

# Presenting China from an International Perspective

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As China grows increasingly connected to the rest of the world, the world is paying more attention to China. With both China and the world undergoing profound changes, it still remains a challenge as how to more convincingly tell the China story from an international perspective.

## I. NEW GLOBAL CHANGES AND CHINA'S RAPID DEVELOPMENT POSE A MORE URGENT NEED FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

To introduce China to the rest of the world, we must bear in mind the changing domestic and international environment. The complicated changes of the global powers, their rise and fall, the interaction between various forces in the world and a rapidly growing China indicate that historical changes are taking place in China's relations with the rest of the world.

### **1. The world has entered a new era since the “9. 11” attacks and the international financial crisis which have resulted in profound changes in international politics.**

The typical features of this new era are political multi-polarization, economic globalization, social informatization, and diversified forms of threats. Traditional threats are interwoven with unconventional ones, and global troubles such as financial

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crisis, climate change and terrorism keep popping up. The “9.11” terrorist attacks in 2001 and the global financial crisis in 2008 have reshaped the pattern of world politics, providing an opportunity for adjustment for the major world powers and also a valuable strategic opportunity for China. During this period, emerging economies, represented by the BRICS and Next-11, while playing an increasingly important role in promoting the process of globalization and multi-polarization, are also gaining a greater say in international affairs. China has become the foremost propeller of the world economy. As the world economy has entered a period of profound adjustment, undulating growth rates and economic cooperation and conflicts between different countries will become a normal state. Under the impact of the global financial crisis, the tendency to politicize trade issues has been intensifying in some countries, and protectionism in various forms are on the rise, resulting in a sharp rise in trade conflicts. Meanwhile, attempts to reform the international economic and financial systems and to enhance global governance have not picked up as expected.

## **2. China’s development has approached an entirely new stage where it faces a myriad of opportunities and challenges.**

China became the world’s largest exporter in 2009. The country also has surpassed the United States to be the world’s No.1 in terms of industrial output as well as the biggest trade partner of most countries. However, China is still far from a world power measured by comprehensive national strength. It is in a historical period of “becoming but not yet powerful”. Its development remains imbalanced, with sharp GDP and per-capita GDP gaps between the east and the west, cities and the countryside. During a trip to the United States in February 2012, Xi Jinping, then China’s vice-president, visited an American family that had hosted him when he was studying in the U.S. 20 years earlier. The family lived 1,000 miles from Washington DC, but its living standards, the local residents’ education and social behavior showed little difference from those in New York City and the American capital. If we drive a few hours west from Beijing or Shanghai, we would reach areas which are five, ten or even more years behind in terms of living

standards and education. This is the disparity between the world's first- and second-largest economies. It also demonstrates that China is still in the preliminary stage of socialism and will remain so for a long time to come. The prime contradiction in China is still that between the people's ever-growing material and cultural needs and backward social production. China is still the world's largest developing country.

### **3.China grows increasingly connected to the rest of the world: Historical changes have taken place in China's global relations.**

China has become the world's second-largest economy in terms of economic aggregate. With this new identity, China needs to learn to handle its relations with different countries, focusing on the development of a new type of relations with other major powers that is non-conflicting, non-confrontational, inclusive, with mutual respect, cooperative and win-win. It also needs to form a partnership with neighboring countries that features mutual trust, common development, cooperation and win-win. How can we handle our relations with the world's No.1 economy so as to avoid conflict between an established power and an emerging power? How should we deal with other developing countries which are on the similar development level and also depend on labor-intensive and export-oriented industries? How can we enhance mutual trust with neighboring countries and reduce frictions? How can we reform the international order and system in the direction of equity and reason? By the time we achieve our first and second "100-year economic and social development goals" in 2021 and 2049, what should we expect for our economic, political, military and diplomatic positions in the world? What kind of situation would we face concerning energy, resources and ecological environment? What does the international community expect from us? We must have greater wisdom and be better prepared to address these issues by proceeding from our fundamental interests, responsibilities and obligations as a major developing country. China remains the key engine for world economic growth. Analyses have suggested that in the next five years, 400 million Chinese tourists will travel abroad,

and the country will import a total of USD10 trillion-worth of commodities and invest USD500 billion overseas. The rest of the world cannot afford to ignore China, and China cannot develop without the rest of the world. In our interactions and exchanges with other countries, we will have more resources and advantages but also face tougher challenges.

