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Transcript

CHINA IN THE WORLD PODCAST

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Guest: **Wang Yizhou**

Episode 4: China's Evolving Foreign Policy, Part
II

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Haenle: Welcome to the China in the World podcast, a series of conversation 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 for Global Policy, located in Beijing. I'm Paul Haenle, the director of the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center, and I'll be your host.

We're back again today with the second part of our interview with a distinguished scholar of China's international relations and diplomacy, Professor Wang Yizhou. Professor Wang is the associate dean of the School of International Studies at Peking University, and professor of international politics and Chinese foreign affairs. If you missed the first part of our interview with Professor Wang, where we discussed China's "New Periphery" diplomacy, and China's role overseas, you can download the first segment of this interview on the Carnegie–Tsinghua website, or on iTunes by searching "China and the World." Professor Wang's full bio and a summary of this podcast are also available at the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center's website.

Now, let's pick up where we left off. I want to ask you about North Korea, and the big question that everyone is asking is: is China's calculus on North Korea changing? Because China's grown economically and has enhanced its influence in the region and beyond. China's own interests are evolving, and some are wondering whether this means China's will change its thinking on North Korea, and perhaps we may begin to see the first signs of a new approach to North Korea. In your view, how do you see China's policy evolving here?

Wang: I must admit, we see [among] the Chinese elites, think tanks, and leaders even, [that] there are many different opinions on relations between China and North Korea, and North Korea's strategy itself. I myself think several things [are] inevitable. One is [the] transformation of this relationship between China and the DPRK from the traditional, what we call 'blood allies' relations, towards normal country-to-country relations. This is a historical process. [It has been] two decades [since] China set up normal relations with South Korea. China and DPRK relations [have begun] changing from a traditional 'blood allies' relations to, gradually, a new [type of] relationship. [This is] not easy—it's challenging, but this is a historical change. We can say that this is also a result of the [end of] the Cold War, like I say. Number two, I think it's also important [to see that] China's role in this peninsula is very clear, very far-reaching and long-term. That is [the] denuclearization of the whole peninsula—not only North Korea, but also South [Korea.] But, this process should be [achieved] under China's supervision with the cooperation of the United States and other parties. [This] should be—must be—peaceful, gradual, not short-sighted. [Changes will not happen in] one day, overnight, [and] not by military solution. So, [peaceful, gradual] denuclearization—this is China's goal [regarding] the Korean peninsula's status. China will follow up this goal, to continue relations with two Koreas.

As to [the] relationship with North Korea, I must say it's true that recent advances over half a year [have seen] some changes, some adjustments. China became more tough, more [focused on the] setting up of new goals [with] more suggestions to North Korean comrades, 'Yes, we want to help you, but you have to [agree to] some compromise. You have to give up some of your policies. When Kim Jun-un wants to come to Beijing, we'll welcome [him]. But if it's just a ceremony, it's not necessary. [If you] come here, [then we] make a deal about denuclearization'—that's our attitude. And I think for China's leaders, [the] next round, [the] next session of six-party talks will focus [on] how to make denuclearization. If anyone, North Korea, or South Korea—whoever—says 'we don't want to give up that goal,' there will be no meeting with Xi Jinping and Kim Jun-un. So I think this is very clear, this year, more than ever before. You can't say this is a new policy. This is a very important side for China's new constructive role in the Korean

peninsula. But on the other hand, I want to make [one thing] clear—don't want to make any mistakes—because some international friends (Japan, South Korea, and Western countries) think China may join the United States and other countries using tough punishments, even using military ways to punish North Korea. That's a [misunderstanding]. China made it clear: we will protect the peninsula from any kind of military clash. We don't want our neighboring area to, sort of, 失火—be set on fire. We want to [keep it peaceful]. So the United States, Japan, South Korea—if they want to take any tough measures, we're facing a strong disagreement.

Haenle: Just to follow up on North Korea, I recently attended the Track 1.5 Conference sponsored by the Chinese Foreign Ministry. The North Korean delegation came down with [North Korean] Vice-Foreign Minister, there was also a great deal of emphasis on something that you talked about, which is that the denuclearization must be focused on the entire Korean peninsula, not just North Korea, and the response, of course, from the United States and its allies was 'there are no nuclear weapons in South Korea.' South Korea has confirmed this, the United States has confirmed this—so when we talk about the importance of making sure it's the denuclearization of the whole of the Korean peninsula, why is that distinction important? Because the view, I think, from the United States—the nuclear weapons we are worried about, the program [we are worried about]—is in North Korea.

