



# Line Between Cooperative Good Neighbor and Uncompromising Foreign Policy: China's Diplomacy Under the Xi Jinping Administration

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## Inconsistencies Found in China's Diplomacy



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I think people in Japan share the impression that China's foreign policies have grown more uncompromising under the Xi Jinping administration when compared with the same policies under the Hu Jintao administration. In all likelihood, people in countries neighboring China share this impression. This situation is closely connected to the fact that China is more aggressively engaging in what it calls peripheral diplomacy. China held a roundtable discussion on peripheral diplomatic maneuvering on 24–25 October 2013, and assembled guidelines aimed at making its relations with neighboring countries, particularly economic and business ties, closer. However, as everyone knows, China simultaneously adopts the policy of making absolutely no concessions with regard to sovereignty and security. This inconsistency between the good neighbor basis and sovereignty issues is the very characteristic of China's diplomacy that is becoming increasingly conspicuous under the Xi administration. The inconsistency is related to the divergence

of policies called an external cooperation path in economics and a hard-line path in sovereignty and security issues. The two paths basically correspond with a group that places importance on development and a conservative group in domestic policies. In other words, the group that takes a serious view toward economic development in domestic policies longs for cooperation in China's foreign relations. Meanwhile, the conservative group that seeks redistribution of wealth does not necessarily support international cooperation, and tends to fall into nationalism.



On the other hand, as the proposal of new world power relations made to the United States demonstrates, China is steadfastly maintaining a policy of cooperating with world powers, such as Western countries and Russia. Such cooperation is one of China's state goals. It also embodies the country's foreign policy goal of multipolarizing the world that now has a single pole – the United States. Among those powers, Japan is falling victim to China's peripheral diplomacy in an exceptional manner. Russia is in a delicate situation, but many other world powers do not necessarily feel China's uncompromising diplomacy deep within because they are located outside East Asia. Japan's inner distress lies herein.

China is the second largest economic power in the world. As such, it is imposing on itself the big question of how to advance diplomacy as such a power. However, the country's self-portrait is that of a developing world power. Put another way, China is acting like a world power but taking the position of not proceeding at the same pace as the Group of Seven industrialized countries. This position does not necessarily mean that China opposes the world order; it is a reflection of the country's intent to gain a free hand, which in this context means that China accepts the existing world order if it is advantageous to itself, attempts modifications while protesting inequality if the order requires changes, and takes no part in the order if it is found totally unfavorable. However, this Chinese attitude leaves the question of whether or not such a free-rider attitude qualifies as diplomacy for a world power.

## Have Inconsistencies Been Brought Under Control?

China is aware of these inconsistencies and problems. In a speech titled "Chinese diplomacy standing at a historical new starting point," delivered on 2 November 2013, Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi stated regarding his country's diplomacy: "We will integrate and adjust our relations with world powers, neighboring countries and developing nations, and draw a new page of friendship and cooperation with each of those countries." As these words suggest, China is aware of the mutual independence of its diplomacy toward world powers, that toward neighboring countries and that toward developing nations. As seen in the new world power relations proposed to the United States, China advocates its influence in peripheral diplomacy while claiming to seek cooperation with world powers. The type of relations China will build with the United States is a problem in East Asia for that reason. However, China's somewhat rough speech, rather than close adjustments and skillful diplomacy, stands out when it comes to the country's efforts to overcome inconsistencies in East Asia. It is the type of speech that says China does not want countries like the United States to enter into East Asia. We can call this a Chinese version of the Monroe Doctrine. Such speech also appears frequently in statements by Chinese leaders as criticisms of an outsider (the United States) in East Asia. The Japan-U.S. alliance is functioning as a precise cause for bringing in that outsider.

On the other hand, China is beginning to think about changing itself into a world power welcomed in the



global community, instead of focusing its diplomacy toward world powers on just strengthening its influence in East Asia. “Integrating and adjusting capabilities, obligations and responsibilities and making great contributions to the world peace and development,” a phrase frequently used by Yang, corresponds to this orientation. However, this approach assumes there are aspects that China cannot accomplish because it brings capabilities into question. We also cannot turn a blind eye to what Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said at the United Nations General Assembly on 27 September 2013. Wang’s remark, “We will try to offer many international public goods to the global community by delivering the Chinese voice, making contributions with Chinese wisdom, proposing Chinese methods, and embodying Chinese actions,” suggests the Chinese attitude of searching for Chinese-style international relations and something that is Chinese. Can China create something Chinese that is accepted internationally? That is a true challenge.

