (the National Philosophy and Social Sciences Planning Office) ed., Zhexue shehui kexue ge xueke yanjiu zhuangkuang ye fazhan qushi (The Current Situation and Trend of Development of the Philosophy and Social Sciences Disciplines), (Beijing: Xuexi chubanshe, 1997).
clearly reflected each year in the Government Work Report, the leaders' speeches, and other documents.

In 1991, the Government Work Report claims that, "In the first year of the 1990s [i.e. 1990], the international landscape changed dramatically—the old world configurations of power that had lasted for over forty years broke down, and a new power configuration has not yet come into being. The whole world is entering into a transitional period from the old to a new configuration of power. A trend toward multipolarity is emerging in the world." The next year, further violent changes occurred in the international arena which shocked the world. Topmost among them were the Gulf War, the ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The 1992 Government Work Report takes the previous year's phrase and claims that, "While the old world configurations of power have already ended, a new configuration of power has not yet come into being, but is heading in the direction of multipolarization. All kinds of forces in the world are fragmenting or realigning, and the old and new contradictions have become mixed. The world is by no means peaceful."  

Yet the question remains: must there be a transitional period from the old to a new world configuration of power? Is not the current one already a new power configuration? What symbolizes the completion of a transition to a new power configuration? Some people were unsatisfied and impatient with the idea of transition and claimed that people who raised these questions could not always say the world was in a transitional period.

Responding to the questioning, an answer was provided claiming that for the current shift to a new world power configuration, there not only would be, but there is destined to be a transitional period, because the global change of geju this time differed from the previous ones which emerged after the two World Wars.

First, the change was not taking place as a consequence of a world war. Both the new world power configurations, which emerged after the end of the First and Second World Wars, the Versailles System and the Yalta System respectively, were created by the victorious powers through closed-door bargaining or by initiating new treaties which were imposed on the defeated powers, and thus led to transformations of political maps as well as changes in the international status of the concerned powers. The process both times was comparatively short and clear-cut. By contrast, the current transition is quite different, since it isn't the result of a major war. This fact determines that the shift to a new power configuration would have to be a gradual and evolutionary process, a sloppy, tortuous, and capricious process.

Second, the incremental nature of the shift, to some extent, set another feature of the transitional period, i.e., the uncertain nature of development.

Third, different geopolitical situations made it impossible for changes in various areas to take place at the same speed. Europe showed a typical bipolar structure while the Asia-Pacific region was fairly pluralistic militarily, politically, as well as economically, except during a limited period of time. Therefore, the processes and ways of power configuration shifts in the two regions were not the same. This can be seen in the developments of the two regions.

Fourth, sudden changes or events such as the Gulf Crisis/Gulf War and their disturbance and impact have to be taken into consideration.

Based on the above analysis, it was concluded that the transition to a new geju would be a relatively long period throughout all of the 1990s and well.
into the 21st century.\textsuperscript{20}

In September 1992, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen delivered a speech at the UN General Assembly which elaborated upon the old configuration of power. He said, “The international community gradually has broken away from the old power configuration, which was characterized by confrontation between the two military blocs. Henceforth the world is entering into a new historical stage of development heading toward multipolarity.”\textsuperscript{21} In other words, along with the end of bipolarity, “the world is moving into a transitional period in the direction of multipolarity.”\textsuperscript{22}

In China’s international studies community, there exist a number of views on whether the post-Cold War world configuration of power is heading in the direction of a more balanced great power relationship or by unilateralization dominated by the United States or the West. The mainstream argument is that, following the fall of the Soviet bloc and the relative decline of the United States, bipolarity is being replaced by a new situation of multipolarization. Under the new circumstances, Western Europe and Japan each keeps its status as a separate pole; China is emerging; and Russia is slowly recovering. These countries are emerging as the new constraining forces or “poles,” although, in contrast with the world’s only superpower today, the United States, they still remain “weak poles.” A different view argues that the concept of “pole” differs from the notion of “great power.” The so-called “pole” has to be a genuinely omni-bearing hegemon or leading nation in the world, its comprehensive power has to be far greater than the second-class powers in a certain era. This sort of “pole” usually has its own ideology, which is distinctive from other nations, and enjoys a clear sphere of influence. It possesses an obvious edge in politics, economics, military, and science and technology, and exerts a huge influence or dominance (including the so-called “soft power”) upon international relations. Thus, in history, only the Roman Empire, the British Empire, the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and the United States today could meet this criteria. The argument also proposes that the situation today could be called at most “one superpower, multi great powers” or a pluralistic “one superpower, four great powers” configuration of power. Multipolarization remains a goal or a process. In spite of their differences, most Chinese scholars endorse the idea that an adequate and correct analysis of the power “poles” is an important basis for formulating a nation’s foreign strategy, particularly strategies dealing with the major great powers.\textsuperscript{23}

