

National Direction of China in the Contemporary and Future World Politics: An Advocacy for "Diplomatic Philosophy" and Grand Strategy

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A "Diplomatic Philosophy" for the 21st Century China

As a very big nation-state that should have long-term domestic and international aspirations and at the same time faces various structural difficulties, China ought to have some reasonable and advantageous long-term "diplomatic philosophy", which can constitute the perennial national central tradition for her external affairs on the one hand, and easily lead to a optimal grand strategy for a whole historical age on the other.

The prime assumptions for suggesting this philosophy and strategy include, among other most important things, awareness and understanding of the basic power structure and the fundamental tide currents of the world in the early decades of the 21st century. As to the former, the basic power structure of the world, what is most critical will be the continued near comprehensive preponderance of the United States. There will be for a very long time no possibility to form and maintain an international "coalition" consolidated enough, strong enough, effective enough, and permanent enough to balance against this preponderance. As to the later, the fundamental tide currents of the world, what we can identify with certainty are that of globalization, domestic democratization, changes in international norms toward more justice, and multi-polarization. The relationship between these two categories of power structure and direction of progress (if you could agree that the slow trend of multi-polarization is a progress in contemporary world politics, rather than something as "back to the future" as Professor John Mearsheimer of Chicago University once said) is primarily connection (in a substantial degree a causal connection) between the preponderance of the United States and the first three of the above tide currents.

Taking into account of all of that, the essential disposition of China in world politics of the 21st century should be a combination of being on guard and struggle on the one hand, and accommodation and conformance on the other. Moreover, the later disposition of accommodation and conformance should be in general more than the former. China should be a "normal" state in world politics in the meaning that she pursuits most of the traditional national self-interests as most other states do, while conform to the common interests defined by the consensus or mainstream opinion in the society of states. At the same time, China should also be an innovative state and this means three major innovations in the modern world history: (1) to achieve and permanently maintain and *satisfy with* basic national security in a highly disadvantageous geopolitical environment and in numerous security dilemmas; (2) to achieve and maintain elemental affluence of the Chinese people by peaceful, sustainable, and largely equitable growth in a vast country which has more than billion population and various domestic structural difficulties; (3) as a leading actor, to contribute to the largely peaceful transformation of the centuries-long international society dominated or controlled by the Western great powers into a new one in which the Western great powers, especially the United States, coexisted and accommodated with the newly arisen non-Western great powers, and thereby promote historical great progresses of the global international system and its norms in the direction of equity and reasonableness. To speak most briefly, these fundamental national objective, essential disposition in world politics, and the double normative self-identities form together the diplomatic philosophy the rising China should have in the early decades of the new century.

The Choice of Secular Grand Strategy

Strategy is the consciously designed fundamental way of doing things, particularly in terms of relationship, and the secular grand strategy of a state refers to such way of pursuing basic national objectives for a whole historical era. Based on the above philosophy, what kind of secular grand strategy China ought to adopt or make in the next 30 or 50 or more years?

It could be said that there are 5 great categories of state grand strategy in theory and practice: Strategy of Hegemony; of Self-help; of “Hiding”; of “Bandwagoning”; and of “Transcending”. What are available for China to choose are the last four categories. **The strategy of self-help** starts from the assumption of international anarchy in the Hobbesian sense. It depends on building up one’s own strength, especially the military and economic ones, and on cooperating with other relatively weak states threatened by the similar or the same threats, to secure safety, independence and mightiness, and to create or maintaining an international balance of power which buttresses the weak and restrains the strong. **The strategy of “hiding”**, as Paul W. Schroeder, a distinguished scholar on the European international history calls it, means doing one’s best to avoid struggles and conflicts in the outside world, keeping a profile as low as possible in the major international political rivalries and competitions, or adopting a posture of fence-sitting or trying to shift responsibility to others (“buckpassing”, in the words of Barry Posen), with its extreme form as simply ignoring the external threats or denying their existence. **The strategy of “bandwagoning”** is one that starting from the assumption of hierarchical structure of power distribution in the international system, trying to cooperate with the first-rate great power and the international regimes sponsored by it, and thereby obtaining its (or their) support, protection, and other possible benefits, though at the cost of one’s own freedom of action reduced by some degree. **The strategy of “transcending”**, in the words of the inventors of the term, the same Professor Paul Schroeder, is defined as “an effort to surmount international anarchy and go beyond the normal limits of conflictual politics by striving for an international consensus or formal agreement on norms, rules and procedures to solve the problem, end the threat and prevent its recurrence.” As to security problem particularly, “transcending” means trying to create, foster and develop regional and sub-regional security regimes, for the purpose of gradually producing a kind of international atmosphere and framework of institutions, in which a relatively stable and predictable peaceful mutual expectations can burgeon, grow, and come into a full being. Whether the historical experience of the “Concert of Europe” in the 19th century, or the post-World War II international realities in the North Atlantic area, Western and Central Europe, and those in recent years in Central and South Americas, part of Africa, and Southeast Asia, or the well-developed theories of international regimes and constructivism, all support the truthfulness of “transcending”.

