CHAPTER 2

China’s Contemporary Foreign Strategy: Ideology, Basic Platform, Current Challenges, and Chinese Characteristics

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Abstract

“Contemporary China” refers to the country’s post-reform and opening-up era. By now, it accounts for about half of the years since the founding of the People’s Republic. As researchers draw lessons from China’s foreign policy history, one of the most important tasks is to summarize and analyze the ideological basis and basic platform of contemporary China’s foreign strategy and grasp its main characteristics that are new compared with previous strategies. Moreover, especially as the People’s Republic is embracing its 60th founding anniversary, it is necessary to know the crucial top challenges for China’s domestic and external situation as it copes with the evolution of the world political and economic environment. Meanwhile, this article points out some Chinese traditions and characteristics that are born in and reflected by contemporary China’s foreign situation. It also examines China’s great contribution to world politics and history.

Keywords

China’s thoughts on foreign strategy – ideology – peaceful development – scientific development outlook – Chinese characteristics

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“Contemporary China” in this article refers to the country’s post-reform and opening-up era since 1979. It accounts for about half of the history since the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949. Contemporary China since the start of the reform and opening-up is a continuity of, and benefits from, the previous thirty years; meanwhile, it has also transcended the previous thirty years, because reform has become the most fundamental characteristic of contemporary China. About thirty years ago, late leader Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) launched the reform drive, which is a great innovation. Since then—especially since 1992 when Deng inspected the southern parts of China and preached new ideas on reform which led to the sustained explosive growth of the Chinese economy—the Chinese society has undergone various great changes. As reform has replaced revolution as the top priority of the country, China’s conduct and leadership style have also undergone decisive changes.

I  Ideological Basis of Contemporary China’s Thought on Foreign Strategy

In the Post-Deng Xiaoping era, the ideology of contemporary Chinese political leaders regarding world politics and foreign policy has featured new richness and useful complexity. Traditionally, the ideology of the leaders in that respect is composed of three elements. First, visions on international relations and basic beliefs are embedded in Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong 毛泽东 Thought. The second element is China’s patriotism, or China’s modern radical nationalism. Third, pragmatic thought on international politics and foreign policy, i.e., the realpolitik concept is by no means only bound to Chinese or communists. Since the start of the reform and opening-up drive, a new element that can be called “neo-internationalism” has been added to the ideological framework of the Chinese political leaders. Moreover, compared with the Mao Zedong era, the intensity of contemporary nationalism in the minds of the Chinese political leaders has gradually decreased, except in regard to the necessity of China’s border territory sovereignty. Besides, many new concepts that serve the interest of China and the world as a whole, such as “new security concept,” multilateralism and “harmonious world,” have been added to the rationalism of the Chinese leaders.

To be exact, neo-internationalism has emerged and developed against the backdrop of globalization and China’s increasing integration into the world system. Such neo-internationalism mainly features China’s sincere belief, and engagement in, multilateral cooperation, international organizations and international regimes. “New security concept” and “harmonious world” can,