In contrast, official Chinese documents show a certain consistency, arguing that “The world is heading in the direction of multipolarization.” (The 1993 Government Work Report) “The tendency toward a multipolar world configuration of power is clearly gaining momentum.” (1994 Government Work Report) “Fundamental and profound changes are occurring in the international situation... The trend of multipolarization is increasingly obvious.” (1998 Government Work Report). A note should be made that the 15th CCP Party Congress in 1997 proposed a new and somewhat more concrete wording. It proclaimed that “The trend toward multipolarization unleashed new developments both globally and regionally, and in both politics and economics,” indicating that multipolarization is not only found at the global and regional levels, but also in different areas such as politics and economics.

In August 1998, the Foreign Ministry held its ninth

\textsuperscript{20} Du Gong, \textit{Dui zhuanhuan zhong ji shijie de jidian kanfa} (Some Thoughts on the Changing World Configuration of Power), \textit{Guojiti wenti yanjiu} (International Studies), No.4, 1991.

\textsuperscript{21} “State Councillor and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen’s speech before the 47th UN General Assembly,” \textit{Remin Ribao} (People’s Daily), September 25, 1992.

\textsuperscript{22} “Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen’s speech before the 48th UN General Assembly,” \textit{Remin Ribao}, September 30, 1993.

\textsuperscript{23} See Wang Yizhou, “Dangqian woguo guoji zhengzhi yanjiu de jide zhengminjian” (Some Contentious Points in the Current Study of International Politics in China), \textit{Tianjin shehui kexue} (Tianjin Social Sciences), No.1, 1998.
ambassadorial meeting in Beijing. According to the speech given by Jiang Zemin during the meeting, the world configuration of power is heading in the direction of multipolarization and is occurring under the conditions of the end of the Cold War, an easing-up of the international situation, and the world’s peaceful forces increasingly growing. It reflects profound changes in international relations and epochal progress. Further development of the multipolarization trend at various levels, as well as in different fields, helps to weaken and constrain hegemonism and power politics, helps establish a new, just and reasonable international political and economic order, and therefore helps to take a peaceful, stable, and prosperous world into the new century. The eventual formation of a new world configuration of power will most likely necessitate a fairly long process of evolution. It is apparent that, accordingly, one major goal of Chinese foreign policy is to strive to help promote the multipolarization of the world. The prospect of the continuing development of multipolarization is that a balance of power emerges among several power centers of the world and mutual checks and balances take shape. No other theoretical reasoning has greater direct impact upon actual foreign policy than this.

New International Political and Economic Order

To change an unjust, unreasonable international economic order, and establish a new, just, and reasonable international economic order has been China’s proposition for over two decades. In 1974, when Deng Xiaoping spoke before the United Nations as head of the Chinese delegation, the proposal for establishing a new international economic order was made.

In 1988, when he met with the then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Deng Xiaoping further elaborated: “There are two things in the world that we must try to do at the same time, one is to establish a new international political order, the other is to establish a new international economic order… As for the new international political order, I think the five principles of peaceful coexistence, jointly advocated by China and India, are the most enduring principles.” From then on, China’s foreign policy proposition of striving to establish new international political and economic orders has appeared and been further elaborated upon in leaders’ speeches and various official documents, and has become a new component of the foreign policy discourse.

In March 1989, the Government Work Report stated that a new international political order should be set up on the basis of the five principles of peaceful coexistence. In this new order, nations are all equal regardless of size or strength. All respect each other, no country imposes its will upon others, and no country seeks hegemony. A nation’s internal affairs are handled by that country alone and the world’s common affairs are dealt with jointly by all countries through consultation. Nations with different social systems, ideologies, and different development levels coexist in a friendly atmosphere. All international disputes are resolved through peaceful negotiations rather than by resorting to force or threatening by force.

The following year, the Government Work Report stated that the drastically changing international situation further put the issue of establishing a new international political order to the forefront of the whole world.

To date, the most systematic elaboration of a new international order in China’s official documents appeared in the 1991 Government Work Report. “At the turn of a transition from the old to a new world...”

