

Fostering a Strategic Relationship with China: A Unification Perspective

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China's President Xi Jinping met President Obama at Sunnylands, California in early June.

In April 2007, I attended a conference that gathered at the Cheon Jeong Gung "Peace Palace" in Chung Pyung for True Parents' Day. After Rev. Moon's Founder's Address, I walked out to the Palace terrace with a Chinese guest and friend who was a retired senior officer in the People's Liberation Army and head of one of China's major think tanks. In the heart of Chung Pyung, we discussed the outlines of a joint conference on cross strait relations held later that year in Macau. Given the significance of where we stood, I couldn't help but feel there was a spiritual imperative behind the discussion of future efforts at cooperation with a Chinese delegate.



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In 1998, I often showed my students a PBS documentary on China's efforts to modernize from abject poverty. By 2010, China overtook Japan as the world's second-largest economy. To some, we now live in a bipolar world of two superpowers, the U.S. and China. More than ever, China has to be reckoned with by the United States, by the two Koreas -- and by the Unification Movement itself.

On a global level, U.S. relations with China must be handled very judiciously. But for North and South Korea, China is their large neighbor, which has inescapable implications. For the international Unification Movement, based in South Korea, it would be wise to foster a strategic relationship with China; that is how one must deal with a nation that may otherwise misunderstand you and cause difficulty.

Recently, China has begun to speak about a "new type of great power relationship" with regard to the United States, the established hegemonic power. What China means is to distinguish the "new type" from the "old type" of great power relationship previously witnessed in history. The question is how these two continental powers can take a different course than previous great powers who were in competition. In history, conflict and war between two major powers sometimes occurred not simply by the increase in material power of the rising challenger but because of the fear it instilled in the established power.

What this implies is that trust-building between the two great powers is vital for the success of a new type of great power relationship. President Obama's June meeting in California with Chinese President Xi Jinping was a start. The challenge is to find a way to share responsibilities and resolve current problems. China and the U.S. need to identify common ground in the realm of ideas and philosophy, as well as in the sustainability of existing markets and the economy.

As difficult as U.S. relations with China can be, it is important, given China's history, for it not to be demonized or belittled by a Western power. It should be treated with respect as a partner for the sake of regional and global stability.

Moreover, if this is the age of the end of ideology, as not only Francis Fukuyama but Rev. Moon himself affirmed, we are beyond dogmas which have been the bases for past struggles between great powers. Rather, a path should be undertaken to mutually search for common universal values to secure peace and stability, economic growth, and prosperity.

However, according to one of America's most distinguished scholars, Amitai Etzioni, the Pentagon, unilaterally, has concluded the time has come to prepare for war with China and that it has done so in a manner beyond the usual contingency planning one would expect for a wide range of possibilities. Etzioni argues this planning has not been reviewed at the highest levels by elected civilian officials. It's understandable the U.S. military should be acutely aware of China's capabilities and advocate proper preparations to contend with its emergence.

The problem is the very definition of China as the new enemy – in a new Cold War -- upon which future American military planning is focused. We may get the very eventuality we should avoid – superpower conflict -- by coming to unwarranted conclusions which have not been reviewed properly beyond our institutions of national defense.

Such contingency planning should be challenged from an economic point of view, considering the world today is a global enterprise in which conflict with China would be greatly destabilizing and debilitating on a worldwide scale. Unlike previous wars contained on one or two continents, the next superpower conflict would be a war of devastation, first of global markets and then all else; the collapse of the Chinese and Northeast Asian regional economy would lead to the world's ruin.

Yet, the situation between China and the Korean Peninsula is quite different. China is extremely sensitive about the 14 nations on its periphery, and feels most secure with a modern-day form of tributary relationship with them, if possible. China's Northeast -- once called Manchuria -- borders the Korean peninsula. The ties between China and the two Koreas are shaped heavily by geography and history. This Yalu and Amur River border was a troublesome spot for Chinese empires, which had to contend with various invaders.

Korea always has had to deal with the possibility of Chinese domination, but since the 7th century, says analyst Rodger Baker, the several Korean kingdoms generally managed to "retain their independence by nominally acceding to China's imperial vision and accepting a special relationship with the Chinese dynasties." This allowed China to feel confident in Korea's loyalty but also gave Korea assurance that China would not invade.

Since the 1953 Korean War Armistice, whose 60th anniversary we observe this week, China was content with the peninsula's division, and used North Korea as a buffer against the presence of American troops in the South. But in the past year and a half, under North Korea's young new leader, Kim Jong Un, China's usual ways of preserving the North in a somewhat subservient status no longer seem to work.

China's relations with the two Koreas are also no longer equidistant: South Korean President Park Geun-hye met President Xi in Beijing a few weeks ago, while Kim is still awaiting his first invitation to China. From China's perspective, North Korea is neither as predictable nor manageable as in the past. China fears North Korea, despite its tenuous relationship with the South, may shift away from China by slowly improving relations with Japan and even the United States. Over the long haul, China sees potential Korean reunification as an event over which it may have far less influence than it hopes.

China's emergence as a superpower has different implications for the United States than for Korea. America is separated from China by the Pacific Ocean (though it is China's largest single trading partner). But Korea is one of China's neighbors. In this sense, one can understand why the "Strong Korea" lectures were given by our Movement in South Korea, though their tone was rather strident. Korea's historical relationship with China has been one of trying to survive and maintain independence despite sometimes enormous pressure from China.

China has a right to have its own interests, and can be reasonable on matters which will directly or indirectly affect it. That Chinese scholar I met at Chung Pyung reflected a sense China was looking for a practical working relationship with the U.S., as well as with the Unification Movement. China, I learned, was most upset with what it regarded as its one-dimensional characterization by conservative American media -- including some affiliated with our Movement -- whose coverage was confined to military developments in China.

This Chinese scholar complained that so much more has been happening in China – in its society, economy, culture -- which these media do not cover and this was unbalanced and unfair. "It's

understandable to be critical where necessary," he told me, "but you should give credit where credit is due." Indeed, this is the approach of America's top think tanks and university institutes. Their relationship with the Chinese may at times be tense, but by acting on principle and with objectivity, China not only accepts but engages them.

Nobody knows what America's relationship with China will be 10 or 20 years from now. But surely it will be shaped by how it understands and conceives of China. If we want an enemy for decades to come, we will get one, and life in our world will become more dangerous. But, as the continental power in Asia, a region of huge dynamism, China can also become a reasonable global actor who could fulfill the main responsibilities asked of it and work with the international community.

Among the many issues our international Unification Movement must face after its Founder's passing, how to view and relate to China is one of them. Despite past difficulties, it is our challenge to find the best basis for ongoing engagement with China, a nation with a rich spiritual civilization and strong traditional values. Our Movement – and America -- should deem China a potential partner for global peace. Let's remember that from 1989 Rev. Moon made a major economic investment in China because he believed in the Chinese people. Meanwhile, divided Korea, given its unique history, must endeavor to reunify in a fully independent and sovereign manner.

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