

# Constructing Peace-Oriented Power in Chinese Diplomacy

*Wu Xinbo*

Power exists in nature as well as in human society. Study on power in nature causes rise to modern physics, while study on power in human society (strength and power) gives birth to science of international politics. Study of natural power in physics focuses on three elements, that is, the magnitude, direction, and application point of power. The studies of international politics, however, mainly concern with the capacity and features of power (e.g. political power, economic power, military power, or hard and soft power, etc.) with seldom attention to the direction in which power is applied. Does this mean the application direction of strength or power is not important in international relations?

Of course not. When analyzing actors in international politics, we usually need to take into consideration their capabilities as well as their intentions since the latter determines how the actors shall utilize their capabilities, that is, the direction in which strength or power is applied. It also determines whether the actors will bring forth cooperation or cause conflicts, whether they would promote stability or weaken it, etc. The “peace-oriented power” we discuss in this article relates to the way strength or power is applied.

---

**Wu Xinbo** is Professor at Center for American Studies, Fudan University.

## **I. Historical Contexts for the Building of Peace-Oriented Power**

It is against the background of China's rise that the construction of China's "peace-oriented power" has been proposed. The rise of China, a country with a long history, vast territory, large population and significant geopolitical location and practicing socialism with Chinese characteristics, would surely produce significant and comprehensive impacts on the whole world and lead to historical changes in the international power structure and the existing world order. China needs to elaborate on two key questions in order to make the world understand precisely the impacts of its rise: one is how China is going to use its ever increasing comprehensive strength, and the other is how to construct a new world order. And the two questions are closely related to each other.

In the hitherto history of mankind, big countries or great powers have mainly used their power in three ways. First, ancient China emphasized the strength of "civilization" and sought to influence others through the spread its superior culture. Meanwhile, it constructed relations with the outside world in accordance with the latter's identification with and acceptance of the Chinese civilization, thus forming a specific regional order, namely, the so-called Sino-centric system and the tribute-paying system. As China and the world have undergone great changes by now, it is impossible for China to copy such a model today.

Second, in modern times, Western nations, after acquiring tremendous material strength through industrialization, began to abuse their "hard power" to engage in military expansion and

---

In the hitherto history of mankind, big countries or great powers have mainly used their power in three ways.

armed conquest and plunder abroad, carve up colonies in the world and compete for spheres of influence with each other, leading to incessant warfare, particularly the two world wars, which inflicted colossal catastrophes to mankind. As a victim of foreign aggression and expansion in modern history, China firmly rejects such a model by sticking to the principle of “do not impose on others what you would not like others to impose on your”.

Third, after becoming the world’s hegemon, the United States has not only given prominence to hard power by seeking and maintaining its supreme military power and using armed forces frequently but also laid stress on soft power to actively expand the influence of American culture and values. In this way, the United States used the “carrot and stick” simultaneously. Whether using hard power or soft power, or applying the “carrot and stick” tactics, they both aim to serve the U.S. hegemony, which often lead to such negative consequences as impinging on other nations’ interests and undermining world peace and justice.

As China is opposed to hegemonism, such a model is unacceptable either. Learning a lesson from the Bush administration’s abuse of America’s hard power, President Obama raised the concept of “smart power”, indicating the United States would choose from its diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal and cultural toolkit appropriate policy tools or combination of them according to concrete situations it faces. As it only means the proper use of both hard and soft power but not a new form of power, the “smart power” concept does not go beyond the traditional domain of hard power and soft power: it just offers a tactic of using power, and hence it is of very limited reference to China.

Under new historical circumstances, China, as an emerging power, has to put forward a new concept of power and propose a new way of applying power in order to go beyond the conventional way followed

by other big powers in their one-sided pursuit and abuse of hard power in modern times and to shape China's international image as an emerging power and formulate its new diplomatic style. Just as former Japanese ambassador to China Yuji Miyamoto said recently, "In order to become a real leading power in the world, China needs to put forward its own ideal, ideas and value system."

On the other hand, as the rise of new powers in history often leads to changes in both regional and international orders, people are often concerned about what kind of order the emerging power is seeking and how it plans to construct such an order. At the beginning of the 21st century, China raised the concept of "peaceful rise" and proposed the prospect of building a "harmonious world" as the new world order, which reflected China's serious thinking about the proper way for its own development and the future of humanity.