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27 Yang Chengxu, Jianchi duli zizhu de keping waijiao zhengce (Upholding Independent and Peace-oriented Foreign Policy), (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1998), p. 42. Yang was China’s former ambassador to Austria and is president of the China Institute of International Studies.
28 Ibid., p. 993.
configuration of power, people become more and more concerned with the peace and development of the future world, and, in particular, with the issue of a new world order. ... we propose to establish a new international order based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence. This new order includes new political and economic orders. The two are closely related and mutually complimentary. The essence of the new international order should be that all nations are independent and equal members of the international community, regardless of whether they are large or small, strong or weak, rich or poor. This new order completely differs from the old order which was based on hegemonism and power politics of a few great powers.\textsuperscript{29}

The report claims that the content of the new international order should include the following four elements: 1) Each nation enjoys the right to independently choose its own social, political, and economic systems and path of development in accordance with its national conditions. No nation, especially great powers, should intervene in other nations' internal affairs, or attempt to impose its own values, ideology, or pattern of development on other countries. 2) Nations mutually respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. No country can invade or annex the territory of another country under any circumstance. International disputes should be equitably settled through peaceful negotiations. Nations should oppose resorting to force or threatening by force, and oppose settling international disputes by means of war. 3) In international relations there should be no room for the big to pressure the small, the strong to bully the weak, or the rich to take advantage of the poor. International affairs should be handled by all the nations in the world through equal participation and consultation, and should not be monopolized by one or a few great powers. No nation should seek hegemony or push power politics. 4) Reform the old international economic relationship and replace it with a new, equitable and reasonable, equal and mutually

beneficial, exchange-of-equal-value international economic order.\textsuperscript{30}

For China, the establishment of a new international order was greatly challenged by the Kosovo War. A regional military organization, in the name of "humanism and human rights" bypassed the United Nations by undertaking large-scale military action against a sovereign state. It seriously undermined the authority of the UN Security Council, and created an abominable precedent in international relations. To establish a new, just international order, the UN's role is essential and the UN Charter's aims and principles are not outdated. Any way of placing the will of an individual state or state group above the Security Council is very dangerous.\textsuperscript{31} In the meantime, Tang Jiaxuan, as the first Chinese Foreign Minister attending the G7 meeting in September 1999, reminded all that the developed countries are using their advantages to actively push and dominate the formulation of new "rules of the game" in areas of trade, investment, environment and so forth. Whether or not developing countries can take advantage of the new developments while avoiding the disadvantages, maintain economic security, and achieve development, is of vital importance to the status of developing countries in the world economy in the next century.

**The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence**

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence refer to: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-intervention into internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

The principles were initially proposed in the 1950s, and were jointly advocated by China and India. From December 31, 1953 to April 29, 1954, Chinese and Indian delegations held negotiations in Beijing regarding the China-India relationship in China's Tibetan locality. At the outset of the negotiations,

\textsuperscript{29} Shisanda yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian (Anthology of Important Documents Since the 13th Party Congress), pp. 1352-1354.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan's speech before the 54th UN General Assembly, September 22, 1999.
Premier Zhou Enlai met with the Indian delegation and proposed the five principles for the first time. He coined or put together the phrases mutually respect territorial sovereignty, non-aggression, non-intervention into internal affairs (pindeng huihui), and peaceful coexistence. Later they were written down in the preface of the “Agreement on Trade and Communications between China’s Tibetan Locality and India.”

In late May 1954, Zhou Enlai visited India and Burma. In the Chinese-Indian joint statement, the two countries reiterated the principles proposed in April as a guideline for the bilateral relationship. They were: 1) Mutually respect territorial sovereignty; 2) Mutual non-aggression; 3) Mutual non-intervention into internal affairs; 4) Mutual benefit (pindeng huihui); and 5) Peaceful coexistence. Here the phrase of the fourth principle was slightly changed from “pindeng huihui” to “pindeng huihui” and afterwards remained unchanged. Later, the Chinese-Burmese joint statement repeated the five principles, and the two prime ministers proclaimed that the principles should guide their bilateral relationship and should be the norm of international relations.

During the Bandung Conference in 1955, Zhou Enlai made a couple of speeches in which he changed the phrase of the first principle from “mutually respect territorial sovereignty” to “mutually respect sovereignty and territorial integrity.” The phrase was eventually adjusted, and from then on, the five principles became an essential component of Chinese foreign policy discourse.

In China’s opinion, the five principles are an epochal product. After the Second World War, newly independent countries eagerly needed to establish new equality-based international relations, and they yearned for the development of their national economies in a peaceful international environment. To consolidate national independence, defend state sovereignty, and to seek just, equal international relations norms were seen as key expectations of the various newly independent countries. Against this backdrop, the five principles of peaceful coexistence were widely endorsed in the international community. The ten principles adopted by the 1955 Bandung Conference concretely embodied the spirit of the five principles of peaceful coexistence. Both the declaration on the principle of international law for nations to establish friendly relationships and cooperation, in accordance with the UN Charter passed by the 25th United Nations General Assembly in 1970, and “The Declaration Regarding the Establishment of a New International Economic Order” by the sixth UN Special General Assembly in 1974 confirmed the five principles. Furthermore, documents of many international organizations and international conferences quoted the five principles. As a matter of fact, the five principles of peaceful coexistence have become a significant part of international relations norms. They have the following characteristics:

- The five principles transcend ideology and social systems. All nations, no matter what social and political systems they adopt or what

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ideologies they choose, can coexist peacefully in the spirit of the five principles.

