

The Role of China

*Remarks by Fu Ying at the Asia Society Dialogue
2014-10-14*

“Is China going to compete for world power?”

Most people in China, if asked of such a question, would show little interest in see the country fighting for world power with the US, still less in becoming another US.

However, in the US and some European countries, many may say: How can they trust that China won't be like that? They are concerned that China may try to set up a new regional order under it's rule.

When I had a conversation with Doctor Henry Kissinger, he advised me to write about what the Chinese people think for more people to know. I have chosen a few hotly discussed topics below to share some of the views in China.

First, is China a world power?

For most in the US and the world for that matter, China is undoubtedly already a newly rising world power.

According to the IMF latest PPP calculation, China's GDP overtook the US's on 29 September to be the number one economy of the world. However, such a story did not raise much excitement in China. Most see it simply as too flattering.

Foreigners see China's progress mainly from the images of China based on skylines in Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou. But

if you drive out of these mega-cities 100 Km, you will easily find people living at very basic levels. By the UN poverty standard of 1.25 US\$ a day, there are still about 200 million Chinese or roughly 14% of the Chinese population, living under that line.

In China, urbanization has reached 51%. But when measured at the human level, people who are living in city conditions are no more than 37%. That is to say, more people in China are yet to enjoy urban quality of life like clean water and proper medical care.

China is a country that has just come out of overall poverty and those born in the 1980s were the first generation of Chinese who have grown up with a full stomach and who started to enjoy the freedom of choices.

But at the national level, more challenges are waiting to be addressed such as more hospitals, schools and better environment. The country is on a steep upward slope, confronting difficulties sometimes beyond imagination for the outside world.

That is why we state that China is a developing country and for a long time to come the country will focus on its reform and opening to the outside world in order to promote development.

We have two centenary objectives. The first is for the 100-year anniversary of the Communist Party at 2020, to double the GDP as well as both urban and rural average income based on 2010 figures.

The second is for the 100-year anniversary of the People's Republic of China at the middle of this century, turning the country into modernized socialist society, with per capita income levels reaching that of a moderate developed country.

These two centenary targets are described by President Xi Jinping as the Chinese dream for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, which captured the imagination of the Chinese people.

Second, does China have to compete for world power and would this even lead to war?

According to Hans Morgenthau, the theorist of realism of international politics, countries when turning strong will inevitably fight for international power. John Mearsheimer, who developed “offensive neo-realism” for the post-Cold War international situation, further stated the unavoidable tragic competition among powers.

But it is important to realize for the world that China is shaping a new paradigm and it has followed a path of peaceful development.

China’s foreign trade grew 300 times in RMB terms in the 30 years from 1983 to 2013. But this was not achieved with “flag before trade”. Rather, it was the fruit of mutually beneficial cooperation on an equal footing and within the existing rule based international free trade environment.

Especially after China joined the WTO in 2001, international trade grew at an average rate of 18.2% annually. China is now the largest trading partner for over 120 countries, importing more than US\$2 trillion worth of goods, and creating jobs and investment opportunities around the world. This factor also anchors China’s relations with its partners.

During the past three decades, China’s GDP expanded 95 times, while the increase in its military spending was only 42% of that rate. China follows a constitutionally stipulated national

defense policy that is defensive in nature. Grabbing capital, resources and markets by military force as the world witnessed in the past is unnecessary in today's world, and unacceptable as policy option for China.

There are both domestic and international reasons as to why peaceful development works for China.

In terms of internal factors, the Chinese nation has strong belief in peace. Many of the ancient sayings go deep in people's mind, i.e, "a nation, however powerful, is doomed if it is always hungry for war", "peace is most valuable under the sun", and "achieving harmony while allowing differences". China suffered a great deal at the hands of foreign powers. We "do not do onto others what we don't want others to do to us".

As a socialist country, people's interest and benefit is at the center of China' domestic policy which has determined that its international strategy is firmly rooted in peace and cooperation with all countries.

Externally, globalization has created conditions that made it possible for China to achieve peaceful development.

When the Cold War ended, it also broke the division caused by confrontation between opposing camps.

