



CARNEGIE-TSINGHUA
CENTER FOR GLOBAL POLICY

Transcript

CHINA IN THE WORLD PODCAST

Host: **Paul Haenle**

Guest: **Wang Yizhou**

Episode 3: China's Evolving Foreign Policy,
Part I

November 19, 2013

You're listening to the Carnegie–Tsinghua "China in the World" podcast, a series of conversations with Chinese and international experts on China's foreign policy, international role, and China's relations with the world, brought to you from the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center located in Beijing. I'm Paul Haenle, the director of the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center, and I'll be your host.

Haenle: Today we're thrilled to be joined by distinguished scholar of China's international relations and diplomacy, professor Wang Yizhou. Prof. Wang is the Associate Dean at the School of International Studies at Peking University, and professor of international politics and Chinese foreign affairs. He is also a senior research fellow at the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and the editor in chief of World Economics and Politics, a Chinese Academy of Social Sciences magazine published monthly in Chinese. Professor Wang is the author of many books, including his two most recent books about the evolution of China's global role and the concept of creative involvement. Professor Wang will publish the third, and final, book of this series in the middle of 2014, which will cover the domestic context of China's new foreign policy. This will be the first of a two-part interview with professor Wang on China's evolving foreign policy and international role. Professor Wang, thank you very much for joining us today.

Since taking power, President Xi has announced the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. China has made remarkable economic progress over the last three decades, and its global power and influence has grown accordingly. What, in your view, are today's greatest foreign policy challenges for China?

Wang: The matters, I think, for Xi Jinping, for Li Keqiang—the new generation of China's top leaders: There are three major challenges with regard to the international affairs and foreign policy of China. The first one is how to guarantee China's economic and social growth and development. You know that Xi Jinping, when he got power, raised two special goals of China's development and growth. One is, in 2021, we will double the income of China's GDP per capita. This is a hundred years of the Chinese Communist Party's celebration. Another goal is the 2049—the hundred years of PRC's separation—[China] will be a very modern, very prosperous, [and] is number one in GDP and in many other aspects the top power of the world. So how to guarantee this economic and social goal is number one for all aspects: for foreign policy, for military, for bureaus, for so many parts of the government. So this is number one. So I think it's very important—whatever you call China [as] assertive or military—don't forget this is very important. The economic [plays a] central role for the very core goals.

Second, I think it's also very important that the sovereignty and security which also serves for China's growth and economic development. You know that in China's neighboring area there are more than 20 different countries, some [are] boundary-neighboring countries, some are maritime neighbors. Among them, there are 10 with whom China has some sovereignty disputes. So [one concern is] how to continue a good neighbor policy, but at the same time promote China's integration, solidarity, and for instance solve some special sensitive issues with Japan, with the Philippines, with Vietnam, and also with Taiwan—this is a very important one. As I said, it belongs to the category of sovereignty, unification, and security.

The last one, but I think an increasingly important one, is that China will have more and more global interest to take more responsibility in different continents, in different corners and foreign areas of the global area. For instance, in China now, yearly there are 90 million people who go abroad as tourists, as students, as businessmen, for so many things. This is one of the

largest numbers in the whole world, and it grows very fast. Yearly there are 10 million Chinese who add to this number. So how to protect their interests—how to protect their security is also a very new, emerging task.

Another overseas interest is energy. China has become a large oil consumer, and also a large oil importer country. We also have a very large number of international investments in different countries in oil, energy, ports, infrastructure. So together I think these are three major challenges for new leaders, which are very different from before. I think now, China has become more and more globalized, and has become more and more interested in guaranteeing their goals, step-by-step, incrementally. And that's why you see the Shibada, the Eighteenth Party Congress, their special slogan by Xi Jinping—Maritime power—and also recently they have had a special Communist Party session about the neighboring countries—harmonious relations, security, and regional goodwill policy. So I think for new leaders they are more and more interested in becoming international and global. Their views also try to catch up with the global spread.

Haenle: Thank you very much for a very comprehensive description of China's foreign policy challenges. In the second challenge that you described, on the regional side dealing with territorial issues and issues of sovereignty, you referred to a speech that President Xi Jinping gave on October 24 at the CPC Central Committee Conference, where he talked about China's diplomatic relations and work with neighboring countries. This speech indicated perhaps a new approach to China's policy within the Asia-Pacific region. What would the main elements of that approach look like, and what should Chinese neighbors in the Asia-Pacific region expect?

