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Xi Jinping's 'Major Country Diplomacy: A Paradigm Shift?

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ABSTRACT

China's diplomacy has undergone a sea of changes under Xi Jinping's rein. But there is no consensus on the nature, scope, essence and direction of these changes. This article aims to explore both the changes and continuities in Chinese foreign affairs under the Xi Jinping leadership through the lens of his recently much-advocated formulation of 'major country diplomacy with distinctive Chinese features'. Tracing the evolution, manifestation and causes of Xi's 'major country diplomacy', it is argued that Xi's diplomacy is a clear departure from Deng Xiaoping's TGYH ([*Tao Guang Yang Hu*] low profile) strategy and therefore transformative in nature. On the other hand, however, his strong adherence to the core realist assumptions about national security issues makes his idealistic and liberal global vision and his efforts to transcend 'the traditional Western theories of international relations' more difficult to accomplish. In this respect, the glass is still half full and half empty.

China's diplomacy has experienced significant changes under the reign of Xi Jinping in a short time span of five years. Unlike his predecessors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, who largely focused on domestic affairs in their first terms, Xi has been in full swing in foreign affairs from the very beginning. Indeed, one can argue that he has devoted at least equal amount of time and energy, if not more, on diplomacy traveling all over the world¹ and ushering in new foreign policy initiatives, concepts and discourse with dazzling speed. Entering the last year of his first term in 2017, high-level foreign affair officials and pundits began to trumpet the so-called Xi Jinping thought of diplomacy. This is extraordinary as the term 'thought' was applied to Xi's diplomatic rather than his domestic achievements first. In addition, if one looks back to history, for Jing Zemin era the same term did not appear until late in his second term. It was not even mentioned to describe Hu Jintao's diplomacy.

While there is largely a consensus on noticeable changes of China's diplomacy under Xi both at home and abroad, there is no consensus on the nature, scope, essence and direction of these changes. Analysts outside of the mainland China like to use words such as 'China's new assertiveness',² 'insecure nationalism'³ and 'offensive realism'⁴ to portrait these changes while pundits in China, however, tend to describe Xi's diplomacy as more cosmopolitan, proactive, path-

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¹According to *Wikipedia*, from 2013 to 2017, Xi Jinping visited 56 countries in 7 continents, accessed 25 February 2018, <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E4%B9%A0%E8%BF%91%E5%B9%B3%E5%A4%96%E4%BA%8B%E8%AE%BF%E9%97%AE%E5%88%97%E8%A1%A8>, He made 7 trips and visited 18 countries in 2014 alone. *Xinhua*, 'The traces of Xi Jinping's foreign visit in 2014: spreading all over 18 countries in four continents,' 27 November 2014.

²Alastair Iain Johnston, 'How new and assertive is China's new assertiveness?', *International Security* 37(4), (2013), pp. 7–48.

³Abanti Bhattacharya, 'China's insure nationalism: the roots of Xi Jinping's foreign policy belligerence, on Doklam and elsewhere,' *The Times of India*, 7 August 2017, accessed 12 August 2017, <http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/toi-edit-page/chinas-insecure-nationalism-the-roots-of-xi-jinpings-foreign-policy-belligerence-on-doklam-and-elsewhere/>.

⁴Baohui Zhang, 'Xi Jinping, "pragmatic" offensive realism and China's rise,' *Global Asia* 9(2), (2014), pp. 70–79.

breaking and compassionate. The truth, however, is always more complicated than those labels may suggest. This article attempts to explore these issues about the changes in Chinese foreign affairs under the Xi Jinping leadership through the lens of his recently much-advocated formulation of 'major country diplomacy with distinctive Chinese features', which is supposed to serve as an overarching framework for Xi Jinping's diplomacy.

Chinese diplomacy 3.0?

Actually, the term 'major country diplomacy' in the vocabulary of Chinese diplomacy is not something entirely new. As a matter of fact, it has frequently been used in Chinese foreign policy documents and literature. But usually it refers to China's efforts to manage relations with other major powers such as the USA, Russia, European Union, and to less extent, Japan and India. It is also true that Chinese government and leaders often referred China as a 'major country' (*daguo*) in their foreign policy statements to highlight its important position and weighty roles in international relations, which can be seen as preludes to Xi's 'major country diplomacy', but not 'major country diplomacy' per se. Put it in a different way, China is a major country in diplomacy, but its diplomacy is not necessarily based on the assumption that China is a 'major country'. For example, the *Tao Guang Yang Hui* (conceal one's ability and bide one's time) strategy under Deng Xiaoping was not taking 'major country' as a starting point. It is under Xi Jinping's leadership that China began to more consciously and systematically pursue 'major country diplomacy'. In other words, China needs to think and pursue diplomacy from the vantage point as a major country with more influence, discourse power and responsibilities. By logic, this will render Deng's low-profile diplomacy irrelevant to major country diplomacy. More importantly, what China should peruse is not just diplomacy as a normal or ordinary major country, but diplomacy with 'distinctive Chinese features' or 'Chinese characteristics'. That means by definition China's major country diplomacy should be different from the diplomacy of other major countries implying the uniqueness of China's diplomacy. Therefore, the concept itself reflects the 'distinctive Chinese feature' already as no other major powers would formally claim to pursue diplomacy of their own characteristics. Another uniqueness about China's 'major country diplomacy' is its efforts to keep a distance from 'power' as reflected in its English translation. Instead of using the more common English translation of 'major power' or 'great power', China prefers to use 'major country' to avoid the negative connotation related to the word 'power' and the impression that the advocacy of 'major country diplomacy' could mean that China intends to seek hegemony (*qiangquan*).⁵

Xi Jinping leadership began to elaborate on the concept of major country diplomacy soon after he took office. It was first introduced by Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi merely 100 days after Xi took over power. At the World Peace Forum in June 2013, Foreign Minister Wang Yi delivered a keynote speech⁶ in which he pointed out that with China's increasing economic weight in world economy and related contributions to the world development, 'China is already standing under world's limelight', China under the new leadership headed by Xi Jinping is ready to explore a new path of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.

This theme of major country diplomacy has been reiterated and further emphasized at the highest level by Xi Jinping when he made an important speech at the central conference on China's foreign affairs in 2014.⁷ He asserted that China should develop its distinctive diplomatic

⁵The creative translation of 'new model of major country relations' and its practical significance,' 23 September 2015, *Translators Association of China*, accessed 26 February 2018, http://tac-online.org.cn/ch/tran/2015-09/23/content_8258679.htm.

⁶Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 'Exploring the path of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics,' remarks by foreign minister Wang Yi at the luncheon of the Second World Peace Forum, 27 June 2013, accessed 10 August 2017, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjzb_663304/wjzbz_663308/2461_663310/t1053908.shtml.

⁷Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 'The central conference on work relating to foreign affairs was held in Beijing,' 29 November 2014, accessed 9 August 2017, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml.

approach befitting its role of a major country. China's major country diplomacy should have distinctive 'Chinese characteristics, Chinese style and Chinese manner'.