Thus a global trend of diffusion occurred, whereby resources and factors of production, such as capital, technology, talents, and expertise, previously held mostly in the developed Western world, started to diffuse to the vast periphery. Wars and military expansion are no longer the workable and necessary way to attain economic expansion.

China made good use of this opportunity. Through persistent reform and opening-up program, China has become the leading developing country to attract international funds, technology and tap the global markets thus achieving economic boost. This is not a one way traffic and China' massive growth has benefited all those countries and businesses who partnered with China.

Many other developing countries also took on the wave of globalization, and their role is also essential in adding vigor to new period of world economic expansion.

Chinese President Xi Jinping stated repeatedly that China is committed to peaceful development. China needs peace, he said, just like human-being needs air and sunlight.

Indeed, China's peaceful development has been successful and there is no reason not to continue it. Only by following peaceful development can China attain its development goals, and contribute more to the world.

Third, how is China's commitment to peace reflected in its policy in the neighborhood?

As we entered the second decade of the 21st century, China's neighborhood has seen much disquiet. Temperature started to rise over territorial disputes and maritime jurisdiction, which lay dormant for years. What has happened?

On 10th April 2012, a Philippine navy ship sent armed men into the lagoon of Huangyan Island to harass and bully Chinese fishermen who were working there. Photos of the scene angered the people back home who called for actions to protect Chinese citizens and territory.

The following September, the Japanese government went ahead with the so-called “nationalization” of the Diaoyu Islands, which broke the status quo of shelving the disputes. That too ignited serious demonstration in many Chinese cities and gravely strained ties with China.

China took effective measures in response to both provocations to firmly uphold territorial rights and interests. At the same time, China has exercised restraint and have not given up on resolving disputes through dialogue or the principle of “putting aside differences and going for joint development”. At the same time, we have to watch closely the true intentions and other complicating factors that may lie behind provocations.

China and ASEAN countries had many rounds of discussions and finally reaffirmed commitment to the *Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea* (DOC), which underpins stability in the South China Sea, and started talks on a “code of conduct” (COC).

Free and unimpeded passage in the South China Sea is crucial for China as a major trading country. Maintaining such freedom remains one of our priorities.

Compared with other regions in the world, Asia since the end of the Cold War has remained peaceful and stable on the whole, with no major conflicts. Countries are able to focus on economic development and cooperation.

They have not only deepened common interests but also made Asia an engine for the global economy, contributing roughly half of global growth in recent years.

To achieve that, China’s good-neighborly policies have played an important role.

One priority of China's Asia policy is to support and join in the framework of dialogue and cooperation initiated by ASEAN which fostered the principles of openness, inclusiveness, consensus building, and accommodating each party's comfort level, known as the ASEAN Way.

This seemingly loose regional architecture led by ASEAN has provided a major integrating network that brought Asia together in the post-Cold War order.

China supports ASEAN centrality in East Asia cooperation which now is an important component of the Asian order.

Parallel to this architecture is the bilateral military alliances led by the US, which is a legacy of the Cold War. How these alliances renew and reinvent themselves is watched closely.

The "rebalance strategy" pursued by the US in recent years showed a heavy military focus, and has given rise to new debate.

First, military alliances are exclusive in nature. Where do non-members come in in its security vision? How do members balance their security interests and responsibilities with those of non-members?

Second, where do alliances draw the line when it comes to principles. Do members always support their allies, be it right or wrong?

Third, how does the alignment regime interface with and accommodate the region's other multilateral frameworks?

In the case of Japan, its current leader refuses to recognize the history of aggression. He visited the Yasukuni Shrine, denies the

issue of comfort women. Furthermore, he beat up “China threat” to justify his attempt to amend the country’s pacifist constitution.

The concern among the Chinese people is that all this may be aimed at freeing Japan from the post-world war restraints in order to attain the ability to wage war again.

As Japan’s most important ally, how will the US rein in this ally and keep it to the peaceful track? This will affect the future regional order in a fundamental way.

In the final analysis, the decisive factor for Asia is whether China and the US can properly manage their relationship and cooperate on regional issues.