Wang: I think that first China's maritime power goal is very new. Although in the past we had a very vast coastal area, we had almost no ability to guarantee it militarily or civilian or whatever, [even] in local governments. We had a noticed disability. But now, as China becomes stronger, domestically they have found a stronger need to put forward our interest: How to guarantee our sea interests, how to guarantee our transportation interests, how to guarantee our ship force, and so on and so forth. So I think this is a touchstone for new leaders. On the one hand, they could keep in the track of Deng Xiaoping's policy, which is [maintaining a] good neighborhood and cooperation, which makes China prosperous socially and economically, and brings peace in the region. But on the other hand, China's new leadership shows more ambitions to enhance this maritime ability. But when we think about this area, you see, there are at least eight countries—among them the Philippines, Vietnam, and Japan—that have disputes with China. Other countries don't have these tough sovereign disputes but still have some worries—worries that China's growth will have some tough measures to them. So this is an uneasy balancing. Good policy cooperation makes China's economic growth and cooperation, regionally prosperous. On the other hand, [you have] the growth of China's military, maritime and civilian power in the sea area.

Right now, I think there are different explanations, different trends. You see recently, though, the relationship with Japan is still very tense and has stagnated. There are some possibilities of accidents. On the other hand, we try to engage some other countries, like Vietnam, to make a “soft landing” of these disputes. I call it “a special way of commercial peace.” We supply some financial support for the construction of infrastructure of these countries—ASEAN, Vietnam, and so on and so forth—also create the ability to make the regional, commercial, financial trade prosperous. By these measures we try to make some “spillover”—economic cooperation, security, military coordination bound together. China's so big—China's financial infrastructure, China's economic ability is so powerful, that we can make some special trade off

with these countries. If we make some peace, then China can give great public goods, great strategic and financial aid to the countries, to the whole region, which makes us together prosperous. So I'm not so pessimistic, like some media and scholars who recently predicted that there is some clash or some special military conflict. I don't think so. I think there is some, I call, "creative tension." There is some tension, but you see more and more creative elements there.

Militarily, now, China thinks that we have to stick to our domestic economic and social growth. To make a "soft landing," we have to make some compromises with all countries. But of course certain countries like Japan don't care about China's economic growth, don't care about China's financial ability, don't care about China's assistance with public goods. They want to make their own deal, thinking individually. So that is why China-Japan relations are stagnating, and, at least in the short term, I hold no solution and see no soft landing possibility. But I also think that both sides are ready to do some crisis management to avoid a clash or else stagnation will continue and we will not have a very great hope [for a solution] there. But China and the other countries will try to solve this and try to make a soft landing. This is very important to make different arrangement, [and present] multiple packages.

In Chinese, we have a special idiom—I don't know how to translate into English—it means that you have to be tough in certain areas, with certain countries, in certain issues to make you more powerful, and you will have special weapons and more special ability. But then [it also] means you have to show your kindness, and you have to give some special goods or strategic aid to make your friends or make your neighbor countries feel that you are a big brother, that you have "goodness", that you want to make some good deals. So [the idiom] is a package and is a multiple-level solution to deal with these kinds of issues. But still, as I said, it's not very easy. This is a process. You must take *incremental* steps going forward. This is a test for new leaders—I hope, you could say cautiously optimistic, that there will be a soft landing. In 5 years, 10 years you will say, ok, there will be some tension for several years, but, finally, we have soft landed and everyone is happy. Economic, trade, financial cooperation will continue and this region, East Asia will continue to be an important part of the world economy, and China will continue to be a driving force, and even larger, even more powerful. But not much clash; no military battles in this region. I think this is very, very important for Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang—as the new generation—to make this "great deal," to perform your slogan—maritime power—but also commit Deng Xiaoping's words that a good neighborhood makes all prosperous.

Haenle: It's an excellent description. Dr. Wang described the third foreign policy challenge for China as the need for China to protect its overseas interests, even beyond the Asia-Pacific region. My follow-up question on that is, can we expect to see—in terms of China's new role as a global power—a more constructive contribution to trying to resolve global challenges faced by China and many countries in the world today, or is it just to protect its overseas interests, whether it's Chinese people living overseas, or commercial interests or energy interests? Will, in your view, there be an evolution toward contributing more constructively to resolving global challenges?

Wang: When Chinese are talking about responsibility and being a responsible country, it always means two aspects. First one [is being] responsible to its own people, its own nation, its own country. Second, as a rising power, you have to be accountable to international counterparts and to the global community. So, right now, I think for leaders here that first thing that appears in their mind is how to guarantee our growing global interests, our overseas investments, consulting interests, so and so forth. As I said, yearly, we add ten million people who go abroad. So now the

whole sum is almost 100 million per year who go abroad. But traditionally in China, only a very few number, say in chairman Mao's era only 10,000 people went abroad. So, it's a big number growth.