II. INTRODUCING A RAPIDLY GROWING CHINA  
AND ITS COMPLEXITY AND DIVERSITY TO THE REST  
OF THE WORLD REMAINS A MAJOR CHALLENGE

It is no secret that China's communication capabilities and effectiveness lag incongruously behind its requirement of developing relations with the rest of the world. Introducing to the world a rapidly developing China and its complexity and diversity still remains a major challenge.

**1. China's development is based on its own cultural lineage,  
historical destiny and national conditions.**

China has its own cultural traditions. The Chinese culture, with unique characteristics, is an important component of the world's cultures and civilizations. The traditional Chinese culture, represented by Confucianism, contributed to 5,000 years of profoundness and diversity in this Oriental land. It entails the deepest cultural pursuit of the Chinese nation, and carries the core genes of its people. It is the unique cultural signature of China. The Chinese nation has a history unlike any other. During the years between 1840 and 1949, China endured unprecedented humiliation and miseries. Independence and prosperity were the common wishes of the Chinese people. From advocates of the "Westernization Campaign" to Kang Youwei's dream of "world harmony," from Liang Qichao's enlightenment efforts to Sun Yat-sen's republican dream, a host of pioneers trudged along the road of national revitalization to no avail. At the critical juncture of life and death for the Chinese nation, the Communist Party of China resolutely took the lead in the Chinese people's fight for independence and guided them toward modernization. China has

its own national conditions. Since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, and especially since the launch of the reform and opening-up drive in 1978, China has witnessed historical progress in its development. The great dream of national rejuvenation is closer to becoming a reality than at any other period in the country's history. But the country's per-capita GDP is still very low, and its economy is suffering from unbalanced and uncoordinated development.

China's unique culture, history and huge population of 1.3 billion dictate that the country must explore its own feasible path of development — which we call socialism with Chinese characteristics. China's special conditions and the unique path have made it difficult for the peoples of other countries to understand China. The biased and stereotyped opinions common in Western society and its competition and conflicts with China for benefits and interests have made it more complicated. Curiosity, appreciation and compliments are being showered upon China, while misreading, misconceptions and demonization also running rampant. For these reasons, we face severe challenges in our communication efforts. We may experience many setbacks, but we should bear in mind that our endeavors are bound to have a bright future.

## **2. China is in a transition that features complexity and diversity.**

China has entered a period of profound transition, and its society is facing new problems. As the nation cracks tough nuts in its reform drive, growth has been slowed due to structural adjustment. All these changes have made our job more difficult. Take foreign policy for example, domestic and international views of China's foreign policy tend to gravitate toward either of the two extremes. Some of our own people think we are “weak,” while there are foreigners who claim we are “tough.” The Chinese who think we are “weak” take pride in our economic growth and achievements, but have unrealistic anticipations of our international status and global role, without considering our actual conditions. The foreigners who rate us as “tough” do so because they are not yet

accustomed to China's rapid development and changes, and our growing international influence. We have progressed beyond their calculations, and they are reluctant to acknowledge the impact we have made on world politics and the vested interest groups. Nor do they wish to witness our inevitable rise in world status. As the most populous and fastest-growing socialist "developing country," China has mounted the global stage with multiple identities. Particularly, when a "socialist country under communist leadership has changed the international political scene," different countries will naturally adopt different attitudes when talking about China.

### **3. China needs to find its own right of discourse in international dialogues.**

Today, the right of discourse in the world is still monopolized by the dominant developed countries, which always judge others based on their own values, influencing international opinion about China. China's voice, on the other hand, often gets muffled and goes unheard. Under such circumstances, China urgently needs the right to reach out to the rest of the world in a way that matches its economic status. Doubt, mistrust and demonization concerning China will not wither away along with the country's development. At the same time, however, the international community is watching closely China's future. Its desire to know about China has never been so strong. We must act fast and take advantage of these opportunities to present a real China to the world.

### **4. China needs better communication skills to present itself to the rest of the world.**

To enhance mutual understanding with the rest of the world, China needs better communication skills. In recent years, we have made considerable progress in this respect, but there is still a long way to go. President Xi Jinping stressed that we need to "tell the 'China story' and make China's voice heard," which is precisely the solution to our problem. The stories China hopes the rest of the world to hear are epitomized as the "Chinese Dream." It is a true and vivid story with twists and turns, and ups and downs. The Chinese people, in telling about their dreams, would like the world

to know that China is willing to share, that the “Chinese Dream” puts people’s interests first, and that the Chinese people intend to realize their dreams in a peaceful and harmonious way. To tell the world about the “Chinese Dream” effectively, we must gain a better understanding of ourselves as well as the rest of the world. By understanding ourselves, we can build confidence in our ideals, in the path we take, and in our guiding principles and social system. By understanding the rest of the world, we can tell the “Chinese Dream” in a more effective and attractive fashion, so that people of other cultures feel more comfortable learning about our stories. Furthermore, as the rest of the world welcomes more Chinese tourists and imports more Chinese products, it is imperative that we provide better education to our citizens, improve the quality of our products and enhance the reputation of our businesses. All these are critical issues we should solve in communicating with the world.

