China's efforts as a responsible power

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The Chinese economy has been steadily developing in recent years. If China can maintain the trend of its economic development, by the middle of the 21st century China will be among the great powers of the world. Whether China can become a responsible great power or not will depend on both internal and external factors. Those factors can also be sorted into subjective ones and objective ones, among which security mechanisms will play important role.

Criteria of a responsible power

There are different explanations about the meaning of responsible power. In my opinion, a responsible power should:

- Play its role in international society not only according to its national interests, but also in order to benefit regional and world peace, development, stability and prosperity;
- Take its international obligations seriously; and
- Participate in the formulation of international rules.

There has been some dispute in China about what kind of responsible power China should become. Some Chinese scholars hold that China should participate not only in existing international economic mechanisms, but also in existing international political mechanisms led by the United States, because it will be beneficial for China to seek a peaceful environment and in this way, be able to gradually change the existing unreasonable rules of mechanisms in the light of the interests of all countries. Proponents of this theory support the improvement of China-US relations. However, other Chinese scholars have argued that the United States would prevent China from rising, and hinder China from playing an important role in international mechanisms, and even intends to weaken China. Such disputes have some impact on China's foreign policy.

Internal factors affecting China's international role

China's national development strategy

Since the early 1980s, China has been focusing its efforts on internal economic development in order to improve the living standards and educational levels of its people. China will continue to move forward in this way for a long time. The long-term purpose of China's national development strategy is to make China become a mid-level developed country, which will be strong, democratic and civilized, by 2050.¹ To achieve the objective, China will continue to pursue a policy of reform and opening up, and needs a long-term peaceful international environment, especially stable surroundings. This means that China does not want to do anything which may seriously disturb the current international economic and political mechanisms except when its critical national interests are threatened. Even if China can achieve its objectives, it will continue to focus its attention on internal issues because of domestic population and economic issues. At the same time, the more prosperous China is, the more co-operative it will be with other countries, because under the circumstances, China will be influenced more easily from the outside world.

The objective of China's foreign policy

China has been pursuing its independent foreign policy of peace since the mid 1980s. The objective of this policy is to strive for a peaceful international environment which will be beneficial to China's long-term economic and social development. Thus there are two outstanding characteristics in China's current foreign policy: peace and independence. Peace indicates that China formulates its foreign policy from the viewpoint of whether it is beneficial to international and regional peace and stability, instead of the viewpoint of gaining military superiority. Independence indicates that China formulates its foreign policy according to its national interests and the common interests of peoples of all the countries in the world. To continue to develop its friendly cooperation based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence with all the countries in the world, including the United States, is the core of China's independent foreign policy.

China's defence policy and military strategy

China's defence policy is purely defensive in nature. The small nuclear arsenal of China is only for the purpose of self-defence. China has unilaterally committed itself to responsibilities not yet taken by other nuclear-weapon states, including the declaration of a no-first-use policy, the commitment not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states and in nuclear weapon-free zones. China has not retained any military presence beyond its own territory. China's military strategy is 'Active Defence', which means that Chinese armed forces assume a self-defensive posture and will not provoke; but if war is ever imposed on China, its military forces will certainly retaliate. China reduced its armed forces personnel by half a million from 1996 to 2000 following the reduction of one million military men during the 1980s. China's military expenditure has been kept at a very low level

for more than a decade. In the past few years, China's military expenditure has been about 1.1–1.2 per cent of China's GDP. Furthermore, China has declared that it will never become a superpower. So China will never pose any military threat to other countries.

Chinese traditional culture and history

China is a country with 5,000 years of civilization and a peace-loving tradition. Ancient Chinese thinkers advocated 'associating with benevolent gentlemen and befriending good neighbors,' which shows that throughout history the Chinese people have longed for peace in the world and for relations of friendship with the people of other countries. Since ancient times, Chinese people have emphasized defence rather than offence. When the Chinese created the earliest written script, our ancestors used two pictographs to form the character 'force' (*wu*). One pictograph was 'stop' (*zhi*), the other was 'spear' (*ge*). The underlying logic was that wars should be abandoned as an instrument and the use of force could be justified to stop violence. Especially since the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, China has focused on maintaining its existing territory rather than expanding. In the early 15th century, even earlier than the period of 'geographic discovery' in the west, a great Chinese explorer and sailor named Zhen He led the largest fleet in the world on seven voyages westward. These voyages, reaching as far as the eastern African coast and the entrance to the Red Sea, took Zhen He to more than 30 countries and regions. Unlike later western explorers who conquered the lands they discovered, this fleet did not subdue the newly discovered lands by force. This was not a voyage to plunder the local populace for treasure, nor was it one to establish overseas colonies. As decreed by the Chinese Emperor, Zhen He's task was to convey friendship and goodwill and to promote economic and cultural exchanges between China and other Asian as well as African nations.