## Two Centennials

I think we can consider the period in which China focused on its economic development and made *tao guang yang hui*, the policy of keeping a low profile and not showing its hand, its principle has virtually ended. A turnaround from such period took place sometime in 2006–2008. China added sovereignty and security to the linchpin of its diplomacy through the transition. I believe China is presently working to implement foreign policies linked with its two national goals that have been advocated anew.

These goals are associated with the centennial of the Communist Party of China and the centennial of the People’s Republic of China, respectively. China is reportedly aiming to “double its gross domestic product and the average income of its urban residents, compared with their levels in 2010, and to realize a moderately prosperous society in the whole country” by the centennial of the Communist Party. It is also said to be striving to “build a modern socialist state that is rich, powerful, democratic, civilized and harmonious, and make the Chinese dream of the great revival of the Chinese people come true” by the centennial of the People’s Republic of China. Hu talked about the former goal before his retirement. The latter was set after Xi gained power and established his leadership.

Wang stated as follows in his address at a ceremony for diplomatic mission members held on December 7, 2013, where members received an appointment and took an oath:

After sixty years of development [since the People’s Republic’s foundation], particularly thirty-five years of development since the adoption of the open-door policy, China has come to a new historical starting point today. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, in which comrade Xi Jinping serves as the General Secretary, has started its work for realizing great goals called the Chinese dream and the centennial targets, united in these causes with all ethnic groups and people in the country. China



has never come closer to its target of the revival of the Chinese people before. China has never reached closer to the center of the international stage before.

How to realize the revival of the Chinese people and the approach to the center of the international stage in concrete terms are questions for China today and in the future.

Gaps between announced slogans and real external actions have been originally pointed out in Chinese diplomacy. Words may have been adjusted to summarize realities that have evolved in various directions or to explain the right course among them. However, such words have recently changed in a number of ways. China of course must verbally confirm the independent actions of its armed forces and the China Marine Surveillance. However, there is an observed tendency for politicians' words to jump the gun these days. What kind of phenomena will words such as "the revival of the Chinese people" connote from here forward? That is a question countries neighboring China will not be able to disregard.

## Problems Found in China's Diplomacy Toward Japan

It goes without saying that Japan has been the greatest problem in China's foreign policies in both words and reality. That is because Japan occupies a position between China's diplomacy toward world powers and its peripheral diplomacy, and because the Japan-U.S. alliance and the presence of Japan have been the greatest negative factors for China, which may advocate an East Asian version of the Monroe Doctrine. We can consider the historical perception issue and the Senkaku Islands issue as what people may call symbolic phenomena that have such problems in their background.

There are two major problems in China's diplomacy toward Japan. First, there is a possibility for negative presences for China, such as Japan, to grow in number. At present, Japan is a representative of countries that have territorial disputes with China, maintain close economic ties with China despite domestic public opinion critical of China, and resist economic pressure from China. For China, Japan is a difficult country to handle because it is the third greatest economic power in the world and has a reasonable level of military capabilities. China has territorial disputes with Vietnam, but Vietnam is a socialist state that has close government, party and military relations with China. The Philippines also has territorial issues with China, but the Philippines has no economic power or military capacity to stand against China on medium- and long-term bases. However, in addition to Japan, countries in Southeast Asia, as well as South Korea, may take security countermeasures in collaboration with Japan and the United States if and when China's stance becomes more uncompromising. Tension is currently rising in the South China Sea. The way China perceived the situation was also conspicuously different from views held by Japan and the United States at the 2014 Shangri-La Dialogue.



Second, the economy is a weapon for China, but it can ultimately be the country's weakness. Economic ties have particularly strong significance in China's relations with Japan. This means the Chinese side must accept economic and interregional exchanges to a certain degree even given the Senkaku Islands issue and the controversy over the Japanese prime minister's criticized visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. A foreign policy trend, which requires cooperative economic relations that date back to the *tao guang yang hui* period, in which development was precisely emphasized, continues to exist in China to a certain extent. I think that trend could be a reason that keeps China away from aggressive diplomacy toward Japan. I believe it could also be an important clue for changing relations between Japan and China for the better.

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He also has been a visiting scholar the Academia Sinica in Taipei (Institute of Modern History, 1995-1996), the Beijing Center for Japanese Studies (vice director, 2000-2001), National Chengchi University in Taipei (Department of History, 2005), Beijing University (Department of History, 2005) and Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars (the Awarded Japan Scholar). His publications include *Chugoku Kindai Gaiko no Keisei* (Formation of Chinese modern diplomacy, Nagoya University Press, 2004), which won the Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities in 2004.

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