- The five principles advocate that all nations should be equally constrained in behavior in their relationships. There are four “mutuals” in the five principles, indicating that nations should coexist peacefully on a politically equal and economically mutually beneficial basis.

- The five principles are consistent with the spirit of the UN Charter, and they are practically feasible and morally justifiable.

- For many years, the five principles of peaceful coexistence have appeared in almost every Government Work Report and have been repeatedly stressed, particularly in the 1990s.

1990: “The Chinese Government holds that the reasonable basis of the establishment of a new international political order is the five principles of peaceful coexistence, which have already been widely endorsed in the international community. International practices have proven over and over again that as long as the five principles are observed, all nations can establish and develop normal and friendly relationships, no matter how greatly their national conditions differ; and international disputes, no matter how complicated, will find a reasonable solution."

1991: “The Chinese government maintains that the five principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-intervention in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence sum up the most fundamental norms of international relations, and are consistent with the aims and principles of the UN Charter, as well as reflect the essential characteristics of a new type of international relations.”

1998: “The Chinese government consistently espouses that relationships among nations should be based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence, and various disputes should be solved through equal consultations. Resorting to force or threatening by force have to be opposed.”

In China’s view, a stable, secure, and prosperous world requires the formation of fundamental principles to be commonly observed in relations among nations and in international political and economic life, to effectively guide and set the activities of the international community. The five principles of peaceful coexistence generalize the most fundamental norms of international relations, accord with the aims and principles of the UN Charter, reflect the essence of normal relationships among nations, and can serve countries with different social systems and different levels of economic development. Among the five principles, non-intervention in internal affairs is the core of the principles and new international order. Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, and peaceful coexistence among nations are the basis of the five principles, and equality and mutual benefit embodies the handling of economic relations.35

China holds that, in over forty years, the five principles of peaceful coexistence have withstood the tests of numerous international changes and have remained vital. History has proven that the five principles are universally applicable norms of international relations. If countries with different ideologies and social systems and different levels of economic development observe these principles, they will continually establish relationships based upon mutual trust and friendly cooperation. If a country violates the five principles, even if it shares the same ideology and social system as another, confrontation and even armed conflict could occur. Thus, the five principles are the essential basis for countries to establish and develop relationships.

**Conclusion**

The above words are a preliminary discussion about China’s distinctive international relations discourse. Chinese viewpoints have changed over the years — sometimes because the leadership changed, sometimes due to a change in the international environment, and sometimes because the leaders’

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35 Ibid.
thinking about the international environment changed even though the leaders and the environment did not change much. Some changes were fundamental such as the change in China’s identification of current era from “war and revolution” to “peace and development.” The latter’s role in Chinese foreign policy making can never be overestimated. However, in the reform and opening years, continuation is clearly the major aspect of China’s foreign policy thinking. Over the past two decades, China has gradually adopted its own independent and peace-oriented foreign policy.

From China’s perspective, independence means that China does not simply follow others. Rather, it has its own views of the world and its own principles about international and regional disputes, and it makes objective and fair-minded judgments according to the rights and wrongs of the matter itself. Peace-oriented diplomacy means any diplomatic action has to be in favor of world peace, since development can only be achieved in a peaceful environment. And a crucial part of Chinese foreign relations is its good neighbor policy, which seeks to actively develop relations with neighboring countries. In addition, a core foreign policy is that China neither attaches itself to any great power or power group, nor yields to any great power’s pressure, and does not ally with any great power. This conclusion was reached after China summed up its experience over the past decades, and has become a long-term policy. Thus, IR theoretical discourse in China is inseparable from this “independent and peace-oriented foreign policy.” In other words, the theories are a logical result of China’s carrying out an independent foreign policy. Along with the rise of China’s international status, the possibility for China’s ideas to be accepted by others is also growing. For instance, “multipolarization” which China espouses and encourages, has been written down in the Sino-Russian Joint Communiqué on World Multipolarization and the Establishment of a New International Order in April 1997, and later in the Sino-French Joint Communiqué in May 1997. The latter states that “the two sides decide to closely cooperate further and enhance the world multipolarization process, ... [and] oppose any attempt to dominate in international affairs in order to achieve a more prosperous, stable, secure, and balanced world.” China’s rich historical and cultural tradition, plus its varied foreign policy practice, breeds its own diplomatic thoughts and theoretical discourse. In addition to this rough preliminary analysis, substantial work remains to be done in the future.

36 I thank Bruce Dickson for this point.
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