The changes of China's security concepts

Since the end of the Cold War, China has changed its security concepts greatly according to the new international situation and the interests of the Chinese people as well as the need of the people in the world to seek peace and development. China thinks that to obtain lasting peace, it is imperative to abandon the Cold War mentality, cultivate a new concept of security and seek a new way to safeguard peace.²

There has been a change from an emphasis on military security to comprehensive security. During the Cold War, faced with the military threat of one or two superpowers, China had to focus its attention on military security. After the end of the Cold War, China thinks that, although geopolitical, military security and ideological factors still play a role that cannot be ignored, the role of economic factors is becoming more prominent.³ So China is now stressing coordination with all countries to deal with challenges together.

The concept of 'security is mutual'. During the Cold War, the concept of the 'zero-sum game' had played the most important role in international politics. Now,

China has accepted the concept that 'security is mutual'. So China opposes any country building its own absolute security upon the insecurity of others and will not do so itself in the future.

The concept of cooperation. Since the end of the Cold War, China has stressed dialogue and cooperation, and sought the settlement of divergences and disputes among nations through peaceful means. At the same time, China has gradually accepted the concept of multilateral security dialogues and cooperation. It has actively participated in regional and sub-regional security dialogues and cooperation, and has played an important role in them, including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Four Party Talks on the Korean Peninsula. China has also attended many 'Track Two' or 'Track One and Half' regional or sub-regional security dialogues, including the Cooperative and Security Council in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) and the Northeast Asian Cooperation and Dialogue (NEACD).

The concept of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs). During recent years, China has been in the lead in the establishment of confidence-building measures in the Asia-Pacific region. China has signed agreements on both border confidence-building measures and border arms reduction with Russia and some Central Asian countries. It also signed agreements on a 'hot line' with both the United States and Japan. China and the United States have signed the Agreement on Establishing a Consultation Mechanism to Strengthen Military Maritime Safety and have decided not to target each other with their respective strategic nuclear weapons. China also signed agreements on CBMs in the military field along the Line of Actual Control in its border areas with India.

The concept of transparency. In traditional Chinese military thinking, there was nothing about transparency. However, since the end of the Cold War, China has gradually accepted the concept of transparency. When China feels more confident about its relationship with other countries and about its international security environment, it can adopt a more active and positive attitude towards arms control and transparency issues. In fact, it has made some progress in improving its military transparency. China has published white papers on both arms control and defence. Chinese and US naval warships have exchanged port calls. And US Defense Secretary William Cohen visited the command and control centre of the PLA Air Force in January 1998. Some US military officers have also visited a Chinese nuclear submarine. Chinese and American troops even conducted the first joint exercise on rescue in late 2000.

The development of democracy and rule by law

Since the early 1980s, with the development of economic reform and opening to the outside world, China has also made big progress in civil liberties, democracy and rule by law. To establish democracy and rule by law in China has been an important part of China's Constitution.⁴ In most villages in China, farmers have had the rights to elect leaders of villages. In coastal areas, tests have been

conducted in some selected towns where people have the rights to elect the leaders of towns. At the same time, the National People's Congress and local people's congresses at different levels in China have gone far beyond being rubber-stamps and have been playing important roles in making laws and supervising officials. Although China still has much to do in improving democracy and rule by law, it will continue to move in that direction step by step. As the result, China will become a country of democracy and rule by law with Chinese characteristics.

China's integration into international mechanisms

During recent years, China has been making big progress in integrating itself into international economic and political mechanisms. Since the mid 1980s, China has been integrating its economy into the world economy. Its foreign trade is about 41 per cent of its annual GDP. China has actively participated in APEC proceedings and reduced the rate of its average tariffs to 15 per cent according to its commitments.⁵ And China made great efforts—now successful—to enter the World Trade Organization (WTO). At the same time, China has made progress integrating itself into international arms control and nonproliferation mechanisms. It has participated in a series of nonproliferation regimes, including the Treaty on Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), has signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and is committed to observing the guidelines and parameters of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). In accord with these international commitments, the Chinese government has been taking a series of measures to control the exports of its nuclear, chemical, and biological technology and materials as well as missiles. At the same time, China has had cooperation on the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction with other countries. Furthermore, since it first possessed nuclear weapons, China has committed itself to realizing the final objective of a comprehensive ban and thorough destruction of all nuclear weapons in the world. That has formed the basis for China to participate in the international nuclear disarmament process in the future. The more closely China has integrated itself into international economic and political mechanisms, the more willingly it would like to play a responsible role in the international community.

