

## COMMENTARY

# Impact of Establishing Peace in Traditional Chinese Culture Upon Current Chinese Foreign Relations

By Ji Yi Tao

### INTRODUCTION

Chinese and American scholars have published many works related to current Chinese foreign relations, but most of them approach it from "the broad interests of the state."<sup>1</sup> Of course, the effects of the element of national interest on current Chinese foreign relations are rather prominent, but I argue that in addition to this important factor, other factors must be also considered. For example, China's foreign relations are peace-oriented. In his Harvard speech entitled, "Enhance Mutual Understanding and Build Stronger Ties of Friendship and Cooperation" on November 1, 1997, then-President of the People's Republic of China, Jiang Zemin said, "In the prolonged course of development, China has formed its fine historical and cultural traditions, one of which is 'the peace-loving tradition.'" Chinese thinkers of the pre-Qin dynasty days (over 2,000 years ago) advanced the doctrine of "loving people and treating neighbors kindly is most valuable to a country." This is a reflection of the aspiration of the Chinese people for a peaceful world where people of all countries live in harmony. Today, the Chinese people who are committed to modernization need more than ever a long-term international environment of peace and a favorable neighboring environment. China's foreign policy is peace-oriented.<sup>2</sup> From here we see that Jiang Zemin makes claims about the importance of the idea of establishing peace in traditional Chinese culture in Chinese foreign relations. That is to say, current Chinese leaders consider the impact of Chinese culture when they make Chinese foreign policy. Apparently, those scholars who approach Chinese foreign relations

from "the broad interests of the state" do not explain the complete picture.

Of course, several Chinese and American scholars also argue that there are some connections between establishing peace (kai taiping) in Chinese tradition and current Chinese foreign relations. But they have not made a further or in-depth study of the topic.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, in this article, I will try to explore current Chinese foreign relations from the standpoint of the impact of the idea of establishing peace in Chinese tradition.

### ESTABLISHING PEACE IS AN IMPORTANT FEATURE OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE CULTURE

China is basically a land country, whose traditional culture is rooted in an agricultural civilization. Against this background, ancient Chinese cultivated fields and were also able to support themselves. They needed fixed buildings to reside in. At the same time, they needed regular time to plough and sow, too. Therefore, they feared chaos and disturbances so much. They tried to create harmony and unity as part of harmony between heaven and human. Under the Confucian system, the fundamental goal of government was also to create harmony in society, unity among people, and the harmonious relationship between human beings and the spiritual world. Accordingly, ancient Chinese loved peace. There was a famous saying in ancient China that says, "Good boys are not willing to join the army. Do not strike the nail with quality iron." (Hao nan bu dang bing, hao tie bu da ding) In addition, ancient Chinese

scholars formulated their goals as follows: to ordain conscience for heaven and earth (wei tiandi lixin), to secure life and fortune for the people (wei shengmin liming), to continue lost teachings for past sages (wei wangsheng ji juexue) and to establish peace for all future generations (wei wanshi kai taiping). In particular, "to establish peace for all future generations" became an important goal for traditional Chinese intellectuals.

Historically, according to the Lun Yu (The Confucian Analects), Confucius (551-479 BC) advocated that rulers should take kind measures to make people happy who lived nearby and to let people come willingly who lived far away and that only in this way could the world be in a state of peace. Subsequent Confucianists such as Mengzi (372-289 BC) and Xunzi (313-238 BC) never advocated that the world should be ruled by doing unjust actions and killing innocent people.<sup>4</sup> Under the guidance of the idea, some open-minded rulers also paid attention to establishing peace in ancient China. For example, Liu Bang (256-195 BC), Emperor of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC - 8 AD), gave one pretty maid in the Palace, named Wang Zhaojun, to Chanyu, head of the Xibngnu nation located in China's north, because the Xiongnu people constantly attacked the Han people and incited wars. After Wang Zhaojun became Chanyu's wife, there was no war across their borders for a long time.

In addition, from the 1,000 year period of the High Tang to the Qing dynasty, there is no record of China sending out an army to invade and occupy other countries. Of course, in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Chinggis Khan united the Mongol people and established an empire which stretched across Europe and Asia. But, "The Mongolian empire in the 12th-13th century was not a Chinese Empire. China was also one of the victims of the Mongolian conquest."<sup>5</sup>

Worth mentioning, China was already a world naval power by the fifteenth century in the

Ming dynasty, and the armada of Zheng He that reached Arabia and Africa far exceeded that of Columbus over 80 years later when he discovered a new continent. But the big exploratory fleet over 200 ships led by Zheng He only traveled in peace. It successfully showed off China's greatness and its generosity along the way by throwing lavish gifts. But the primary mission was to look for a disposed and escaped young emperor, not for colonization or conquest.<sup>6</sup>

In a word, establishing peace is an important feature of traditional Chinese culture. It was of active significance to the long-term stability of Chinese nation.

