Chapter 3

China’s Dual-Identity Dilemma and Its Countermeasures

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Abstract

The international system, as an overall structure for interactions among actors, is the environment and stage for implementation of China’s foreign policy. In this system, identity is a fundamental factor determining both China’s international position and interests and ways to achieve these ends. China has long stressed that it is a “developing country,” but with the rise of its national strength, China increasingly is viewed today as a “great power.” Because “developing countries” and “great powers” utilize different mechanisms that produce different results in their international interactions, China now faces a dual-identity dilemma. In fact, with its image as a “great power” and the beginning of its interactions with the outside world, China is now facing a negative international environment. To resolve this dilemma, on the one hand, China should subjectively recognize its true identity and the influence of the various mechanisms on its international interactions; on the other hand, it should more effectively resolve the issue regarding the objective coexistence of these different mechanisms. In terms of its foreign relations, China should deal with the influence of the main mechanisms embedded in the international system, including power politics, international institutions, and the concept of construction, so as to properly implement power-based diplomacy, institutional diplomacy, and public diplomacy. Only by using the advantages of the systemic effects of the international system and avoiding its disadvantages in dealing with the problems of the development of power and the shaping of its national image, will China be better able to achieve its national developmental objectives.

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Keywords

China's identity – international system – China's diplomacy

The overall structure of the international system as the result of interactions among actors is not only the environment and stage upon which China carries out its foreign policy, but it is also the source of the resources and conditions that China can take advantage of. In the international system, identity is an essential factor determining one's foreign-policy behavior. China's interests, and its approach to achieve its interests, depend on the positioning of its identity. But today China is increasingly revealing a dual identity in terms of its interactions in the international system. China itself insists that it is a “developing country,” but the international community generally views it as a “great power.” Because these two identities utilize different mechanisms and result in different consequences in terms of international interactions, such a dual identity presents a dilemma. China can only resolve this dilemma through diplomacy.

China's identity dilemma is basically a problem related to its position in its participation and interactions in the international system. Its resolution depends not only on determining the source of the dilemma but also determining the appropriate countermeasures. This can be achieved by analyzing the effects of the mechanisms within the international system.

I China's Identities and Interests

Since the 1980s China has clearly identified itself as a developing country. Based on this identity, and in the course of the reform and opening-up of its policies, its economic construction has developed rapidly. Chinese GDP became the second largest in the world in 2010, and, correspondingly, its gap with the United States in terms of economic output declined. U.S. GDP was 15 times that of China in 1978, eight times that of China in 2000, but by 2010 it was only 2.5 times that of China. Accompanied by the rise of its economic status and the growth of its international influence, some elements of China's identity as a great power are causing growing concern. For example, there are those who view China's rise within the context of a revival of the Chinese civilization with