In 2016, Foreign Minister Wang Yi further substantiated the concept of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. He began to use the term of 'theory of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics' turning a concept into a theory. He pointed out that this theory is a top-level design supported by five pillars including a community of shared destiny of mankind, people development, win-win cooperation, partnerships and correct understanding of justice and interest.⁸

Starting from 2017 in which Chinese Communist Party was making preparation for its epic 19th party congress, the level of official articulation of Xi's diplomatic thinking had been elevated. State Councilor Yang Jiechi published two long articles to authoritatively expound Xi's concepts and practice in diplomacy. In his article published in January 2017 in *People's Daily*,⁹ for the first time he used the term of 'Xi Jinping thought on diplomacy'. He declared that Xi scientifically answered a series of major questions regarding China's diplomacy under new situation including task, goal, pathway, strategy, tactic, institution and mechanism. According to Yang, Xi's thought on diplomacy is a 'scientific, systemic and complete ideological system'. Among other contributions Xi has made, Yang mentioned the establishment of 'theoretical system of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics'. Xi emphasized that China should have its major country diplomacy with its own characteristics; 'It is a logo, a banner'. Then in July 2017, Yan published another major article on Xi's thought on diplomacy.¹⁰ Once again, he asserted that Xi's thought on diplomacy is a 'comprehensive and profound system of theories with rich connotations'. Under the guidance of Xi's thought on diplomacy, China 'has become more confident in pursuing major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, fully demonstrating its distinctive vision, style and way of conduct as a major country'.

In September, two months before the 19th Party Congress, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi published yet another article on Xi's diplomatic thought¹¹ in which he argued that Xi laid out creatively a series of 'new vision, new thinking and new strategies' for China's diplomacy. The first and foremost component of Xi's thought on diplomacy is 'major-country diplomacy with Chinese features'. In this article, Wang's compliment of Xi's diplomatic thought reached a new high claiming that it 'has made innovations on and transcended the traditional Western theories of international relations for the past 300 years'. At the most recently held Central Conference Relating to Foreign Affairs in June 2018, Xi's diplomatic thought formally obtained the 'guiding position' in conducting foreign affairs. In his own articulation, Xi put 'major country diplomacy' at the prominent position of his diplomatic thought.¹²

From this cursory review of the development of the concept of 'major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics', it is not difficult to see that 'major country diplomacy' occupies an important position in the so-called Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy. It is no longer just a concept or an idea, but already a theoretical system. Comparing the discussion of Yang Jiechi's two articles on Xi's thoughts on diplomacy, one can find that the main content he articulated on Xi Jinping's thoughts on diplomacy and major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics shares many similarities. In a way, it can be argued that Xi's major country diplomacy is another name for Xi's

⁸Wang Yi, 'Practicing the idea of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics,' 4 May 2016, *cppcc.china.com.cn*, accessed 11 August 2017, http://cppcc.china.com.cn/2016-05/04/content_38377875.htm.

⁹Yang Jiechi, "Keep creating a new situation in external work under the guidance of general secretary Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy," *People's Daily*, 14 January 2017, p. 7.

¹⁰Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, Yang Jiechi, 'Study and implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy in deep-going way and keep writing new chapters of major country diplomacy with distinctive Chinese features,' 17 July 2017, accessed 11 August 2017, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zjyh_665391/t1478497.shtml.

¹¹Foreign Minister Wang Yi, 'Forge ahead under the guidance of General Secretary Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy,' *Study Times*, 1 September 2017, p. A1.

¹²Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 'Xi Jinping urges breaking new ground in major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics,' 23 June 2018, accessed 1 July 2018, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1571296.shtml.

thought on diplomacy. Some Chinese analysts argue that the advent of ‘major country diplomacy’ indicates that the diplomacy of People’s Republic of China (PRC) has entered a new stage. Major country diplomacy could be considered PRC diplomacy 3.0, which is different from the ‘revolutionary diplomacy’ (1.0) in 1949–1979 and ‘development diplomacy’ (2.0) in 1979–2009. Major country diplomacy is more aimed at reforming international order and international system rather than just focusing on economic development.¹³ Others also agree that under Xi Jinping diplomacy, economic interest is no longer the most important and overwhelming consideration in Chinese diplomacy. Rather the political rationale for nurturing an international environment for the great renewal of Chinese nation has become the new strategic goal of Chinese diplomacy.¹⁴

At the center of the world stage

Why did Xi advocate ‘major country diplomacy’ at this juncture? It is based on his assessment of current situation and trend in international affairs and the change of China’s position in the international system. Although facing many challenges in diplomacy since he came to power, Xi’s overall estimate of China’s external environment remains optimistic. With the ups and downs of Sino-American relations, particularly after the Obama administration initiated the Asia Rebalance strategy to push back China and the intensification of maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas, the Chinese foreign policy community has long debated whether the so-called the period of strategic opportunity, first suggested by Jiang Zemin, has ended. While being aware of the tension, contest, struggle and uncertainties in China’s international environment, Xi nevertheless concluded that all factors considered, China is still in an important period of strategic opportunity for its development.¹⁵ This judgement was reconfirmed in his most recent report to the 19th Party Congress although he did emphasize that while the prospects are bright, the challenges are severe.¹⁶ More recently, facing serious challenges from Donald Trump’s all-out foreign policy offensive on trade, South China Sea and Taiwan, Xi Jinping insists that China is in its best period of development since modern times.¹⁷

But more crucial is Xi Jinping’s evolving perception of China’s status in the current international system. While previous Chinese leaders since Mao largely considered China at the periphery or semi-periphery of the existing and Western-dominated international system,¹⁸ Xi believes that it is no longer the case. Instead China has moved from periphery or semi-periphery to the center. He pointed out ‘in explicit terms’ that China is ‘closer than ever to the center of the global stage’, ‘closer than ever to fulfilling the Chinese dream of national renewal “and therefore” more confident and able than ever to realize this goal’.¹⁹

Position determines attitude. Since China is almost at the center of the world stage with correspondent capabilities, it cannot continue the *TGYH* (low profile and hands-off) approach as designed by Deng Xiaoping anymore. Before Xi came to power, with China’s increasing power and

¹³Zhao Kejin, ‘Interpreting major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics,’ 28 August 2013, *CCCPC Party Literature Research Office*, accessed 10 August 2017 https://www.wxyjs.org.cn/zgtszhzyltxyj_569/201307/t20130712_142674.htm.

¹⁴Yan Xuetong, ‘Diplomatic transformation, priority of interest, and the rise of major power,’ *Journal of Strategy and Decision-Making* 8(3), (2017), pp. 4–11.

¹⁵Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, ‘The central conference on work relating to foreign affairs was held in Beijing.’

¹⁶Xi Jinping, ‘Secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and strive for the great success of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era,’ delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 18 October 2017, *Qiushi*, accessed February 26, 2018, http://english.qstheory.cn/2018-02/11/c_1122395333.htm.

¹⁷Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, ‘Xi Jinping urges breaking new ground in major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.’

¹⁸For example, Mao Zedong’s theory of ‘three worlds’ obviously allocated China at the margin of the international system as a developing country.