Wang: This is easy to [answer]. Firstly, to make North Korea happy, because we don't just let one country be nuclearized. We are guaranteeing that any other party [also be denuclearized]. Second, I don't think this is a warning to the United States' nuclear weapon in the Korean peninsula, in East Asia. No, we think the United States is there. [The] United States [and its] nuclear capacity is there, right? You can say it's a nuclear umbrella. It's always [been] in East Asia. So China's words [are] not especially directed at the United States. I think this is an ambiguity. But in fact, everyone, in [their] mind, knows that the U.S. supply—the U.S. nuclear umbrella—for its East [Asian] allies [will persist]. So when China says, 'ok, [we want] denuclearization in the peninsula', it doesn't mean the United States will not supply the umbrella, right? Third, [even] though our key official announcements disagree with parties in North and South [Korea] with nuclear weapons and [we] say the peninsula should be denuclearized, in fact when I go to South Korea, I heard a lot of think tanks, private persons talking [about] whether South Korea, in some day, in some time, in some way, will get its own nuclear ability. So I think in China, we want to have zero tolerance for these things.

Haenle: Let me finally turn to the important issue of the U.S.-China relationship. When Xi Jinping visited the United States as vice-president, before becoming president in 2012, he garnered a lot of attention by calling for a “new model of cooperation,” a “new type of great power relationship” 新型大国关系, between China and the United States, among other countries in the world. What do you think is meant by proposing this new concept? Is it a worthwhile and realistic goal for our two countries to work towards?

Wang: In my understanding, every generation of Chinese political leaders [had a very strong] attachment to the U.S.-China relationship—Chairmen Mao, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and currently Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang. But what's new? What're the new elements in Xi Jinping's new idea? I think he wants to keep [away] from potential conflicts with the United

States. He wants to build up a kind of constructive role in the Pacific area. Since the [most] recent two years, you've seen a "pivot" policy by the United States, you see some turmoil in our neighboring area, you see some sensitive disputes in maritime areas. So Xi Jinping wants to build kind of a more mature relationship with the United States—we call [it] the "crisis management package," with the United States. But I think this is not very easy, so in the future, I think the core of this new type, or new pattern of U.S.-China relations will very much depend on whether this is the right build-up of crisis management, or it's just [rhetoric] by political leaders [to prevent the relationship from becoming] more and more suspicious, more and more frictions, more and more stories, that's very important. You see, my view is very simple. If China and the United States can have a systematic crisis management system, or measures, it'll be very ok for the near future. For the long term, I really don't know. I [think] it very much depends on China's domestic reforms and opening up. For the military, the PLA, for the political leaders, at most, what they should do is build up a good arrangement to [prevent] crises from [happening.] But for the long term—middle and long term—a mature U.S.-China relationship very much depends on the domestic atmosphere, the domestic reform and opening up [in China]. So, that's [a] very important source for a really new pattern of China-U.S. relationship. I mean, domestic progress, domestic reform, is the basic [step].

Haenle: Many in the United States, when looking at the "new type of great power relations" concept, are calling for the United States and China to put global cooperation—cooperation on global issues—at the center of this new framework for U.S.-China relations. Given that China's rise over the last three decades has resulted in China being in a position to influence and to contribute to resolving global issues, and China having a stake in how these global issues are resolved, many Americans think that there are many areas of common interest and that this is a new feature of the U.S.-China relationship that we should explore together and try to build on—this cooperation as a mean of improving our relationship going forward. Do you think that this is a viable approach, and if so, what are examples? What would the Chinese side see as examples of where the United States and China could cooperate?

Wang: In my view, in traditional areas, such as the military area, such as in the area of East Asian security, China [and] the United States can do a lot of things. [Current issues have] already shown some possibility, some direction for further efforts. But my recent interest is whether China and the United States can build a new relationship [within] some new boundaries, especially meaning the deep sea, North Pole, outer space, cyber, and financial fields. These five fields are very [essential] in my mind. I think we are talking too much [and] are very familiar about the traditional areas, [for instance] about sovereign disputes, about East Asia security dilemmas, even about Africa, [and] China-U.S. operational cooperation. This is rather familiar, talked of, and we already have some measures to deal with them. It's possibly a soft landing.