Leaders of the two countries have agreed to build a new type of major-country relationship. The question is how this is realized in the real world.

The first issue is whether the two countries could build up mutual trust and reduce misperceptions. The lack of trust between China and US, both at strategic level and in media circles, has led to continuous misreading and misjudgment, which spoils the atmosphere, and stands in the way of cooperation.

For the US side, the key lies in resisting the temptation to view China from an ideological standpoint. If this obstacle cannot be removed, bilateral ties are likely to be affected by ups and downs from time to time.

The second is whether the two countries could learn to respect each other’s interests and concerns. To the Chinese people, the US seemed prefer to choose to standing on the opposing side on almost any issue that involves China’s interest.

For instance, when China faces provocations from its neighbors, the US pointed fingers at China regardless of facts. By doing so, the US has reinforced its negative image among the Chinese public.

To change that, the two countries may make more statement with positive note and conduct more visible cooperation in such areas as climate change, counter-terrorism, curbing pandemics, and cyber security. Both countries need a prosperous and stable Asia. We should identify areas where we agree and work on them and areas where we can't agree and put aside the differences for further discussion.

We should state together our support for the multilateral frameworks led by ASEAN, and leave little room for regional countries to worry about China-US conflict or to take sides.

On the part of China, we should carefully consider how our actions might affect our neighbors. We should explain ourselves more proactively, to make our voice better heard, so that the outside world can have more timely and objective understanding of our thinking and intentions.

Fourth, how do the Chinese people see their country's role in the world and international responsibilities and should China share US's global responsibility?

The world today is constantly troubled by conflicts in different regions. The Ukraine issue has not yet cooled down while temperature continues to rise in the Middle East. China is perceived as not playing sufficient role or even shirking responsibilities.

In China, people see most of the world problem started from the wrong foot and then led to a mess. The easiest way is to stop

the fighting and find a compromise among the parties concerned. It is a widely held belief in China that countries should not interfere in each other internal affairs. So China may join in discussions about hotspot issues with the aim of seeking a peaceful solution, but not to turn into a party to the conflict or taking steps making the problem worse.

How about China's global responsibility?

First and foremost, as a country accounting for one fifth of the world population, China growing prosperous and staying stable in itself is a very important contribution to world prosperity and stability.

As for the world security issues, China has offered good offices on the Korean nuclear issue and promoted stability in Afghanistan and we are also parties to many of the negotiations concerning regional and world security. However, China does not see itself as having an overriding power over other countries. Our view is: should there be the need for international involvement, the opinion of the country concerned and the regional view must come first and the UN's authorization cannot be circumvented.

Chinese President Xi Jinping elaborated the Asian security concept which promote common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. That's a crystallization of China's security thinking and it also go along with the general thinking in Asia.

It is also important that China provides more public goods as its ability grows. For example, since 2008, the Chinese Navy has sent 45 ships to the Gulf of Aden for escort missions, and half of the ships they helped were non-Chinese.

China actively participated in international cooperation in disaster relief, combating transnational crimes and maritime security. China now ranks the first among developing countries in

terms of peace-keeping assessment at the UN, and it is the biggest contributor of peacekeepers among the P-5.

China also strives to share anti-poverty experiences with African and other developing countries. The Chinese medical personnel are at the forefront fighting the deadly Ebola virus and more assistance and resources are sent from China in recent weeks.

Asia is the key area for China's international cooperation. China's initiatives to develop the Silk Road economic belt and maritime Silk Road are aimed at expanding connectivity and promoting common development. It combines China's advantage and the regional needs.

It is not a closed or exclusive arrangement. We welcome more participation by countries including the United States.

When the US judges China or other countries about their role in the world, it often prefers for others to just "follow me" or "do for me". This approach does not go down well with the Chinese people.

On the other hand, in China, we also need to fully understand and appreciate our country's new position in the world and grow into this new role.

The direction to go is for the Chinese and Americans try to understand and appreciate each other's views and positions better, which is indispensable should the two countries want to work closely and effectively on world strategic issues.

(End)