¹⁹Yang Jiechi, ‘Study and implement General Secretary Xi Jinping’s thought on diplomacy in deep-going way and keep writing new chapters of major country diplomacy with distinctive Chinese features.’

influence in world affairs, Chinese foreign policy community already started to debate whether China should continue Deng Xiaoping's undeclared low-profile strategy of 'conceal one's abilities and hide one's intention'.²⁰ Some veteran Chinese diplomats such as Wu Jianmin argued that Deng's doctrine should remain intact.²¹ Immediately after Xi assumed office, one could still hear voices for keeping *TGYH*. But not anymore. Xi's 'major country diplomacy' literally put an end to this debate. In this sense, Xi's major country diplomacy is a replacement of Deng Xiaoping's low-profile diplomacy. Instead of following Deng's advice of 'never taking a lead' in international affairs, Xi advocates that China should just do the opposite: 'leading' the trend of international affairs.²² This is not just what China wants to do but also the expectation of the international community. As he put it, 'The world is so big, and the problems are so many. The international community expects to hear China's voice and see China's inputs', Therefore, 'China cannot be absent'.²³ This is in sharp contrast to the 'leaving China alone' mentality manifested by Chinese leaders before Xi.

Xi's major country diplomacy therefore is undeclared but clear negation of Deng Xiaoping's low-profile diplomacy and therefore transformative in nature. This paradigm shift has been reflected in many aspects of Chinese diplomacy under Xi that will be discussed in more details in other articles in this special issue. More relevant to the discussion here is that Xi's diplomatic initiatives are not just policy-oriented but conceptual and constructive-oriented. Xi is particularly fond of enhancing China's discourse power in international relations which has long been dominated by Western concepts and theories of international relations. From 'China dream' 'community of common destiny of mankind' to 'new type of major country relations' to 'win-win cooperation', Xi Jinping is determined to inject Chinese concepts and ideas into the narratives of world affairs. Xi has been especially energetic in selling his new concepts and discourse to the world. For example, it is said that wherever he goes he never forgets to talk about the concept of 'community of shared destiny for mankind'.²⁴ Chinese official media outlet takes particular pride when such a discourse is accepted by the international community such as the UN Security Council resolutions.²⁵ The most recent progress is that the term found its way in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Qingdao declaration.²⁶

To summarize, in multiple areas of international affairs, Xi Jinping's 'major country diplomacy' indicates that China has qualitatively departed from Deng Xiaoping's low profile and non-involvement approach to more comprehensively, systematically and actively not just participating in but also shaping international affairs as a power not at the peripheral but the center of the world stage. In doing so, he displayed a tendency to globalize and generalize his new discourse and policy initiatives. For example, both 'community of shared destiny' and 'one belt and one road' initially were proposed at the regional level, but very soon they have evolved into a sort of global and open-ended discourse.

Return of idealism

Besides keeping low profile, another hallmark of Deng Xiaoping's diplomacy is pragmatism based on his famous political philosophy that 'it doesn't matter whether a cat is a white or black, as long

²⁰Wang Jisi, 'China's search for a grand strategy, a rising power finds its way,' *Foreign Affairs* 90(2), (2011), pp. 71–73.

²¹Wu Jianmin: 'TGYH' should continue for 100 years,' *SinovisionNet*, 19 June 2016, accessed 11 August 2017, <http://blogger.sinovision.net/home/space/do/blog/uid/3453/id/289291.html>.

²²The word of 'yinling' has appeared more and more frequently in the vocabulary of Chinese foreign policy discourse. Although 'yinling' is not exactly the same as 'lingdao,' it is difficult to differentiate in English, both mean 'leading.'

²³Chinese president Xi Jinping's new year speech 4 January 2016, 2016, *China.org.cn*, accessed 10 August 2017, http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/2016-01/04/content_37452232.htm.

²⁴Understanding major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristic,' 12 March 2016, *China.com*, accessed 10 August 2017, http://news.china.com/2016lh/news/11176754/20160312/21870663_all.html.

²⁵'Constructing community of common destiny for mankind' was written into the UN Security Council resolutions for the first time,' 2 November 2017, *Guancha.com.cn*, accessed 22 February 2018, http://www.guancha.cn/Third-World/2017_11_02_433313.shtml.

²⁶*Xinhua*, "Qingdao Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of Shanghai Cooperation Organization," accessed 1 July 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2018-06/11/c_1122964988.htm.

as it catches mice'. As a result, value and morality do not have much place in Deng's foreign policy thinking. Chinese foreign policy under Deng is mainly about China, not about the world. The main task of Chinese diplomacy is to create a peaceful environment for China's economic modernization, not necessarily to make the world better. Narrowly defined Chinese national interest, rather than universal value and moral standard, is the guiding principle of Chinese foreign policy under Deng and his successors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. Consequently, Chinese foreign policy was often described as 'hard-core realism' and 'hard-core mercantilism'.

In this respect, Xi Jinping also diverged from his predecessors. Once again, he is committed to introducing idealistic and moralistic elements into China's diplomacy. The underlying assumption for this push is that a big country or major power cannot just pursue interest but also justice. From the very beginning, Xi's foreign policy articulation is colored by his idealistic and moralistic impulse. Soon after he took power, Xi Jinping introduced the phrase 'Chinese dream' to mobilize the public support for his political course and to aspire the Chinese people. According to him, the greatest Chinese dream is the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. More concretely and in foreseeable future, Chinese dream is about the realization of two centennial goals of finishing building a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the centenary of the CPC in 2021 and of turning China into a modern socialist country that is rich, strong, democratic, civilized and harmonious by the centenary of the PRC in 2049.²⁷

Originally targeted at the domestic audience, 'Chinese dream' soon found its way in China's diplomatic discourse. Rather than portraying it as a narrowly defined concept just for the interest of China, Xi used the slogan as a means to convey the common aspiration between China and other countries and the benign intentions of China as a rapidly rising power. In a speech delivered in Paris to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of China-French diplomatic relations in 2014, in addition to mentioning the domestic context of the Chinese dream such as the renewal of the Chinese nation and the quest for happiness, he also emphasized the international connotation of the Chinese dream including the pursuit of peace and making contribution to the common good of the world declaring an awaken sleeping China lion is a 'peaceful, amicable and civilized one'.²⁸ He also drew a parallel between the Chinese dream and the French dream which offer opportunities to each other. The similar lines of narrative have been repeated by Xi in other countries when discussing the concept.

Still the Chinese dream is largely about the aspiration of Chinese people and does not answer the question about what kind of the world China would like to strive for. In the past, Chinese foreign policy was often criticized as strong in opposing others' world vision without offering much of its own. Xi realized that as a superpower in the making, China needs to offer its vision of the future world. Here came the concept of 'community of shared (common) destiny for mankind'. The idea of a community, of course, is not new in the discourse of international relations. Some Chinese pundits also long desired to build a kind of community among nation states. Zheng Bijian, a leading strategic scholar who came up with the theory of China's peaceful rise, for example, once suggested to Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski that China and the USA should enlarge the converging points of interest to establish a community of common interests in foreseeing the future of Sino-American relations.²⁹ The concept of community of common destiny for mankind was not first coined by Xi Jinping either. As early as 2007, Chinese official media *People's Daily* used the term to discuss the APEC meeting. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao mentioned the term when talking about the natural disasters during his visit to Japan. The 18th Party Congress report in 2012

²⁷Xi Jinping, 'Speech at "The Road to Rejuvenation,"' 29 November 2012, *China Copyright and Media*, accessed 14 August 2017, <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2012/11/29/speech-at-the-road-to-rejuvenation/>.

