

## A New Model of China-US Relations

**Session:** 4

**Date/Time:** November 15, 2013 / 10:40-12:30

**Moderator:** Jane Perlez, *The New York Times*

**Speakers:** Cheng Xiaohe, Renmin University of China  
Liu Ming, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences  
Christopher Johnson, Center for Strategic and International Studies  
Choo Jaewoo, Kyung Hee University

**Discussants:** Gong Keyu, Shanghai Institute for International Studies  
Ha Taewon, Dong-A Ilbo

### Session Sketch

The moderator of the session, Jane Perlez, Diplomatic Correspondent for *The New York Times*, opened the panel on the subject of China's proposed "New Model of China-US Relations," observing that after the Obama-Xi meeting in June 2013 both Chinese and US observers spoke of a "spirit of Sunnylands." Perlez asked speakers whether there is any such spirit and what has changed since the summit in California. Citing the March 2012 article by Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, "Addressing US-China Strategic Distrust," Perlez also highlighted how some see the US as a declining power—particularly with recent examples the US Government shutdown, difficulties with the TPP, and revelations of NSA operations from Edward Snowden—and asked speakers to address what has changed in China-US relations in recent years.

Cheng Xiaohe, Associate Professor at the Renmin University of China, presented his impressions of meetings with US think tanks and government officials from his recent ten-day trip to the United States. He outlined the range of views that he encountered on the proposed "new type of major-country relationship," including that the concept lacks exact content, that some see it as a propagandistic con by Chinese leaders, that elements of the concept have already been articulated by previous Chinese leaders, that US acceptance of such a concept would be a form of appeasement to further Chinese aggression, and lastly, that

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some officials believed that it was worth waiting to see how the concept might be put into practice. Cheng explained that for Chinese scholars and experts enthusiastic about the concept, it is generally understood that the concept as presented by Xi Jinping includes four basic elements: 1) no conflict, 2) no confrontation, 3) mutual respect, and 4) win-win cooperation. While describing this formulation as “good, attractive, and constructive,” Cheng used the examples of North Korean denuclearization, the Diaoyu Island dispute, and other issues that affect US-China relations to demonstrate how these four elements of the concept may be difficult to put into practice, particularly with new challenges such as interpretations of China’s rapid economic growth and military modernization. Cheng concluded by highlighting how China and the United States focus more and more on cooperation on multilateral issues and that the United States needs to take into account new voices in China, including the increasing number of netizens, as well as challenges to China-US relations presented by third parties, such as Japan and the Philippines.

Liu Ming, Executive Director of the Institute of International Relations Studies of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, echoed Cheng’s view that the concept of a “new model of major-country relationship” is not totally new but is consistent with previous policies of Chinese leadership. Liu emphasized that for China this is not a “G2.” He explained that though China wanted the concept to apply to China’s relations with the EU, India, China, etc., some believe that the concept’s value, in tandem with China’s “peaceful rise,” is in challenging the historic assumption that a rising power will inevitably come into conflict with a power that is already established. The concept’s application to the China-US relationship was therefore deemed to be more pressing. In a review of the previous year, Liu argued that China and the United States have also had success in other meetings, including between defense ministers, the Strategic Economic Dialogues and the first China-US Cybersecurity Dialogue. He highlighted that while coming to agreements is valuable, it is more important for China to follow up on these talks and press for substantial results. He also described how finalization of a China-US bilateral investment treaty may pave the way for China eventually joining the TPP.

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Christopher Johnson, Senior Advisor and Freeman Chair in China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, addressed difficulties with implementing a new type of major-power relationship between China and the United States. He described how US-China relations, initially formed to counter the Soviet threat, have undergone fundamental changes as China's power has increased. He gave the example of how China's assertiveness while the US struggled with a dysfunctional government and the US economy in the wake of the global financial crisis, contributed to disequilibrium in China-US relations. However, with US confidence again on the rise on account of an improving economy and the shale gas revolution and China seeking a benign external environment in order to pursue its own domestic economic reforms after recently concluded plenary, Johnson believes we have an opportunity to find a new equilibrium in bilateral relations. In order for this to be achieved, Johnson posited that the US should continue to reassure China and China's neighbors that the United States wants China to succeed. He also suggested that China continue to show its current nuance and adroitness in signaling a more positive approach in its relations with its neighbors, and that the United States seek further cooperation with China on the North Korea nuclear issue. To stay on track, the goal should be to aim for stability on current issues between the US and China, such as cybersecurity and maritime security, and not allow them to disrupt bilateral relations. On the TPP, Johnson opined that it offers positive external pressure toward allowing for the kind of reform of China's economy that Chinese leaders seek but domestic politics would not otherwise permit.