But my interest is that whether in some more sensitive, new areas, new functional zones or arenas, can China-U.S. cooperation [prevail] or will [their interests] conflict [with each other's], such as the five areas, as deep sea (the ocean), North Pole, outer space, cyber space, and the financial area? These, we call [them] new boundaries or "highlands", have special features. They are lacking mature rules, mature contracts. They need very systematic, scientific, logical arrangements and discussion—deep communication. They may make one country become a [rising] new star overnight, and another country, from [being] a very powerful one to a very weak, shrinking one. So, this new century's features, new "highlands", will [be a] kind of new basis [for]

China-U.S. relations. I think in the coming 5 to 10 years, it could be some kind of a new base for China and the United States to build a [new type of] relationship, or it could be a kind of a very sharp obstacle with new appeal for China-U.S. conflicts to become kind of a 导火索.

My studies [focus on] how in China, we make our population ready for these new “highlands”, how we can make our products, our population, and our public goods [better prepared], and then how to face the United States, Russia, and other powers existing there—in outer space, in the North Pole, and whether we can have a more cooperative way, a more creative way, to engage and get involved in [these issues together] rather than hard landing. In my new book, we’ll try to open some chapters to talk and discuss about it. I think maybe in the future, the media and think tanks will focus more [on these issues]. Say, 10 years ago, no one talked about China-U.S. maritime disputes, or potential conflict. But now, it’s become more and more [prominent]. I remember Bob Ross, from Boston College, once, about 10 years ago here, told me that China is a continental power, and the United States [has always been] a maritime power. But if you, China, want to become a maritime power, [that’ll be] a disaster. But now, you see, China is becoming more and more, you know, ambitious, aggressive in maritime areas. But Xi Jinping said, this is not [a] disaster. We may become co-partners. The Pacific area is big enough for both of us.

So, those are two perspectives. One is Bob Ross’ logic: inevitable conflict. Another one is Xi Jinping’s “Dream”. These two big [perspectives] can be harmonious, co-existing. [You can picture] the same story, the same picture, in the North Pole, in outer space, in cyber, in the financial area. These areas easily become [areas] of conflict or battlefields of powers—new and traditional powers—and also could be kind of a site for cooperation, to build up new bases of these new types, new patterns of relationship. So I think it’s very important for Chinese think tanks, and U.S. [ones] as well, to think, talk and communicate [more]. My personal experience is, many years, in the early months or days, [things can change drastically]. 10 years ago, people were talking [only about] very nearby area—very “lowland,” very familiar area, [such as the] Taiwan issue, treaty issue, human rights issue, or North Korea issue. But now I think in this area, we have found more and more mature arrangements already, but for the new areas, for the “highlands,” for some of the boundaries still lacking, thinking, discussion, communication [are needed]. That’s very important. So, my suggestion is that in the future, to enforce these relations, [to] enhance the ability to communicate, to have more communication, [will be crucial], not only among think tanks but also media, mass media, leaders, political leaders, to have a communication, to see whether these two countries and other powers can cooperate or [not].

Haenle: Very interesting ideas, certainly deserving of further exploration, and we look forward to your new book coming out next year, and we already invite you to come to the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center to discuss your new book and to explore these concepts, and to do another interview at the Carnegie–Tsinghua “China in the World” podcast.

Wang: Ok, I have your word. I will [be] ready to have some communication with Carnegie–Tsinghua friends about my new book, whether China’s new foreign policy in [the] “highlands” can [be] more cooperative, or more assertive.

Haenle: Well, thank you very much for spending time with us today. Thank you.

That’s it for this edition of the Carnegie–Tsinghua “China in the World” podcast. If you’d like to read more about China’s evolving foreign policy and international role, you can find

publications by our scholars and summaries of our many roundtable discussions with experts on these issues on the Carnegie–Tsinghua website at www.carnegietsinghua.org. You can also visit the “China in the World” podcast page, through our “Resources” tab. To find a link to a summary of President Xi Jinping’s remarks at the October 24 CPC Central Committee Conference on China’s diplomatic relations and work with neighboring countries, which was referred to in my interview with Professor Wang Yizhou. I encourage you to explore our website, and see the work of all our scholars at the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center. Thanks for listening and be sure to tune in next time.