²⁸Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 'Speech by H.E. Mr. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at the meeting commemorating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of China-France diplomatic relations,' 27 March 2014, accessed 11 August 2017, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zjh_665391/t1147894.shtml.

²⁹Wu Jianmin, *Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics and 'One Belt One Road'*, (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2016), pp. 13–14.

adopted this term by saying that China should 'raise awareness of about human beings sharing a community of common destiny'.³⁰ But the concept was just mentioned in passing with no further elaboration. It was Xi Jinping who attached unprecedented significance to the concept and began to more consciously apply and articulate it to represent his worldview.

Xi Jinping first used the term 'community of common destiny' in his first meeting with foreign guests in December 2012 after he was just elected general secretary of CPC at the 18th party congress.³¹ He then applied it again in his speech to the students of Moscow College of International Relations in March 2013.³² Since then he began to advocate this concept tirelessly at most important international conferences. In a keynote speech at Boao Forum for Asia in 2015, he promoted the community of common destiny in Asia, but a community of common interest for all mankind.³³ This is a very interesting differentiation. Maybe at that time he still considered that the world is too diversified to establish a community of common destiny while it is more plausible to strive for such a community at the regional level. In the same speech, he called for China and ASEAN countries to join hands in building a China-ASEAN community of common destiny. But as alluded to earlier, very soon the scope of this concept was expanded to reach the global level. In his first speech at the United Nations as Chinese president in September of the same year, he applied the concept of community of common destiny for mankind.³⁴ But for reasons unknown, the English version of this concept turned out to be 'community of shared future for mankind'. It can be argued that 'common destiny' and 'shared future' do exhibit a difference of degree if not a difference of kind. Again, it could be reasonably speculated that the translation has the effect to water down the term to make it more acceptable to the international community.

Xi understands that if the concept of community of common destiny or shared future remains empty and abstract, it will soon be forgotten just like Hu Jintao's 'humongous world'. In his following speeches and remarks, Xi Jinping has made painstaking efforts to substantiate the concept. In his most recent keynote address at a high-level dialogue with world political parties, he declared that the 19th Party Congress 'reaffirmed China's genuine desire to work together with the rest of the world to build a community with a shared future for mankind (CSFM)'. He further clarified that the term means 'the destiny and future of each and every nation and country are interlocked'. More specifically he elaborated that this CSFM means a world of universal security free from fear, a world of common prosperity free from poverty, an open and inclusive world free from isolation and a green, clean and beautiful world.³⁵ Although the articulation still sounds too good to be true, it nevertheless represents China's global vision of what kind of world it intends to strive for. It indicates that after several decades of pragmatic diplomacy largely focusing on China's own interest and well-being, Chinese diplomacy once again began to view China's relations with rest of the world from the perspective of mankind. As Yang Jiechi put it, the vision reflects Xi Jinping's 'strong sense of historical mission', and 'a keen sense of responsibility for the whole mankind'.

³⁰Wen Jiabao mentioned community of common destiny for mankind for the first time, 16 January 2017, *DWNEWS.COM*, accessed 22 February 2018, <http://culture.dwnews.com/history/news/2017-01-16/59794648.html>; *Xinhua*, 'Full text of Hu Jintao's report at 18th Party Congress,' November 19, 2012, accessed 11 August 2017, <http://en.people.cn/90785/8024777.html>.

³¹Nan Xishi, 'Xi Jinping and foreign experts: General Secretary Xi's first activity of foreign affairs,' *American TESOL Institute*, accessed 25 February 2018, http://tesolsh.com/m/news_content.asp?id=1593.

³²*Xinhua*, 'Xi Jinping's speech at Moscow College of International Relations,' 24 March 2013, accessed 15 August 2017, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/0324/c1024-20892661.html>.

³³*Xinhua*, 'Towards a community of common destiny and a new future for Asia,' keynote speech by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 28 March 2015, 2015, accessed August 12, 2017, http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/2015-03/31/content_35201394.htm.

³⁴Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 'Working together to forge a new partnership of win-win cooperation and create a community of shared future for mankind,' statement by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China at the general debate of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, 28 September 2015, accessed 12 August 2017, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zjyh_665391/t1305051.shtml.

³⁵'Working together to build a better world,' keynote address by H.E. Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and President of the People's Republic of China at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting, Beijing, 1 December 2017, *People's Daily*, 2 December 2017, p. 02.

Bearing in mind the responsibility of the leader of a major country, Xi 'has reflected deeply on the critical issue of what kind of a world we should build and how to build it, an issue that concerns the future of mankind'.³⁶ Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi also takes the building of 'CSFM' as the overarching goal for Xi Jinping's 'major country diplomacy'. He declared that this concept puts Chinese diplomacy on a high moral ground.³⁷ In short, 'CSFM' has become the 'symbolic icon' of Xi's diplomacy.³⁸

While the CSFM is an idealistic vision for the future, to move the world closer to such a destiny, it needs first to establish 'new type of international relations' underlined by some new universal norms. Among other things, Xi Jinping and his associates trumped the norm of win-win cooperation as another pillar for his major country diplomacy. This is considered the core value for the 'new type of international relations' that Xi Jinping has been advocating. It is also a new addition to the evolution of Chinese understanding of the current time.³⁹ This norm is aimed at countering the perceived traditional Western norms underlying international relations such as zero-sum game, winner takes all, seeking absolute security and going beyond the traditional Western international relations theories. It is the 'comprehensive generalization' of various initiative and proposals that China put forward in recent years.⁴⁰ Xi in his various speeches emphasized the importance of pursuing win-win cooperation to promote a new type of international relations indicating that this norm should be applied to every aspect of China's diplomacy such as political, economic, security and cultural fields.⁴¹ He categorically rejected 'the law of the jungle where the strong prey on the weak' and the pursuit to 'establish China's own sphere of influence'.⁴² It is on these grounds Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi claimed that Xi's thought on diplomacy transcended the Western theories of international relations for the past 300 years.

Related to the new norms and values for the new type of international relations, Xi has also tried to reintroduce morality into China's diplomacy. He advocated the so-called new concept of morality and interest in Chinese diplomacy, particularly in its relations with developing and neighboring countries. While China should emphasize both morality and interest in its dealing with developing countries, it should put morality before interest when necessary.⁴³ China should champion and uphold justice in international relations, acting in good faith and valuing friendship.⁴⁴ As he put it, 'We have always aspired to create a better world in which "a just cause is pursued for the common good"'.⁴⁵ He argued that justice is the faith of the Chinese communists and Chinese nation. It is not a good thing that some people live well in this world, while others do not. The true happiness is the shared and common happiness. Therefore, China hopes that the world can develop together. To realize that, China has the duties to assist developing countries. Sometimes China should sacrifice interest for justice. China should never

³⁶Yang Jiechi, 'Study and implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy in deep-going way and keep writing new chapters of major country diplomacy with distinctive Chinese features.'