External factors affecting China's international role

The development of economic interdependence among states

During recent years, economic globalization has become a strong trend. As one of the results, economic interdependence among states, especially among major powers, has progressed. Under the circumstances, more and more countries are willing to resolve their disputes through peaceful means. China has actively supported this positive trend and is making efforts to maintain peace and establish friendship with its neighbours.

The trends of peace and development

Since the 1980s, especially after the end of the Cold War, peace and development have become the major subjects of the world situation. China has regarded the two trends as the basis of its foreign policy. That means that China will pursue its foreign policy according to the two trends and will do its best to push them forward.

The positive attitudes of other countries

A growing number of countries have recognized that a policy of containment towards China will not get support from other countries, and a poor and unstable China will not be in the interests of the global order, especially in Asian countries. They think that a policy of integrating China into the international community will be beneficial for all other countries.

The development of different kinds of partnerships between China and other countries

In recent years, China has made big progress in establishing partnerships with other countries. It has established a constructive strategic partnership of coordination with Russia; a comprehensive partnership with France and Britain; and a friendly cooperative partnership working for peace and development with Japan. At the same time, China has also established partnerships with many third world countries, including neighbouring countries.

Conditions necessary to make China a responsible great power

China's confidence in the international security environment and international mechanisms

If China thinks that the international security environment is stable and it is not facing serious military threats, it will pursue its policy of reform (including political reform), and opening-up, and its independent foreign policy of peace. As a result, China will integrate itself deeply into the international community and world mechanisms, in which it is beneficial to China's national interests for China to play a role as a responsible great power.

Other countries should help China to participate in international mechanisms

It will be beneficial to the interests of other countries, especially other major powers and China's neighbouring countries, to take positive and active steps to help China to integrate itself into the world economy and international political and security mechanisms. For example, China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) is conducive to the expanding trade relations of other countries with China. Other major powers should welcome and accept China joining the G-8 in the near future. That will greatly reduce the suspicion within

China about the intentions of western countries and establish a good channel between China and other major powers to consult with each other to increase mutual understanding and cooperation.

The strategic balance in the Asia-Pacific region should be established and maintained

China is located in the Asia-Pacific region, and attaches great importance to peace and stability in the region. In the post-Cold War era, the balance of US-China-Japan triangular relations is the most important factor in maintaining stability and peace in the region. No side should be dominant. And the three countries should increase their security dialogue and exchanges—especially between China and the United States and between China and Japan—so as to establish cooperative and mutually beneficial relations of ‘win-win-win’ among them.

The Taiwan issue should be dealt with properly

The Taiwan issue is an internal Chinese affair to which China favours a peaceful reunification. But China cannot commit itself to renouncing the use of force as a final resort to halt the independence of Taiwan and foreign intervention into Taiwan. Therefore, force is also the guarantee that the Taiwan issue might be resolved peacefully. The reason why China is very concerned about the Theatre Missile Defense system (TMD) is that if the United States provides TMD to Taiwan, it will not only violate its commitments in the three China-US joint communiques on China’s sovereignty, but also make some separatists in Taiwan think that if they declare independence, the TMD can protect them from being attacked by the mainland. That will be very dangerous. And, if the United States transfers TMD to Taiwan, it will hurt the process of arms control and nonproliferation in the Asia-Pacific region and make it very difficult for China to positively consider formal participation in the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). On this issue, the United States uses a double standard. On the one hand, it imposes sanctions on some countries accused of proliferating weapons of mass destruction and missiles; on the other hand, it provides many sophisticated weapons to some regions, including technologies in the TMD systems that violate the MTCR. If stability in the Taiwan Strait can be maintained and reunification with the mainland through peaceful means can be realized, China will be more willing to play the role of a responsible great power in the international community.

Notes

- ¹ Jiang Zemin’s report at the 15th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, September 12, 1997.
- ² ‘China’s National Defense’, Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 1998, Beijing, p.6.
- ³ ‘China’s National Defense’, Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, July 1998, Beijing, p.4.

- ⁴ 'The Amendment to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China', adopted by the Second Plenary of the 9th National People's Congress, March 15, 1999.
- ⁵ The Main Points of the Plan of Free Trade of the participants of the APEC, November 22, 1996.