For the rising China in the early decades of the 21st century, while the strategy of self-help should serve as a strategic basis, it will not only be unable to mitigate security dilemmas, but aggravate them. Moreover, as pointed out before, balancing, one of the key components of self-help, can not be effective enough at the grand strategic level for a long time. As to the strategy of “hiding”, it will be obviously unfeasible for a China locating in the center of the Asian-Pacific geopolitical structure and as a very big country open up to the outside world, though in some time and for some issues she will need to adopt a course of “hiding” as something like tactics.

China should take “bandwagoning” and “transcending” as her secular grand strategy. What is the “bandwagoning” of China in the early decades of the 21st century? At the bottom, “bandwagoning” in this case means riding on the above-mentioned fundamental tide currents of the contemporary world, and that in turn means first of all insisting and develop China’s reform and opening-up, entering into international regimes and conforming international norms as broadly as possible, and learning advanced technology, advanced administrative methods, advanced political approaches, advanced ways of thinking, and advanced pattern of behavior of international conduct. China has to construct a general relationship of accommodation with the United States and the Western community of nations under U.S. leadership, developing with them as many common interests, common values, common rules and common institutions as possible, and has to, obtain and cultivate various chances embedded in the basic international and transnational environments China lives in through necessary and affordable compromise and concessions.

Because of the problem of security dilemma, China’s pursuing for national security in the 21st century must include the strategy of “transcending”. This demands that China should participate or strive to participate all those international security regimes that could be expected produce more benefits than costs to China. In particular, China should contribute as much as

possible to the creating and fostering regional and sub-regional security institutions in East Asia. Only depending on international security regimes that can mitigate substantially or even in the end remove the security dilemmas, can a rising and increasingly stronger China become a safer China.

China, by the essential disposition in world politics and the secular grand strategy elaborated above, could achieve her fundamental national objectives of basic security, elementary affluence of her people, and a possible status as a world power that would coexist with and accommodate the United States, and would also have a working strategic relationship with Japan, the U.S.' major ally in East Asia. Because, first of all, national social learning by more than one generation of the nations concerned, the Chinese, Americans, and Japanese, will be the most powerful force in the long run in the contemporary age in which the major war between great powers are becoming increasingly unimaginable, thereby making peaceful coexistence and ultimate mutual accommodation become increasingly an inevitability.

The Present Situation and Problems

In a significant sense, almost all depends on the present and the near future. The 16th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party represents a major step in strategic clarification and improvement, resulting from a more than decade long process of almost anguish learning and strategic balancing, with several remarkable zigzags. It can be said that both symbolically and substantially a kind of "two-headed" (therefore balanced) grand strategy emerged from that Congress, which on the one hand characterized by the more determined, more consistent, and more patient pursuance of the moderate, prudently optimistic, and pragmatic principle of thinking and practice in China's fundamental policy toward the United States, together with a much stronger commitment to the all-round "good neighbor" policy and the positive involvement in economic globalization and various multilateral international regimes, and on the other featured almost equally by a firm determination to accelerate China's military modernization and to prevent or stop by almost any means if necessary the independence of Taiwan. With this, the ordering of strategic priorities and the conduct of strategic balancing has become much better in comparison with the situation most of the past fifteen years, and it can be said that the grand strategy option of "bandwagoning" and "transcending", based in a un-excessive "self-help", has been much clearer than ever before in being adopted and implemented.

However, there are remaining problems, or at least potential strategic dilemmas in China's present foreign policy and strategic approaches, first of all in the order of importance those in dealing with the United States, and a large part of them existing within the above-mentioned "two-headed" strategy as well as in the requirement of building and consolidating sufficient domestic consensus needed to support it. Moreover, there is remarkable "self-contradiction" in the sense of very strong negative views on the U.S. general national security strategy *versus* quite positive or optimistic views of U.S. China policy. Also needed to be taken into account, apart from those middle term and long range structural tensions, are several major and new complicating factors potentially damaging and tending to increase (even greatly) China's difficulties in policy-making, including the North Korea nuclear crisis, the growth of the forces for independence within Taiwan, and increasing monetary/ trade frictions between China and the U.S. Almost dramatically complicated problem of the Chinese-Japanese relations, together with insufficiency of grand strategic sense as well as political determination in this respect, is also significant. Moreover, there are domestic factors of complication: the problem a degree of "two-headed leadership", especially in defense and major foreign policy areas; government intentions on foreign policy *versus* somewhat disadvantageous public opinion; domestic economic needs (including energy supply and trade expansion) for an assertive foreign policy *versus* international restraints and a generally conservative foreign policy tradition. In a sense, grand strategy and its operations will be never an easy and cheap affair, while at the same time one could expect its further optimization step by step in an evolutionary process always based on social learning and strategic balancing.