³⁷Wang Yi, 'Practising the concept of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.'

³⁸*Xinhua*, 'Community of common destiny and Xi Jinping's realm of "harmony,"' 17 August 2016, accessed 15 August 2017, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-08/17/c_1119401010.htm.

³⁹The keywords to understanding the world trends during Deng Xiaoping's era is 'peace' and 'development.' Then Hu Jintao added 'cooperation.' Finally, Xi Jinping put 'win-win' to the expression. Wu Jianmin, 'Major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics and "one belt one road."'

⁴⁰Wang Yi, 'Practicing the concept of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.'

⁴¹Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'The central conference on work relating to foreign affairs was held in Beijing.'

⁴²Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 'Keynote speech by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the opening ceremony of the B20 summit,' 3 September 2016, accessed 25 February 2018, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zjyh_665391/t1396112.shtml; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 'Full text of President Xi' speech at opening ceremony of BRICS Business Forum,' 4 September 2017, accessed October 30, 2017, https://www.brics2017.org/English/Headlines/201709/t20170904_1887.html.

⁴³Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 'Exploring the path of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics,' remarks by foreign minister Wang Yi at the Luncheon of the Second World Peace Forum, 27 June 2013, accessed 20 August 2017. http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjwb_663304/wjzb_663308/2461_663310/t1053908.shtml.

⁴⁴Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'The central conference on work relating to foreign affairs was held in Beijing.'

⁴⁵'Working together to build a better world,' *People's Daily*.

work exclusively for interest and haggle over every penny in diplomacy.⁴⁶ This moralistic dimension of Xi's thought is considered a value orientation for his major country diplomacy. This so-called right approach to justice and interest is said to become a banner to highlight China's soft power.⁴⁷ Xi Jinping sometimes also reveals his personal passionate side towards world affairs: 'Seeing the people trapped deep in suffering and war, we should have compassion and sympathy, but also take responsibilities and action'.⁴⁸

In his speeches and remarks to the international community, Xi Jinping often tried to cite 'touching examples' of China's win-win cooperation with other countries as well as the right balance between morality and interest. His signature Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is often portrayed in such a way. BRI is probably the most far-reaching and consequential diplomatic initiative launched by Xi Jinping. According to him, it is the significant move to bring about a community with a shared future for mankind⁴⁹ and a playground to practice the win-win cooperation. As he stressed, this initiative was originated from China but belongs to the whole world.⁵⁰ The purpose of the Belt and Road construction is to take China's development as an opportunity to allow more countries to take a ride of China's fast train of development and to help them to realize their own development goals. He requests that during the process of constructing the Belt and Road, while developing its own interest, China should also give more consideration to and take good care of other countries' interests. China should find a good balance between justice and interest putting justice before interest. In doing so, China should avoid the instinct to seek quick success and instant benefits and hence short-term behavior.⁵¹ Moreover, Xi made it very clear that the purpose of the BRI is not for the geopolitical maneuvering, but for creating a new model of win-win cooperation.⁵² In short, according to Xi, the BRI 'has developed into an open and inclusive platform of international cooperation and a widely welcomed public good for the global community'.⁵³

As mentioned earlier, Xi Jinping's efforts to provide an idealistic vision of the future world and to create some new universal norms and moral standards should be understood in the context of offering some alternatives to the Western visions and norms. Recognizing that it will be difficult to offer more appealing universal values in domestic governance given the limitation of the Chinese political system, Xi initially saw more opportunities to shape values and norms governing relations among nations. That probably can partially explain why Xi has devoted so much of his attention to his diplomatic thought during his first term. But even with regard to the domestic governance, Xi has become more confident lately in light of the political chaos in some Western countries including the USA and failures of the so-called color revolution in some Middle Eastern and African countries. As his chief diplomat, Yang Jiechi put it, 'The Chinese Communists and Chinese people are fully confident of offering Chinese input to human exploration of better social systems'.⁵⁴ This growing confidence reached a peak at the 19th Party Congress when Xi declared in his report that socialism with Chinese characteristics 'offers a new option for other countries and

⁴⁶Wang Yi 'Upholding the correct view on justice and interest and actively playing roles as a responsible major country,' *People.cn*, 10 September 2013, accessed 15 August 2017, <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n/2013/0910/c1003-22862978.html>.

⁴⁷Wang Yi, 'Practicing the concept of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.' h.

⁴⁸Chinese president Xi Jinping's new year speech 4 January 2016, 2016, *China.org.cn*, accessed 10 August 2017, http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/2016-01/04/content_37452232.htm.

⁴⁹'Working together to build a better world,' *People's Daily*.

⁵⁰" President Xi chairs leaders' roundtable summit of B & R forum," 15 May 2017, *en.people.cn*, accessed 27 May 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/0515/c90000-9215661.html>.

⁵¹*Xinhua*, 'Xi Jinping chaired the 31st collective study session of the CPC political bureau,' 30 April 2016, accessed 22 August 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-04/30/c_1118778656.htm.

⁵²*Xinhua*, 'Full text of President Xi's speech at opening of Belt and Road forum' 14 May 2017, accessed 22 August 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm.

⁵³Yang Jiechi, 'Study and implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy in deep-going way and keep writing new chapters of major country diplomacy with distinctive Chinese features.'

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence, and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind'.⁵⁵

Interestingly, however, for the most part the theoretical foundation for Xi Jinping's global idealism is not communist or socialist ideology, but Western liberalism. One important rationale for his vision of a community of common/shared destiny for mankind is the deepening interdependence among nation states. According to him, China's dependence on the world and its involvement in international affairs are deepening as are the world's dependence on China and its impact on China.⁵⁶ An unprecedented degree of interdependence makes the world increasingly a community of common interest and common destiny.⁵⁷ In addition, the rapid development of the Internet, big data, cloud computing, quantum satellite and artificial intelligence has made human beings connected as never before. As a result, the destiny and future of all countries across the world are increasingly intertwined.⁵⁸ All these make the course of win-win cooperation a necessity for nation states. The logic is simple: the more interdependent and connected nation states are, the more common interest and destiny they will share, and the more they need to cooperate with each other. Indeed, one important purpose of Xi Jinping's BRI is to further increase the connectivity among nation states. It is all-inclusive and not targeted at any particular country⁵⁹—if successful certainly a very important step towards the community of common destiny or share future.

Xi Jinping's embrace of economic liberalism which values interconnectivity, interdependence and integration is further demonstrated by his passionate endorsement of globalization which is largely responsible for interdependence. In his high-profile keynote speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2017,⁶⁰ he strongly defended economic globalization by saying that many problems troubling the world are not caused by economic globalization. Just blaming economic globalization for the world's problems is inconsistent with reality, and it will not help solve the problems. While economic globalization does create some new problems such as unequal distribution of economic benefits within and between countries, it promoted economic growth, facilitated movement of goods and capital and advances in science, technology and civilization, and interaction among peoples. More importantly, economic globalization is not something created by any individuals or countries. Rather it is a historical trend, that the international community needs to adapt to. He boasted that China made a right strategic choice to integrate into economic globalization. Xi Jinping firmly believes that whether one likes it or not, the process of economic globalization cannot be reversed and will continue. What countries can do is not to stop economic globalization but to make it more inclusive and solve the problem of fairness and justice.⁶¹ In this process of re-globalization or globalization 2.0, China should and could play a 'leading role' to make it a 'more open, inclusive and balanced process that delivers win-win outcomes to all'.⁶²

⁵⁵Xi Jinping, 'Secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and strive for the great success of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era,' delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, p. 9.

