

The Roles China Ought to Play in the World

Shi Yinhong

[Abstract] What roles the rising China ought to play in the world? At least they should include those: (1) as a major value—world historic transnational value—provider, with her domestic progress in several fundamental aspects; (2) as a really strategic great power, which could in some sense redefine the China-U.S. relationship strategically; (3) as a major bear of international responsibility in various functional areas, making her contribute substantially to the global political economy, security, and ecology; and (4) as a courageous as well as prudent restrainer of the abusive preponderant power, for both world liberty and justice.

The Role No.1 China Ought to Play in the World: As a Major Value Provider with Domestic Progress

The modern transnational values can be reduced into four basic categories: “economic growth”, “liberty”, “social justice”, and newly born “environment protection”. The primary national achievement China has made since the initiation of reform and open-up falls into the category of “economic growth”. But this transnational value itself is definite not out of her creation. And, this achievement of economic growth of China has been over many years much excessively at the expense of “social justice” and “environment protection”. Since the beginning of reform the economic “liberty” of the Chinese society has been realized, a great extension of liberty in the history of the world. However, this value itself is also not an innovation by China, and the economic liberty in too many cases in China now is virtually like *laissez-faire* with its huge cost in social just and environment health, not to mention that there is still a very long way to go before China fully realizes some other basic liberties of her people.

Thus, the historical challenge China faces is: Can China make sufficient domestic progress in addressing the major problems pointed above, to create really a set of “Beijing Consensus” that is innovative and has much transnational relevance and applicability? There are increasing hopeful developments while also increasing difficulties in this vital aspect of future national life. China has to successfully cope with this challenge if she is to become a really sustainable world power.

While all the above, it should be pointed out that in one major aspect China has already shown the likely prospect of contributing to the future world a really innovative historic value which was created brilliantly by Mao Zedong and adapted by Deng Xiaoping for the contemporary China. That is: What is most important and decisive is the Chinese’ own practice and experience in the particular Chinese circumstances and situation; What is best for Washington or elsewhere is not necessarily best for China, just as what is best for China is not necessarily for any of the others; Peoples in the world should and are fully entitled to move on their own roads respectively according to their own practice, experience, and decision. This “local” Chinese experience, vindicated by her successful revolution, reform, and growth, could surely have its global significance.

**The Role No. 2 China Ought to Play in the World:
As a Strategic Great Power and Prospects of China-U.S. Relations**

With the assumption that China's peaceful rise sustains, the United States may tend to consider with increasing seriousness certain peaceful "final settlement". That is to differentiate the different balances of strength and influence in different functional and geographical areas through adopting the rationale of "selective preponderances" (instead of "comprehensive superiority") or "advantage distribution". That means not only accepting China's leading position she might obtain in terms of GDP, foreign trade volume, and economic/diplomatic influences in Asia, but also accepting the mutual strategic deterrence between China and the United States, and China's military parity or even a marginal superiority to the U.S. for China's offshore area and a peaceful reunification of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, together with China's "strategic space" in a narrow but substantial span of the western Pacific. This means the U.S. must accept China as a legitimate strategic great power.

But indeed, on the other hand, the great power "structural rivalry" between China and the United States is becoming broader and more profound than in the past, perhaps like a gathering storm over the distant horizon. What particularly important is that China's lasting and escalating military build-up will surely become (or even already begin to become) the most prominent problem in the minds of American strategists and foreign policy makers. This contradiction is surely not absent of a possibility of paralyzing the future of China-U.S. relations.

**The Role No. 3 China Ought to Play in the World:
As a Major Bearer of International Responsibility**

For China's grand strategy and its practice, especially in her relations with the United States, European Union, and other western powers, as well as in the increasingly prominent wide issue of global governance, there has emerged [the major issue of China's bearing of her international responsibility. The outside world is not only expecting China's peaceful rise, but also her "responsible rise".

There should be no doubt in China that she must increase greatly her bearing of international responsibility, as long as such bearing (1) will not violate against her vital interests and surpass her fundamental capability; (2) results from the equal consultation between her and the external world, rather than from any "dictation" or coercion by the latter; (3) largely matches with the increase of her reasonable international rights and privileges. "International responsibility" is rapidly becoming a primary key word in the issue of China's grand strategy and foreign policy, and a major challenge that China has to meet actively and positively.

**The Role No. 4 China Ought to Play in the World:
As a Restrainer of Abusive or Excessive Power in the World**

(An outline)

What might be China's Future Foreign Policy Orientation?

Two Contending Possibilities:

“Checking American power” gently and prudently but also consistently, a traditional orientation since Deng Xiaoping; “comprehensive” and balanced diplomacy; To keep old friends, to win new ones; focus on Asia, deals with China's Asian neighbors in a holistic strategic framework, and pay sufficient attention and efforts to China's relations with other powers in other Continents beside the United States in North America. [It's domestic implication: To make the Chinese state and society healthier through domestic reform; To reduce the excessive interdependence with the United States in the terms of political economy.] **Or**

G-2 the Chinese version, as some people in China has held since about 2008: Increasing further the “interdependence” with the U.S.; To reduce the trouble from the Superpower through “extra-accommodation” while dealing with almost all the others “more harshly” or less attentively. And to obtain the recognition of “No.2” status and position from it through the same way.

China ought to insist on the above first option, along with the vitally important and feasible cooperation with the United States, against the interference of the second, and adopt it to the changing China and the changing world in order to make herself an independent World Power in the not so distant future.