---

"In order to become a real leading power in the world, China needs to put forward its own ideal, ideas and value system."

However, China has not proposed a concrete way of applying the idea of peaceful rise to promoting the building of a harmonious world. Against such a background, China should construct and enhance the peace-oriented power in its diplomacy in order to advance human progress through enhancing mutual development, maintaining peace in an active way, settling differences effectively, resolving conflicts peacefully and promoting common interests among nations, thus making it possible to build a harmonious world.

## **II. Theoretical Prop for Peace-Oriented Power**

Different from the traditional way of categorizing and defining power, peace-oriented power not only refers to power itself (hard

power and soft power) but also includes the directive application of such power, that is, the way of applying power. If a definition is needed, peace-oriented power means the ability of a nation to utilize its comprehensive strength positively to promote “peace”, “harmony” and “cooperation” in the international arena based on the ancient Chinese idea of “harmony and synergy”. Therefore, peace-oriented power is composed of the idea, the composition, and the way of application of power.

The key conceptual element of peace-oriented power is “harmony and synergy”, which is both a philosophical idea and a value orientation in Chinese culture. Philosophically, the concept of harmony and synergy emphasizes coordination and complementation among things. In sense of values, it refers to “peace”, “harmony”, “integration” and “cooperation”.

The concept of peace-oriented power is not only rooted in the harmonious feature of the traditional Chinese culture, but also is a summarization of China’s diplomatic practices in the past 30 years with “peace, development and cooperation” as the purposes. In the meantime, it comes into being on the basis of China’s contemplation of the experience and lessons of big powers in their rise and decline (which teaches that China should not take the old road of using force or engaging in aggression and expansion abroad) and derives from China’s perception of the real world (i.e., the deepening of globalization and interdependence).

In fact, three essential questions at present have given birth to the concept of peace-oriented power, which are: What kind of world we are facing today? How should we pursue our national interests? And how should we address confrontations and differences among states? Contemplation on and answers to the above-mentioned questions constitute the world outlook, view of interests and view of contradiction that support peace-oriented power.

Peace-oriented power is rooted in the following view on the world: economic globalization has become a significant trend that influences international relations and promotes interdependence and integration of interests among nations; global challenges have become the main threats to the world and some common security issues faced by human beings have become increasingly salient, which require the international community to tackle with concerted efforts. Meanwhile, the world is heading toward multi-polarization in an accelerated manner and the rise of emerging powers has broken the traditional international patterns of power and governance, and hence the international rules and norms need to be revised and renovated. Against such a background, mankind should promote the construction of a community of common destiny and shared interests with new ideas and in new ways.

---

Peace-oriented power is considered to be composed of the idea, the composition, and the way of application of power”.

Pursuing national interests is the starting point of a country's foreign policy. Different methods in interest seeking, however, have led to different outcomes such as war or peace, confrontation or coordination. The view of interests on which peace-oriented power relies is different from the previous ones regarding national interests.

**First, it stresses win-win results in interest-seeking.** In today's world featuring globalization and interdependence among nations, the interests of all countries are intertwined and integrated, and therefore they should not view inter-state relations as a zero-sum game but need to pursue national interests through win-win cooperation. Only in this way could all countries interact in a friendly manner and ensure the sustainable development of each other's own interests.

**Second, shared interests are emphasized.** To promote mutual interests, one should not focus only on the realization of its own

interests but should join others to increase the size of shared interests, which is conducive to enlarging one's own interests as well.

**Third, the principle of seeking balanced interests should be followed.** All nations, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor,

---

The best way to address contradiction is to find the equilibrium of interests for all countries concerned instead of seeking for complete victory over others.

have their core interests and legitimate interests. All members of the international community should respect each other's core interests and major concerns while attending to each other's legitimate interests instead of seeking to maximize one's own interest. Only in this way, could

states build mutual trust and make cooperation possible.

Confrontation (including divergences, disputes and conflicts, etc.) is the normal state of inter-state relations. How to address confrontation has always been a test of the political wisdom of mankind, which also reflects the level of evolution the human society achieves. The view of confrontation on which peace-oriented power is based calls upon states to address differences and disputes in ways conforming to the 21st century.