I think China's global interests first will come from this kind of global spread of China's interests there. Also, you see more and more of China's investment in oil, in gas, in whatever, in Africa, the Middle East, the Gulf, and in North America. So, for that, China is building up its new ability of the PLA (People's Liberation Army). China builds very fast growing civilian projects of maritime and infrastructure. And, I think this will continue. At the same time, we feel that when you grow up your ability in a global context, in different corners of the globe, you have to supply some goods, some public goods, some assistance to the local level, to different continents. Otherwise, why would others cooperate with you? Why would other countries help you? So, the second appeal becomes stronger and stronger to leaders. When we want to guarantee our oversea interests, we also need others to help us. For that, you must supply some public goods. You must supply some infrastructure: your bridges, your hospitals, your PLA deployments, your diplomatic mediations, and so on and so forth. That's why you see, for instance, in Africa, in Latin America, in ASEAN, more and more Chinese diplomats, PLA, and Peace Keeping Operation actions there.

I want to conclude [by saying that] first, these kinds of global role, global interests, global hand, and global tools came from China's own interests: How to guarantee our growing interests globally? But before that, you must know that you have some [accountability] for other countries, for the global society to join in the global governance, to join in the global cooperation to help for the global challenges. So, this is a dual aspects. I think, the problem right now we see with China is that there are still many people, maybe the majority in the media or some nationalist authors or even some officials, who still narrowly think that our global responsibility is just for our people themselves but forget that there is another aspect, a dual aspect separately. Another aspect is about how to [provide] accountable contributions to the global governance or you will lose other people's cooperation. You will be viewed with suspicion by other countries. You will know any kind of arrangement that other countries, so this is very important. So, in my understanding, current political leaders are very aware of these kinds of dual aspects and will try to increase our public goods, our international strategic aid to many other countries- to Africa, to our neighboring area, to ASEAN, and even to some advanced areas like to Europe and to the United States. When the United States has a flood [or] a special disaster, China also sends some aid there. I think this is for hope, hope for some backing, you know, in the future. Since China is more and more interested in spreading, you have to think how to make to their spread interests guaranteed but be coordinated with local and different countries.

Haenle: Let me turn to the Middle East and the issues of China's diplomacy and diplomatic power and diplomatic strength. I've argued on the Syria issue that it appears that China was reluctant to take on a leadership role or an active role diplomatically. In finding a solution to respond to the Syrian—chemical weapons use by the Syrian regime—I've argued that it's unfortunate that China did not come up with the solution to the problem; that if China had come up with the solution, it would have been great for U.S.-China relations and it would have been great for China's image overseas and around the world—as a country that is rolling up its sleeves and is finding solutions to problems where all countries in the world have a stake. Do you expect to see China begin to take on a more active and diplomatic role internationally in areas like the Middle East or do you think that China will continue—at least in the near term—to outsource security to other countries and focus more on internal development here in China?

Wang: I think the Middle East is a very special zone, a special area for China's engagement. Different, I mean from any other continent or other areas. For instance, different from the African continent, different Latin America, different from ASEAN. The Middle East is so diverse, so diverse [of a] religious zone with a lot of conflicts-not only the religious conflict, not only the power conflicts, not only the so complicated issues, but also, there are many, many tough challenges for China. Recently, I went to Israel and I found that Israel would like to be a friend to China. But at the same time many Arab countries, many Middle East countries also hope to have China's hand in assisting them. So, I think China's policy in this region will not be militarily focused, rather infrastructure finance, financial supportive, and so on and so forth.

In the future, I still think in the short run, I see no possibility for a very active Chinese security role or any very active initiative role there. But, on the other hand, I think we can do something [in a minor role], on a secondary level. For instance, when the United States and Russia made some special arrangements for Syria, China immediately expressed that we can supply some financials support for the aftermath settlement. And also, if you check out the history of the Iraq War, during the war, the United States and France and the UK played a very crucial leading role. But afterwards, in the post-war recovery period, China played a very important economic and social role there. I think the same model will show in Syria and other countries. But Iran is another story. Iran is too sensitive of a nuclear issue and a very, you know, kind of an enemy role with Western countries. For China now, we prefer after Russia not to say too much. Only after Russia makes some deal with the United States and Germany and other Western powers and then will China join in. But, we are not an initiator of the Iran issue.

Haenle: Professor Wang thank you so much for spending time with us today. That concludes the first part of our two-part interview with professor Wang Yizhou. Be sure to tune in next week when we'll bring you the second part of our interview in which professor Wang Yizhou talks about China's North Korea Policy and relations with the United States. That's it for this edition of the Carnegie-Tsinghua China in the World podcast. To hear more about China's evolving foreign policy and international role, you can find publications by our scholars and summaries of our many-roundtable discussion with experts on these issues on the Carnegie-Tsinghua website at www.carnegieitsinghua.org. I encourage you to explore our site and see the work of all our scholars at the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center. Thanks for listening and be sure to tune in next time.