⁵⁶The central conference on work relating to foreign affairs was held in Beijing,' 29 November 2014, accessed 11 August 2017, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml.

⁵⁷*Xinhua*, 'Xi Jinping's speech at Moscow College of International Relations,' 24 March 2013, accessed 20 August 2017, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/0324/c1024-20892661.html>; *Xinhua*, 'Xi Jinping spoke at the British Parliament,' 21 October 2015, accessed 20 August 2017, http://www.guancha.cn/politics/2015_10_21_338274.shtml.

⁵⁸'Working together to build a better world,' *People's Daily*.

⁵⁹Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 'Xi Jinping's opening remarks at the Belt and Road forum,' 15 May 2017, accessed 16 August 2017, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/zyxw/t1461700.shtml>.

⁶⁰'Full text of Xi Jinping's keynote at the World Economic Forum,' 17 January 2017, *CGTN*, accessed 10 August 2017, <https://america.cgtn.com/2017/01/17/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum>.

⁶¹*Xinhua*, 'Xi Jinping's speech at the 24th informal leadership meeting of APEC,' 20 November 2016, accessed 16 August 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2016-11/21/c_1119953815.htm.

⁶²Yang Jiechi, 'Study and implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy in deep-going way and keep writing new chapters of major country diplomacy with distinctive Chinese features.'

Stick with realism

Incorporating idealism and liberalism into his major country diplomacy, however, does not mean Xi Jinping is ready to modify or abandon realism in managing China's security relations with the outside world. Economic liberalism and security realism could co-exist in Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy although sometimes they do clash with each other. It is widely believed in the international community that Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping has become more assertive and aggressive, another less soothing manifestation of discarding Deng Xiaoping's *TGYH* diplomacy. There is some truth in it and Xi Jinping's thinking on security issues could lead to more hardline policies in Chinese diplomacy.

First of all, in recent years, China has displayed a tendency to expand its definition of national interest, particularly the so-called core national interest. The term used to be reserved only to Taiwan. But during the Hu Jintao era, he and his chief foreign policy advisor Dai Bingguo came up with a much broad and general definition of core national interest: China's diplomacy must safeguard the interests of Chinese sovereignty, security and development.⁶³ However, including a specific foreign policy issue in the category of core national interest is always a sensitive matter. For example, the Obama administration's return to Asia strategy was in no small part prompted by the reported Chinese attempt to define the South China Sea as China's core national interest in 2010. Some Chinese scholars dismissed such comments as reckless and unauthorized at that time.⁶⁴ Yet it became clearer under the Xi Jinping government that the South China Sea does fall into China's core interest. State Councilor Yang Jiechi in his article on Xi Jinping's diplomatic thought stated: 'Since the 18th Party Congress, we have particularly staked out our positions on Taiwan, the South China Sea and other issues concerning China's major core interests.'⁶⁵ This is the most explicit statement so far that the South China Sea and related maritime interest and rights are China's core national interest. As soon as an issue is defined as a core national interest, it often implies that the Chinese government has little room to compromise and more forceful actions could be justified in case the core interest is violated. That could well explain China's more forceful behavior on the South China Sea exemplified by the large-scale land reclamation.

The more expansive and explicit definition of China's national interest during the Xi Jinping era is also related to another aspect of his new way of thinking on diplomacy. That is the so-called bottom-line thinking. Xi first mentioned this idea at an important meeting in early 2013. Then he repeatedly mentioned it dozen times in various public speeches and articles. According to him, policymakers 'should be good at using the bottom-line thinking, everything from the bad preparation, and strive for the best results, so that prepared, failing to panic, firmly grasp the initiative.'⁶⁶ When it comes to applying this concept to the perceived core national interest, it means China should draw some red lines that should be crossed under no circumstances. As Yang Jiechi put it, since the 18th Party Congress, 'We have drawn a clear line of what is unacceptable, and acted forcefully to defend our core interests as well as legitimate rights.'⁶⁷ Another implication for the bottom-line thinking is Xi's reinterpretation of China's peaceful development or peaceful rise. This is the constant theme of China's self-image making to the international community since the Hu Jintao period. With China's security environment deteriorating until recently, the Chinese foreign policy community engaged in a debate about whether China could rise peacefully even if it tries very hard. Xi Jinping took the issue head-on. At a study session of the Communist Party of China

⁶³State Councilor Dai Bingguo: adhere to the path of peaceful development,' 6 December 2010, *The Central People's Government of PRC*, accessed 27 May 2018, http://www.gov.cn/lhdh/2010-12/06/content_1760381.htm.

⁶⁴Wang Jisi, 'China's search for a grand strategy, a rising power finds its way,' *Foreign Affairs*, 90(2), (2011), p. 71.

⁶⁵Yang Jiechi, 'Study and implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy in deep-going way and keep writing new chapters of major country diplomacy with distinctive Chinese features.'

⁶⁶Xi Jinping on the governance of China, keywords (51): bottom-line,' 13 February 2017, www.cpcnews.cn, accessed 16 August 2017, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0213/c64094-29075534.html>.

⁶⁷Yang Jiechi, 'Study and implement General Secretary Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy in deep-going way and keep writing new chapters of major country diplomacy with distinctive Chinese features.'

(CPC) political bureau Xi declared that while China will stick with the path of peaceful development, other countries should do the same. Only when all countries pursue a path of peaceful development can they jointly develop and enjoy peaceful coexistence.⁶⁸ His remarks were considered drawing a ‘principle bottom line’ for China’s peaceful development.⁶⁹ In other words, China’s peaceful development is not unconditional and is contingent upon what other countries’ behavior is implying that there is a possibility for an unpeaceful rise if other countries pursue unpeaceful policies towards China. This could also be seen as a response to the widely held perception that China’s international behavior under Xi has become more assertive and less peaceful since China’s tougher action could well be a response to the external hostile stimuli. It is from such a logic of thinking that Xi declared on various occasions that while China will keep its peaceful development, it will never relinquish its legitimate rights and interests, or allow China’s core interests to be undermined.⁷⁰ ‘No country should presume that we will engage in trade involving our core interests or that we will swallow the “bitter fruit” of harming our sovereignty, security or development interests.’⁷¹ In his 2017 New Year speech he reiterated that ‘we have adhered to the peaceful development while resolutely safeguarding the territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests of China. We will never tolerate any act that undermines our territorial sovereignty and maritime rights.’⁷² This, in Xi’s mind, is the minimum that China should uphold as a major country. This bottom-line thinking on sovereignty and territorial integrity can also explain the rationale behind his enhanced campaign to build a strong and more lethal military force since he came to power.