First of all, it advocates resolving divergences through dialogue, consultation and negotiation rather than confrontation and settling disputes through peaceful means instead of using force. Even in some circumstances where the use of force is inevitable, force must be used in a limited and appropriate way only to promote the eventual political settlement of the disputes. Second, it insists that the settlement of disputes should follow its natural course and, when conditions are not ripe, disputes should be shelved until the right time comes. In addition, it also calls on nations to resolve their divergences in a tolerant manner. The best way to address contradiction is to find the equilibrium of interests for all countries concerned instead of seeking

for complete victory over others, which requires both the sense of compromise and tolerance and creative thinking.

### **III. Composition of Peace-Oriented Power and Its Application**

Peace-oriented power is constituted by various integrative elements including economy, diplomacy, culture, security and international politics. More importantly, each element of power is closely connected with its specific way of application.

**The economic element and its application.** The economic element of peace-oriented power takes the form of economic interaction with the outside world. This interaction conforms to the general trend of globalization and regionalization and serves to advance globalization toward achieving balanced and universal benefits as well as win-win results, promote the establishment of just and reasonable international institutions and rules, and push forward regional economic cooperation in an equal, mutually beneficial and practical manner. External economic exchange should seek mutual benefits and win-win results, rather than pursuing the maximization of one's own interests; and foreign aid should aim at accelerating the economic and social development of the recipient countries, rather than being used as a tool to influence the internal affairs of the recipients and obtain political influence over them.

**The diplomatic element and its application.** The diplomatic element of peace-oriented power calls for promoting trust and cultivating goodwill as well as expanding inter-state connection, communication and cooperation with other countries. Interactions between states should be based on sincerity and integrity and avoid playing double game, showing bad faith or sowing dissension and framing evidence. When divergences arise between two countries, diplomacy should function as a means of persuasion and negotiation instead of imposing pressures



and making threats. Diplomacy should pursue the principle of non-interference of the internal affairs of other countries and never be used as a tool to exercise political control over other countries. Meanwhile, in an era of globalization and mutually independent interests, diplomacy should play the role of promoting peace and stability for the country beset in internal conflicts and turbulence.

**The cultural element and its application.** The cultural element of peace-oriented power refers to cultural exchange. While facilitating the exchange of various cultures, globalization may lead to expansion of the strong cultures and contraction of the weak ones. The external cultural exchange advocated by peace-oriented power is aimed at promoting the communication and understanding between different countries and different cultures, enriching the spiritual world of mankind, and elevating the cultural attainment of various nations through learning from and complementing each other. While pursuing the traits of the times, cultural interaction should also respect the diversity of cultures and acknowledge the fact that diverse and colorful cultures are more helpful to meet the spiritual need of mankind than the single culture. The cultural element of peace-oriented power refrains from exporting values and ideology through cultural exchanges as well as seeking cultural hegemony.

**The security element and its application.** Peace-oriented power pursues common security and cooperative security, rather than absolute security and security through alliance. It advocates settling international disputes through peaceful means and opposes using force at will. The essential attitude of peace-oriented power toward military forces is: it does not oppose building a moderate defense force by a country but opposes the practice of seeking excess military advantage; not oppose using military force but advocates that the use of military force should be strictly confined to the maintenance of its core interests (such as state sovereignty and territorial integrity), self-

defense (such as fight against invasion, protection of its domestic and overseas legitimate interests from threat), as well as the provision of public goods to the international community (such as peace-keeping, disaster relief, maintenance of free navigation and humanitarian intervention, rather than using it to seek geopolitical interests or regime change in other countries.

**The international politics element and its application.** The international politics element of peace-oriented power implies that China shall play a leadership role in world affairs in a responsible and constructive manner, which includes putting forward progressive ideas, setting action agendas, providing public goods, and advancing international cooperation. Along with the rise of its comprehensive national strength, China has been playing and will play an even greater leadership role in world economic and political affairs. It is the result of world globalization as well as the demonstration of China as a responsible big power. But China does not consider itself as the sole leader of the world, and would never seek to monopolize the leadership of world affairs. Instead, China stands for a collective leadership, that is, countries concerned take the responsibilities together and cooperate in dealing with world affairs. In the meantime, China attaches importance to playing the international role in a multilateral approach, with international mechanisms as the platform and international norms as the guiding principle, and will reform the incumbent mechanisms, create new ones and reasonably adjust and modify the rules of game in line with the changing international situation.