### III. COMMUNICATION PRACTICE CALLS FOR STRONGER THEORETICAL SUPPORT

Theoretical research in international communication must be carried out in close connection with the new developments and new requirements. We must work harder and get ready to tackle new problems in the era of new media technology.

#### **1. Enhancing the study of the discourse system and the right of discourse**

As China goes global, we are facing challenges in expressing and interpreting Chinese socialism and its theoretical framework, the country’s social, economic and political systems and its core values to an international audience. Similar to the relationship between emerging powers and established powers, the prevailing rules, systems and discourse system have already been consolidated by the established powers. Today, many problems in cross cultural communication cannot be solved simply by Chinese-to-foreign-language translation, or by looking up in dictionaries and encyclopedias. The same expression in two languages might have different meanings and connotations. For China, we need



to adapt to the established rules and discourse system in the first place, while deepening our engagement and enriching its repertoire. More importantly, we must develop our own discourse system and activate its functions in the international discourse system. To do so, we must improve our capabilities in communicating with countries which have different cultures, systems and theories. This will decide if China could acquire international influence compatible to a major power.

## **2. Getting our major theories and core values across to the world**

While following with great interest the brilliant economic achievements China made during the past three decades, the international community is paying more attention to China's theories, path, guiding principles, as well as systems that have powered the development. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the new central leadership has proposed a series of innovative notions and policies for governance and summed up a set of "core values." These have aroused worldwide attention. The "Chinese Dream" and "a new type of major power relationship" are, among others, new expressions of the CPC's guidelines of governance and value pursuit. How to understand, interpret and communicate these expressions and theories from a major power's perspective and magnanimity, making use of our rich cultural heritage and in vivid language? How to present to the rest of the world our road and theoretical framework and system of socialism with Chinese characteristics? How to expound to the international community the Chinese people's pursuits and values so as to enhance its understanding of China and win its respect and recognition? How to enhance cohesion and self-confidence among our people by promoting patriotism on one hand, and to foster a demeanor compatible to a major power that features modesty, reason and inclusiveness? In one word, how to build a discourse system suitable to China's realities and acceptable worldwide? These are the key subjects for research in international communication both at present and for a long time to come. These are also major issues bearing on China's soft power.



### **3. Using new media to boost research in international communication**

The rapid development of new communication technologies and new media has brought new opportunities for spreading China's views and presenting its image. How to take advantage of the rapidly expanding and multitudinous new media in China's international communication has become a major and urgent topic for research. Statistics show that every 12 to 18 months a new technology breakthrough would be made in information dissemination, pushing the information industry in breakneck innovations beyond existing boundaries and exerting a far-reaching influence on the contents and forms of the information disseminated. At the same time, changes in contents and forms also raise new requirements for the development of information carriers, spurring further innovation in technology. As new technologies come into use, communication grows increasingly diversified in content and form. We must make good use of new technology, and learn to be cyber-savvy to grasp this opportunity and open up new horizons. Meanwhile, we have to stay cool-headed and use good judgment to distinguish merits from threats.

### **4. Telling the China story through an international lens and with good narratives**

Telling a story is different from explaining a concept or giving a definition. It requires the employment of an appropriate and understandable style of expression to offer a narrative that the audience can accept. To introduce China in a way that suits the habits of the target audience has already proved to be an effective and attractive means of communication on many occasions. China's new central leadership has set a good example in this respect during its diplomatic interactions since last year. In a sense, how we tell stories decides how well we can present China to the rest of the world. Well narrated stories will help the rest of the world understand and accept China more readily, and are conducive to changing biased and stereotyped views about China, and to removing doubts and hostilities.

In conclusion, we must adopt an international perspective to study the profound changes in international politics and economy

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as well as in the communication field. As long as we work diligently, think innovatively, and take the initiative to address new changes and developments in the rest of the world, we will undoubtedly provide more eye-catching and convincing stories about China for international communication.