The bottom-line thinking is also reflected in his handling of Taiwan issue since he came to power. He could go extra miles to hold a historic meeting with the Taiwan leader Ma Ying-jeou even when Ma was already a lame duck. But when current Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen failed to recognize the 1992 consensus—the bottom-line, Xi showed little flexibility warning Tsai that undermining the political foundation of cross-strait relations could lead to ‘earth moving and mountain shaking’. It was also reported that Xi is losing patience on the Taiwan issue and has the intention to settle the issue when he is in power as he said reportedly, ‘Taiwan issue has to be settled eventually and cannot be postponed one generation after generation.’⁷³ At the 19th Party Congress, Xi Jinping used unprecedented eight ‘any’ to highlight his strong determination to stop Taiwan independence: ‘Any separatist activity is certain to meet with the resolute opposition of the Chinese people. We have the resolve, the confidence, and the ability to defeat separatist attempts for “Taiwan independence” in any form. We will never allow anyone, any organization, or any political party, at any time or in any form, to separate any part of Chinese territory from China.’⁷⁴ For Xi, without solving this issue, China cannot be considered a qualified major power and China’s rise is an unfinished business.

On the other hand, while the bottom-line thinking could occasionally lead to bellicose Chinese behavior on security issues, it could also mean that Xi Jinping has no intention to pursue unlimited offensive realism to maximize China’s national interest and to establish a sphere of influence in the region as John Mearsheimer stipulated.⁷⁵ What he wants to do mostly is to hold the bottom line. Xi certainly has no plan to systematically change the status quo in East Asia in general and in the South China Sea in

⁶⁸Xinhua, ‘Xi vows peaceful development while not waiving legitimate rights,’ 29 January 2013, accessed 10 August 2017, <http://en.people.cn/90785/8113230.html>.

⁶⁹Xinhua, ‘Xi Jinping indicates the principle bottom line of China’s peaceful development,’ 30 January 2013, accessed 12 August 2017, <http://au.china-embassy.org/chn//gdwx/t1009631.htm>.

⁷⁰The central conference on work relating to foreign affairs was held in Beijing,’ Ibid.

⁷¹Xinhua, ‘Xi vows peaceful development while not waiving legitimate rights.’

⁷²Xinhua, ‘Chinese president Xi Jinping delivers 2017 new year message,’ 31 December 2017, accessed 10 August 2017, <http://gbtimes.com/china/chinese-president-xi-jinping-delivers-2017-new-year-message>.

⁷³Voice of America, ‘Xi reviews the troops and settles Taiwan issue in his term,’ 31 July 2017, accessed 11 August 2017, <https://www.voachinese.com/a/strait-talk-jinping-xi-taiwan-20170730/3965081.html>.

⁷⁴Xi Jinping’s work report to the 19th Party Congress, 18 October 2017.

⁷⁵John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001).

particular. The immediate goal of China is to hold the current line and improve China's position from being unfavorable to favorable. Xi is also willing to make adjustments when facing pushing back and backlash. For example, China declared Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in East China Sea in 2013 but did not really enforce it. Facing possible negative reactions from the region, China so far has not declared widely anticipated ADIZ in the South China Sea. Beijing has largely muted in reacting to the more frequent U.S. FONOP operations in the South China Sea. In most cases, what China exercised is still 'reactive assertiveness' rather than 'offensive realism'.

This 'limited assertiveness' or 'calculated assertiveness' is related to another basic component of Xi Jinping's worldview. As much as closely related, connected and interdependent as nation states are with each other, power is still the dominant factor in world politics. While China has become much more powerful than before, it is still not able to get all what it wants and therefore China must pick and choose the battles. This also applies to China's participation in global governance. As Xi put it, the global governance structures depend on the international balance of power and reforms hinge on a change in the balance.⁷⁶ While China is now powerful enough to demand more say in global governance, it is still not in a position to overhaul the existing international system and to systematically change the status quo. China needs to seek more space within the current international order.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Since he came to power, Xi Jinping has worked diligently to develop his own system of thinking on foreign policy. His thought on diplomacy is a complex system and it is difficult to grasp it with a simplistic label. From the above analysis, one can find various idealistic, liberal and realist elements in his thinking. In this respect, Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy resembles more a major power. John Ikenberry argued when discussing the US grand strategy in East Asia that the US strategy is building 'around American power, interests and ideals'. American strategy should not be 'seen simply as a geopolitical strategy of hegemony or balance of power'. 'Rather, it is infused with distinctive American ideas about order, identity, and community. It is a synthesis of realist and liberal thinking.'⁷⁸ Without much modification, his diagnosis can also be used to describe Xi's diplomatic thinking. It can be further inferred that the more conscious synthesis of idealism and realism is also an indicator of major power diplomacy.

Xi's thought on foreign policy is most typically reflected in his concept of 'major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics'. Given his assessment of China's enhanced power position in the international system, Xi Jinping concluded that it is time for China to behave like a major country (power) in all dimensions of international affairs: constructing more norms and discourse, making more initiatives, taking more responsibilities, exercising more influence and providing more public goods. To put it differently, China should behave more likely a major power rather than an ordinary country. In this sense, Xi's major country diplomacy is a clear departure from his predecessors' low profile and largely reactive diplomacy and therefore could be considered a paradigm shift. The debate about 'TGYH' is pretty much over. Xi Jinping's more than five years in office has witnessed the most impressive expansion in Chinese diplomacy in terms of discourse, interests, scope and domains. As Xi put it, 'We have seen a further rise in China's international influence, ability to inspire, and the ability to shape'.⁷⁹ So much so that some Chinese scholars already began to worry about China's diplomatic 'overstretch' or 'overdraft'.⁸⁰ Even hardcore realist scholars such as Yang Xuetong who long advocated more confrontational approach in dealing with hegemonic power such as the USA warned about China's

⁷⁶Xinhua, 'Xi calls for reforms on global governance,' 26 September 2016, accessed 12 August 2017, http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-09/29/content_26931699.htm.

⁷⁷Wang Yi, 'Practicing the idea of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.'

⁷⁸G. John Ikenberry, 'From hegemony to the balance of power: the rise of China and American grand strategy of East Asia,' *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies* 23(2), (2014), p. 43.

⁷⁹Xi Jinping's work report to the 19th Party Congress.

⁸⁰Lianhe Zaobao, "Professor Shi Yinhong: the risk of China's 'strategic overdraft' has been increasing", 21 September 2016, accessed on 8 August 2017, <https://www.zaobao.com/znews/greater-china/story20160921-668655>.

'premature diplomatic advances'.⁸¹ Just a few years ago he declared that China would soon become a superpower on par with the USA and a new bipolar world has been emerging.⁸² But now he argues that China's power has not reached to the level of the USA yet and therefore should not pursue a foreign policy of superpower at a global level. At most China is just a 'regional superpower'. It cannot be said that Xi Jinping is not aware of the risk of excessive diplomatic expansion. He once warned that while China should actively participate in global governance and take more international responsibilities, China should not 'overreach ourselves'.⁸³ But often in practice he seemed to be overwhelmed by the momentum created by his impulse and eagerness for national greatness. The Belt and Road initiative is a typical case to the point. Initially a reasonable and sensible regional initiative, with much fanfare and over sale, it now runs the risk of turning into an unlimited and boundless global campaign with uncertain strategic and economic return.