### ESTABLISHING PEACE HAS EXERTED EFFECTS ON CURRENT CHINA'S FOREIGN RELATIONS

The idea of establishing peace in traditional Chinese culture has affected current Chinese foreign relations to a certain degree. In a speech made in Beijing on December 18, 2001, Jiang Zemin said that the Chinese nation had many fine traditions including establishing peace which current Chinese people were still inheriting and developing. That is why he had reason to advocate that China keep to a foreign policy of peace in order to maintain world peace.<sup>7</sup> In the Harvard speech on December 10, 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao declared that China should "establish peace for all future generations (wei wanshi kai taiping)," one of the four goals that ancient Chinese scholars formulated and that he believes that current Chinese people should carry forward this fine cultural heritage and strive for a more peaceful, more tranquil and more prosperous world.<sup>8</sup> It is quite evident that the idea of establishing peace has a specific influence upon current Chinese statements of foreign aims.

The idea of establishing peace has exerted such effects on current China's foreign relations, because of the following:

Since 1981, China has entered the new era of reform, opening up and modernization.

That is why China needs urgently a long-term international environment of peace and a

favorable neighboring environment. At the same time, Chinese nation has a tradition of establishing peace, which can help the current Chinese government to pursue a foreign policy of peace.

Firstly, current China's foreign relations are peace-oriented. As early as 1982, Deng Xiaoping • advocated that China should work to safeguard world peace and promote human progress.<sup>9</sup> In his Harvard speech in 1997, Jiang Zemin also said, "China's foreign policy is peace-oriented....We will never impose upon others the kind of sufferings we once experienced. A developing and progressing China does not pose a threat to anyone. China will never seek hegemony even if it is developed in the future. China is always a staunch force for world peace and regional stability."<sup>10</sup> As current Chinese leaders, President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao not only continue to pursue world peace, but also have raised the new strategy of China's Peaceful Rise recently. In his speech at dinner hosted by nine American organizations on December 9,2003, Wen Jiabao also said, "The rise of China is peaceful. It relies on itself for its progress. In foreign relations, we are always in favor of friendship, partnership and cooperation with our neighboring and all other countries.... It calls for arduous endeavors of generations for China to catch up with developed countries. China will never seek hegemony and expansion even when it becomes fully developed and stronger."<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, China takes an active part in multilateral diplomatic activities and is an important force in preserving world peace and facilitating common development. For example, China founded the Shanghai Cooperation Organization together with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in June 2001. The SCO abides by the following basic principles: adherence to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations; respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs,

mutual non-use or threat of use of force; equality among all member states; settlement of all questions through consultations; non-alignment and no directing against any other country or organization; opening to the outside world and willingness to carry out all forms of dialogues, exchanges and cooperation with other countries and relevant international or regional organizations. Since the founding of the SCO, China and other five member states have fully cooperated to fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism, develop multilateral economy and trade among the six member states, and conduct exchanges in all forms with other nations and international organizations. In the course of development, a Shanghai spirit gradually took shape, a spirit characterized by mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, cooperation, respect for diversified civilizations and common development,<sup>12</sup> which can develop bilateral and multilateral relations of the SCO countries, and even improve world peace and common development to a certain degree.

Thirdly, as a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations, China actively participates in the political solution of the problems of regional hot spots. For example, China quickly condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and called for an immediate end to Iraqi military actions and a peaceful settlement of Iraqi-Kuwait disputes. In the United Nations Security Council, China voted for 11 resolutions directed against Iraq, including Resolution 661, which provided for mandatory economic sanctions. Despite Iraqi lobbying and a visit to Beijing by Iraqi officials, China did not use its veto power to block Security Council actions against Iraq. When the vote came on resolution 678, setting a deadline for Iraqi withdraw from Kuwait and authorizing the use of force thereafter, China abstained.<sup>13</sup> Regarding the nuclear issue of the Korean Peninsula, China holds that the Korean Peninsula should be nuclear-free. At the same time, the DPRK's security concerns should also be addressed through the only means of dialogue and peaceful

talks so as to maintain peace and stability on the peninsula.<sup>14</sup> China supports and welcomes all efforts conducive to promoting dialogue and pushing forward peaceful talks. As the host country, China has provided many facilities for the three-party talks and the six-party talks towards peacefully resolving the nuclear issue in the recent two years.

