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# Beyond the 'Cognitive Iron Curtain'. China's White Paper on Peaceful Development

Simone Dossi

State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's Peaceful Development*, 6 September 2011, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/gqbps/2011/201109/t1000029.htm>

*China's Peaceful Development* joins the growing number of white papers that the Chinese government has published over the past two decades on a variety of issues. The aim of the document is to explain the basic features of China's development strategy to foreign audiences, and for this reason it was released in both Chinese and English.

The first section of the white paper ("The Path of China's Peaceful Development: What it is About") defines the concept of "peaceful development" (*heping fazhan*). It focuses on the circular relationship between peace and development: "China should develop itself through upholding world peace, and contribute to world peace through its own development". From this perspective, China's growth is presented as an opportunity for "common development" (*gongtong fazhan*). First, it contributes to the economic prosperity of

other countries. China has made considerable efforts to counter the international financial crisis and promote global economic recovery. Second, China's growth contributes to international peace and security. Here, the white paper emphasizes China's participation in UN peacekeeping missions and in international counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.

The second section ("What China Aims to Achieve by Pursuing Peaceful Development") outlines China's development goals for the next decades. By 2020 China will become a "society of higher-level initial prosperity" (*geng gao shuiping de xiaokang shehui*). By 2050 it will reach the per capita GNP of the "medium developed countries" and further develop into a "rich, strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious and modern socialist country" (*fuguang minzhu wenming hexie de shehuizhui xiandaihua guojia*).

The third section ("China's Foreign Policies for Pursuing Peaceful Development") recalls China's "independent foreign policy of peace" (*duli zizhu de heping waijiao zhengce*), the grand strategy adopted in 1982 at the 12th National

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Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The basic principles of that grand strategy are reaffirmed in the white paper, including the principle of non-alignment (*bujiemeng*). The document also mentions China's "new security concept" (*xin anquan guan*), first articulated in 1997 and based on "mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination" (*buxin, huli, pingdeng, xiezuo*).

The fourth section ("China's Path of Peaceful Development is a Choice Necessitated by History") associates peaceful development with China's "basic national conditions" and with the larger "global trend". Regarding the latter, the white paper declares that "peace and development" remain the major issues of international politics, as famously stated by Deng Xiaoping in 1985.

Finally, the last section ("What China's Peaceful Development Means to the Rest of the World") argues that China's peaceful development breaks away from the "traditional pattern where a rising power was bound to seek hegemony" ('*guo qiang bi ba' de daguo jueqi chuantong moshi*).

The concept of peaceful development has been the foundation of China's public diplomacy since 2005. Originally articulated as "peaceful rise" (*heping jueqi*), as proposed in 2003 by Zheng Bijian, an influential ideologist and a former Executive Vice President of the Central Party School, the term met with strong criticism within Beijing's foreign policy community because "rise" might arouse concerns among China's neighbours.

The concept was thus reformulated as "peaceful development" and illustrated in the 2005 white paper on "China's Peaceful Development Road".<sup>1</sup>

The reasons behind Beijing's decision to release a second white paper on the same issue six years later are explained by Wang Jisi, Dean of Peking University's School of International Studies. In an article in *Dangdai Shijie* [Contemporary World], the journal of the CCP International Liaison Department, Wang notes that China's rise is increasingly drawing "doubts, misunderstandings and slander" (*zhiyi, wujie he dihui*) from the international community. China should break this "cognitive iron curtain" (*renzhi tiemu*) by clarifying its strategic intentions better.<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, the white paper can be considered a part of China's new efforts to reassure its neighbours.

In this respect, the 2011 edition of the white paper also contains some interesting novelties. Most notably, it provides a list of China's "core interests" (*hexin liyi*), an expression that was often used cryptically by Beijing in previous statements and documents. China's core interests were already listed by State Councillor Dai Bingguo during the July 2009 US–China Strategic and Economic Dialogue. Yet the 2011 white paper is the first official document providing a list of what the Chinese government considers its core interests: "state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability,

<sup>1</sup> SCIO, *China's Peaceful Development Road*, 12 December 2005, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/book/152684.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Wang Jisi, "Nuli Xiaojie Guoji Shehui dui Zhongguo Heping Fazhan Daolu de Yiliu" [Strive to Dissolve the International Community's Doubts about China's Path of Peaceful Development], *Dangdai Shijie* 10 (2011), 1.

and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development”.

A second interesting innovation are the two concepts of “convergence of interests” (*liyi huihe dian*) and “community of interests” (*liyi gongtongti*). Although not explained in detail, they are meant to suggest China’s commitment to stronger

international cooperation. Also introduced by Zheng Bijian,<sup>3</sup> these two concepts have been referred to quite frequently in recent times. They seem to be important ingredients of the foreign policy debate prior to the 18th CCP National Congress, and are well-placed to become a part of China’s future public diplomacy.

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<sup>3</sup> Zheng Bijian, “Dui yi ge Zhongda Zhanlue Gouxiang de Xin Renshi” [A New Understanding of a Major Strategic Concept], *Beijing Ribao*, 9 January 2012, 17.