Xi Jinping's major country diplomacy theory also attempts to surpass the traditional Western international relations theory and to falsify the Western prediction about the so-called Thucydides Trap: the inevitable conflict between a rising power and an existing dominant power. To avoid this historical foreordination Xi asserts that mankind needs to make a choice between two options. One is vicious competition or even armed conflict for power and self-interest leading to disastrous crisis and the other is to go along with the tide of the times and rise to challenges through global collaborations thus creating favorable conditions for building a community with a shared future for mankind.⁸⁴ Xi intends to convince the world that China has definitely made up its mind for the latter, it is a rising power of a different kind in pursuing its foreign policy goals compared to historical and current major powers and could help foster a new paradigm of international relations which is characterized by connectivity, interdependence, win-win cooperation, equality and common destiny. This paradigm shift, however, while maybe winning China some normative power in world public opinion, has turned out to be more complicated and difficult to accomplish and could be hampered by multiple factors in reality.

First of all, in pursuing his 'major country diplomacy', Xi Jinping tends to be more innovative on economic and other functional issues than on security issues. Indeed, one can argue that his mindset on traditional security issues is still quite old-fashioned and constrained by the Westphalia norms. On issues like sovereignty and territorial integrity, Xi displayed little new thinking. If anything, he just turned out to be more resolute and assertive in defending China's perceived core national interest due to his understanding of China's significantly enhanced national power. The uncomfortable co-existence of political idealism, economic liberalism and security realism in his thinking sometimes offset rather than reinforce each other.

Secondly, Xi Jinping and his lieutenants' tendency to present his idealistic vision, norms and discourse of future world order as an alternative to the Western-centered current international order could cause alarm in the Western world leading to unintended tensions. As indicated in his report at the 19th party congress, Xi seems to think that China could offer the world, not just a new vision of world order as exemplified by his concept of 'the community with shared future for mankind' but also an alternative pathway of economic and political development for non-Western countries as exemplified by the 'socialism with Chinese characteristics'. By the same token Chinese media and pundits tend to describe Xi's vision of 'community with shared future for mankind' as the opposite to Trump's self-centered 'America First' policy and portrait a fragmented world characterized by 'a tug of war' between the 'two fundamentally different outlooks'.⁸⁵ This was perceived by Western analysts as China's efforts to deliver a clear and strong message about global

⁸¹Yan Xuetong, 'Diplomatic transformation, priority of interest, and the rise of major power.'

⁸²Yan Xuetong: the world will see the emergence of two superpower of China and United States by 2023,' 12 November 2013, *sino.com.cn*, accessed on 18 August 2017, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2013-11-12/103128687267.shtml>.

⁸³*Xinhua*, 'Xi calls for reforms on global governance.'

⁸⁴'Working together to build a better world,' *People's Daily*.

⁸⁵Deng Yushan and Shang Jun, 'Commentary: shared future or America first,' *Xinhua*, 24 January 2018, accessed 25 February 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/24/c_136921547.htm.

leadership: it's either China or the USA.⁸⁶ This could also partially explain why the recently released US national security strategy defines the competition between the USA and China as 'a geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order'.⁸⁷

Thirdly, while win-win cooperation is a noble idea, it still falls short to resolve the acute issue of relative gain in international relations. As IR scholars long pointed out, in a competitive world, countries care more about relative gain rather than absolute gain.⁸⁸ That is why international cooperation among nation-states could be limited and a win-win situation is hard to achieve. Donald Trump is unhappy with US-China trade relations not because it has not brought benefits to the USA but rather because he was convinced that China has gained much more from it than the US does. More importantly, although Xi Jinping demands that the win-win approach should be applied to all fields of international relations, in fact, it is often more difficult to do so in security domains as issues such as territorial and maritime disputes tend to be zero-sum in nature: one country's gain often means another's loss. While a win-win situation is not impossible to create such as joint exploration and development of maritime resources, it certainly requires greater persuasion, bargaining and even unilateral concessions. Simply calling for a win-win solution is not sufficient and could sound a bit shallow.

Fourthly, there is still a perceptual gap on China's strategic intention behind many of its new concepts and initiatives between China and the receiving countries leading to suspicions. For example, Xi Jinping repeatedly told foreign audiences that the Belt and Road initiative is purely an economic scheme focusing on infrastructure and connectivity. It is not about geopolitical maneuverings. It is not designed to 'invent the wheel, but complement strategies of countries involved by leveraging their comprehensive strategies'.⁸⁹ Beijing even refrained from using the word 'strategy' to define BRI, but stick with the word 'initiative'. Yet few political elites in Southeast Asian countries, for example, would believe for a second that there is no geopolitical consideration behind it.

Finally, people sometimes also perceive gaps between China's words on different occasions and between China's words and deeds. For instance, Xi Jinping vows solemnly that China does not want to 'export' the Chinese model and will not ask other countries to copy the Chinese practice.⁹⁰ Yet at the same time, he confidently proclaimed that the Chinese model has become 'a new option' for other nations. With regard to the Chinese international behavior, as early as in the 1950s when China was still very weak, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai already warned the possible 'big country chauvinism' in Chinese diplomacy. Today China is marching from a 'big country' to a 'strong country', how to avoid arrogance and cockiness in Chinese diplomacy could be even more challenging. Yang Jiechi's blunt reminder of ASEAN countries that 'China is a big country'⁹¹ is still vividly remembered by many in the region. The more recent episode of the perceived Chinese highhandedness in dealing with Singapore due to its position on the South China Sea also raised concerns among some ASEAN elites about how comfortable it could be to live under a possible new regional order dominated by China.

China has long claimed that when it rises, it will behave differently from traditional major powers in history. Although few in the West and the region want to bet on it, it is still laudable for Xi Jinping to set a higher bar for China's international behavior and offer an idealistic vision for the

⁸⁶Michael Kovrig, 'The future is now for China's challenges and Xi Jinping's ambitions,' *South China Morning Post*, 26 November 2017, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2121510/opinion-future-now-chinas-challenges-and-xi-jinpings>.

⁸⁷White House, 'National Security Strategy of the United States of America,' December 2017, p. 45, accessed February 25, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

⁸⁸Joseph Grieco, 'Anarchy and the limits of cooperation: a realist critique of the newest liberal institutionalism,' *International Organization* 42(3), (1988), pp. 485–507; Robert Powell, 'Absolute and relative gains in international relations theory,' *The American Political Science Review* 85(4), (1991), pp. 1303–1320.

⁸⁹*Xinhua*, 'Full text of President Xi's speech at opening of Belt and Road forum' 14 May 2017, accessed 20 August 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm.

⁹⁰'Working together to build a better world,' *People's Daily*.

⁹¹John Pomfret, 'U.S. takes a tougher tone with China,' *Washington Post*, 30 July 2010, accessed 21 August 2017, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/29/AR2010072906416.html?noredirect=on>.

world order. In this second paradigm shift in Chinese diplomacy envisioned by Xi Jinping, however, the glass is still half full and half empty.

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