Fourthly, China is firmly opposed to all forms of terrorism. Terrorism is the common enemy of the whole mankind and poses a threat to international peace and security. Therefore, after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, Chinese leaders made an immediate response, firmly opposed and strongly condemn all forms of terrorism in all their evil acts, and appealed to nations to cooperate in order to strike a thorough blow at international terrorism. China and America have already started some cooperation on the anti-terrorism field in the recent years. For example, the two countries have established a mechanism of mid- and long-term anti-terrorism exchange and cooperation based on the principle of "equality, cooperation, reciprocity and mutual benefit."<sup>15</sup> Some American scholars made right comments on them and said, "China's response to the September 11,2001 attacks in the United States have been better than expected. China backed the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions for the use of force against terrorism by the United States and its coalition partners, sent a delegation of counterterror and intelligence experts to consult with counterparts in Washington, and supported the idea of issuing a declaration condemning terrorism at the Asia Pacific economic cooperation summit meeting in Shanghai in October 2001. It may be possible to elicit further cooperation from China, mostly in the form of continued diplomatic and political support. China's voice is important in certain quarters of the international community, such as on the UN Security Council, and among its friends in central and south Asia, such as Pakistan and Iran. It may also be possible for China to offer more in the way of intelligence sharing, though expectations on this score may be limited."<sup>16</sup>

Lastly, China devotes itself actively to pushing forward the cause of international arms control, disarmament and nonproliferation. Since China was restored to its rightful seat in the United Nations in 1971, it has even more actively participated in international arms control and disarmament activities. China appreciates and supports disarmament activities proposed by the United Nations. In 1987, China, in cooperation with the United Nations, hosted the Regional Symposium on World Disarmament Campaign in Beijing. In response to the United Nations' proposals, China carried out extensive publicity on disarmament issues and implemented a series of nationwide activities including an "International Peace Year" and a "Disarmament Decade." On many occasions it sent representatives to UN expert group meetings and symposiums on disarmament and international security issues, conscientiously and responsibly making its own contribution to the drafting of fair and rational research reports. To date, China has joined all the treaties related to international arms control and non-proliferation.

## CONCLUSION

This paper seeks to explore connections between the idea of establishing peace in traditional Chinese culture and current Chinese diplomacy. On the basis of the abovementioned analyses, due to the profundity of the traditional Chinese cultural stockpile, current China's foreign policy of peace and its practices have been apparently influenced by the idea of establishing peace. That is to say, there are close connections between the two sides.

Current Chinese leaders fully understand that a nation would be rootless if traditional culture and humanity values are not cherished. Now that the CCP will continue to focus on the four modernizations, inherit and develop good traditional Chinese culture in the first half of the twenty-first century, traditional Chinese culture will continue to have an impact upon Chinese diplomacy. As for how much traditional Chinese culture will affect future Chinese diplomacy, this will depend on future Chinese leaders' attitudes

towards traditional Chinese culture. We can only make predictions at present, and must wait for what the future bears.

## NOTES

1. For example, see Robert G. Sutter, "Change and Continuity in Contemporary PRC Foreign Policy: Implications for the United States," In Shao-chuan Leng, ed. *Changes in China: Party, State, and Society* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 294-295.
2. 10. Jiang Zemin, "President Jiang Zemin's Speech at Harvard University," <http://www.chinaembassy.org/eng/zmgx/zysj/jzxfm/t36252.htm> (17 June 2004)
3. For example, see Youwei Chen, "China's Foreign Policy Making as Seen Through Tiananmen," *Journal of Contemporary China* 12 : 37 ( November 2003): 731.
4. Zhengtong Wei, *An Introduction to Chinese Culture* (Taipei Shui Niu Publishing House, 1968), 43.
5. 6. Sheng Yen Lee, "Confucianism, Emperors, Chinese Culture and World Peace," *Chinese American Forum* 72 (April 2003): 29.
7. Jiang Zemin, *Jiang zemin lun you zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi (Jiang Zemin Talks about the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics)* (Beijing Central Committee Document Press, 2002), 527.
8. Wen Jiabao, Wen Jiabao's Speech at Harvard University, <http://www.phoenixtv.com/home/news/world/200312/10/170571.html> (11 December 2003 )

9. Deng Xiaoping, *Selected works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), 397.
11. 15. Wen Jiabao, "Working Together to Write a New Chapter in China-US Relations," <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/zyjh/t55971.htm> (18 June 2004).
12. "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," <http://www.vic-info.org/InternationalOrganizations/IOSCO.htm> (22 June 2004).
13. William A. Joseph, ed., *China Brief 1992* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 58.
14. Policy Research Section of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, *China's Foreign Affairs, 2003* (Beijing: World Affairs Press, 2003), 25.
16. Stephen J. Flanagan and Michael E. Marti, eds. *The People's Liberation Army and China in Transition* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 2003), 36-37.

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