---

China does not consider itself as the sole leader of the world, and would never seek to monopolize the leadership of world affairs.

#### IV. Features of Peace-Oriented Power

**First, it is unique and creative.** As a world power that inherits profound and harmonious cultural traditions, persists in taking the road of peaceful development, and advocates the building of a harmonious world, China puts forward the concept of peace-oriented power, which highlights the diplomatic style of China with Chinese characteristic and unique Chinese wisdom. In the meantime, the peace-oriented power concept composed of the idea, power and way of application has transcended the traditional power classification (for example, political, economic and military power, or hard and soft power) and shifted the focus from the magnitude and nature of power alone to the way of its application. This creative thinking has not only renovated the understanding of power and enriched its connotation but also deepened the perception of and contemplation on state actions in international politics.

**Second, it integrates values, policy conception and practice.** As mentioned above, the values advocated by peace-oriented power include peace, concord, harmony, integration and cooperation; its policy conceptions are cherishing peace and cooperation, maintaining harmony in diversity and treating each other as equals, balancing interests, having sense of propriety, and seeking common interests and taking common responsibilities. A review of China's diplomatic practices since reform and opening up shows that the active promotion of "peace and development" in the world in the 1980s and 1990s, the advocacy for "peace, development and cooperation" at the beginning of the 21st century, and the implementation of China's diplomatic goal of "peace, development, cooperation and responsibility" against the backdrop of fast rise of China's comprehensive national strength

have exactly fitted with the values and policy conceptions of peace-oriented power, indicating that peace-oriented power has rich contents of practice.

**Third, it is inclusive and symbiotic in nature.** In the West-led international system since the modern era, the dominating power highlights the balance of power and superiority and pursues uniformity of its values; its application of power (hard and soft power) has been confrontational and exclusive, which often led to confrontations and conflicts. On the contrary, the values and policy conceptions of peace-oriented power advocate peace, concord, harmony in diversity, and balanced interests, etc., embodying the inclusive and symbiotic nature of peace-oriented power.

**Fourth, it bears distinct characteristics of the times.** The concept of peace-oriented power reflects the need of the international politics in the 21st century. The deepening of interdependence of interstate interests calls for win-win cooperation; the mounting common challenges confronting mankind demand for joint efforts of various countries; and the evolution of ideas and behavioral norms of the international community further shapes “peace”, “harmony” and “cooperation” as the mainstream values. Against such background, the concept of peace-oriented power emerges as is required, vividly annotating the characteristics of our times.

**Fifth, it is strongly oriented.** With the continued increase of China’s comprehensive national strength, the world is concerned over how China will use its superior power outside. It is not sufficient for China to dispel the concerns of the outside world if China only repeatedly emphasizes its goodwill that it will not seek hegemony and engage in armed expansion abroad. Only by clearly and systematically expounding how China will use its power abroad

and what is the difference between the way China applies its power and that the big powers in the history used to do can China really answer the external concerns.

It is of great realistic significance for China to positively build and advocate peace-oriented power in the diplomatic realm. On the one hand, the concept of peace-oriented power reflects the determination of China, a rapidly rising country, to become a new-type great power, which is

---

It goes without saying that the building of peace-oriented power will confront numerous challenges.

conducive to shaping a more positive international image for China. On the other, given the significant changes in balance of power in the world and the prominence of global issues, the progressive concept of peace-oriented power will help push to handle international relations with a new and constructive approach so as to enhance international cooperation and establish new type of great power relations.

It goes without saying that the building of peace-oriented power will confront numerous challenges. Just take two for example. One is whether China will be able to maintain sound economic, social and political development, effectively resolve the various external restraints, and properly handle all sorts of challenges from the outside. The other is whether the international community, especially some big powers, the United States in particular, will be able to respond positively to the progressive concepts raised by China and willing to push for the transformation of the international system and international politics. 