Choo Jaewoo, Professor of Chinese foreign policy at Kyung Hee University, addressed whether China and the United States can find space to converge on common interests and overcome strategic distrust in order to realize a new model of relations in the context of East Asian regional order. Giving the examples of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's 2010 remark that the US will lead in this new century and Wen Jiabo's 2004 remark that China bide its time for the next one hundred years, Choo argued that there cause for suspicion and concern on both sides. Choo also outlined differences in Chinese and US goals for regional order in East Asia. Whereas China wants to realize common development and a harmonious world, Choo argued that the US wants to preserve its primacy and leadership

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based on value-sharing with countries in Asia. Whereas China's values include the pursuit of peace, development, and cooperation, the United States foreign policy values emphasize democracy, freedom, and market economy. While China wishes to build a system of cooperation based on multilateralism, the United States wants multilateralism based on bilateralism, including its alliance system in Northeast Asia. This last contrast also reflects in different perceptions of the center of gravity in East Asia, where China believes the focus for regional order should gravitate toward ASEAN but the United States sees more value in focusing on ties to its allies. In terms of membership, Choo argues that China seeks more inclusive regionalism where any country would be welcome, but the United States supports more selectivity based on shared values. Finally, where China sees common interests and new security concepts as sources of regional stability, Choo posited that the US believes stability in East Asia is maintained by US leadership, primacy, and its positive influence in international affairs. Choo concluded that given these differences in perspective vis-à-vis regional order, China and the United States will find it difficult to find common ground upon which to form a basis for a new model of major-country relations.

During the discussion period, Gong Keyu of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies began by addressing causes for optimism in the improvement of Sino-US relations. Emphasizing the importance of mutual trust, Gong argued that with regard to the Korean Peninsula there is now a window of opportunity because the countries of Northeast Asia have all experienced changes in leadership, including North Korea with Kim Jong-un, and US presidents' in their second terms have shown a tendency to more actively pursue positive relations with North Korea rather than focusing on the nuclear issue. Despite shared interests regarding the Korean Peninsula, including China's emphasis on stability peace, and denuclearization, Gong asked why so little progress has been achieved. She posited that this is because both the US and China misunderstand what each side should contribute to this issue. Comments earlier in the Asan Beijing Forum regarding China using the nuclear issue as a card against the United States reminded Gong of suggestions that the United States think of Taiwan as a card against China. Yet Gong believes that there is still time and space for China and the United States to list their interests and priorities, including those that they share

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in the East Asian region as stakeholders who would both benefit by focusing on these common interests together. Gong concluded that while in the past China and the United States considered North Korea and South Korea as their respective younger brothers and used their alliances to support them, subsequent ineffective efforts to resolve differences altogether in the Six-Party Talks leaves it to China and the United States to instead cooperate with each other and work together to manage their common concerns.

Ha Taewon, Editorial Writer for the *Dong-A Ilbo*, continued discussion by considering the implications for South Korea. From speakers' remarks, Ha observed that it is clear some in China believe the United States has reached its highest point and China's continuing growth will lead China to surpass the United States in the global order. Were this to be the case, South Korea will have cause for concern because China may seek to test its new model or interpretation of world order in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific, which would greatly affect South Korea. Ha argued that until China fully explains its vision of regional order to its friends in Korea and Japan, the latter two countries, as stakeholders in the region, will find it hard to consent to China's stance. While China and the United States may find a new model of great power relations and a joint understanding for regional order, Korea may still have cause for concern. Ha noted how Korea has a painful history and feeling of betrayal by superpowers, including only a century ago when the Taft-Katsura Agreement, where Japan was permitted to annex Korea in exchange for Japanese recognition of the Philippines being a US protectorate. Ha concluded that while it is premature for Korea to fear this kind of occurrence in the near future, others should be aware that, given recent history, major countries deciding the fate of Korea at the cost of Korean interests will not be acceptable from the ROK point of view. If it can be explained how Korea would benefit from a new regional order, then Koreans will support it, but for now the content of these visions need to be clarified.

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