

HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE, CONTEMPORARY VALUE, AND KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper revisits the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as a cornerstone of China's foreign policy and a normative framework for contemporary international relations. Drawing on case studies and policy text analysis of historical archives, diplomatic practice, and major initiatives since the 1950s, it examines how the Principles have maintained vitality across different social systems and ideological contexts. The paper analyses their alignment with China's major-country diplomacy and the vision of a community with a shared future for humanity, arguing that the Principles continue to function as a value compass for world peace and common development. It concludes with an assessment of current limitations and offers policy recommendations for better integrating the Five Principles into emerging agendas on global development, security, and civilization.

Keywords: *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence; Historical Experience; Community with a Shared Future for Humanity; Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics; Foreign Policy; International Relations Theory.*

INTRODUCTION

On 28 June 2024, a commemorative conference marking the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence was held in Beijing, where President Xi Jinping emphasised that these principles “*transcend time and space and remain ever relevant*”, having become universally applicable fundamental norms for international relations and principles of international law that have made significant contributions to world peace and human progress. Since their proposal by Premier Zhou Enlai in 1953, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have been gradually established as the cornerstone of China's foreign policy and widely incorporated into international documents. In recent years, scholars have continued to deepen their research on the Five Principles.

Former Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin proposed integrating the Five Principles with the concept of building a community with a shared future for humanity. It aimed at helping construct an inclusive, equitable, and cooperative new global governance framework, which requires enhancing multilateral consultations, equal partnerships, mutual respect, and jointly addressing challenges such as development gaps, climate change, and security threats to improve international collaborative governance capabilities (Liu, 2014).

Some scholars argue that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence possess unique advantages in cyberspace governance, where countries should pledge not to infringe upon the cyberspace of others while enjoying the right to protect their own (Zhu and Chen, 2022). Other scholars, based on declassified archives about Kissinger's visit to China, conclude that the Five Principles underscore China's international justice stance against aggression and colonialism, providing important insights for handling current peripheral strategic disputes and enhancing diplomatic resilience (Qiu and Qin, 2024). Huang Huikang and others have elucidated the

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legal connotations and contemporary value of the Five Principles from an international law perspective (Huang and Bai, 2024). Lan Jianxue and Tang Xiao emphasise the profound alignment between the principles' embodiment of Asian wisdom and their contemporary mission (Lan and Tang, 2024). Wu Zhicheng and Xu Xingao believe that the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are consistent with promoting the building of a community with a shared future for humanity, offering significant insights for building new international relations and a better world (Wu and Xu, 2024). These studies provide important theoretical support and research perspectives for this paper to explore the historical experience and contemporary value of the Five Principles in the new era.

Over the past 70 years, despite major shifts in the international landscape, including the Cold War confrontation, the dissolution of the bipolar system, and the evolution toward multipolarity, the Five Principles have consistently demonstrated strong vitality and practical guiding significance. In the new era, with the rise of unilateralism and power politics and the emergence of numerous global challenges, the international community's calls for fairness, justice, and multilateralism have grown increasingly louder.

In this context, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have not become obsolete but rather become an important ideological resource for building a community with a shared future for humanity. This paper focuses on the historical experiences, contemporary values, and key objectives of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in the new era. It explores the accumulated experience related to these principles in history, their practical significance in the current era, and their innovative development under the framework of China's diplomatic thought in the new era. Through a combination of historical review and case analysis, the paper systematically presents the contemporary expressions, policy applications, and theoretical contributions of the Five Principles to global governance and the building of new international relations, while offering targeted policy recommendations and future prospects.

I. Methods of Research on the Historical Experience, Contemporary Value, and Key Objectives of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence

This study employs qualitative analysis and utilises various methodological tools to ensure the analysis is systematic and reliable. Through textual analysis, it systematically reviews historical literature and academic research related to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, including historical records of Zhou Enlai's proposal of the principles, diplomatic archives from various periods, and relevant documents from international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), as well as domestic and foreign scholarly research on the evolution and role of the principles.

By combing through the existing literature, the article clarifies the developmental trajectory of the Five Principles across different historical stages and scholarly perceptions, laying a theoretical foundation for subsequent analysis. To grasp the new developments of the Five Principles in the new era, this paper focuses on analysing important literature and policy speeches related to Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, such as the full texts of President Xi Jinping's speeches at the commemorative conferences marking the 60th and 70th anniversaries of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, as well as policy documents on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilizations Initiative proposed in the new era. These textual materials aid in understanding how Chinese leaders have inherited and extended the connotations of the Five Principles under new circumstances.

Then, the study conducts case studies. It examines typical cases to dissect the practical application and effects of the Five Principles. On the one hand, it selects representative events in the history of the People's Republic of China's diplomacy to illustrate the role of the Five Principles in handling state relations and resolving disputes. On the other hand, it focuses on contemporary cases, analysing cooperative projects and diplomatic mediation efforts guided by the Five Principles. For instance, it examines people's livelihood projects such as the Smiling Children School Feeding Programme, a China-Nepal cooperative project under the BRI framework, as well as China's practical cases of mediating international conflicts (such as mediation of conflicts in West Asia) to demonstrate the real-world application of the Five Principles.

Finally, the analysis is supplemented by official data releases to support the findings. For example, the data from the National Development and Reform Commission indicate that, as of 2023, China has signed BRI cooperation documents with 152 countries and 32 international organisations, achieving significant results in trade, investment, poverty reduction, and employment. These data provide a quantitative basis for evaluating the practical impact of policies related to the Five Principles.

II. Formation and Practical Implications of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Results)

Seventy years ago, amid the rise of national independence movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence emerged. Drawing inspiration from the UN Charter, the developing countries, represented by China, proposed the five principles of *"mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence"*. These principles provided fundamental guidelines for promoting democratisation in international relations and building a new international order, becoming the cornerstone of China's foreign policy and laying the value foundation for building a community with a shared future for humanity.

First, the principle of sovereign equality must be upheld. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence emphasise that all countries, regardless of size or strength, are equal participants in the international community. The future of humanity should be jointly shaped by all nations, and China opposes any country's monopoly over international affairs. Over the past 70 years, China has consistently engaged with other countries based on the principle of sovereign equality, opposing hegemony and power politics. It firmly advocates that each country's affairs should be determined by its own people, promoting equality of rights, opportunities, and rules among nations; and opposing interference in other countries' internal affairs and infringement on their sovereignty. With the advancement of economic globalisation and the new technological revolution, the importance of international relations democratisation has grown, highlighting the increasing necessity of upholding the principle of sovereign equality.

Second, the principle of mutual respect must be upheld. Mutual respect is a prerequisite for normal state-to-state interactions and the foundation for building new international relations. Given the diverse historical and cultural traditions and varying stages of development among countries, the development paths and institutional models chosen independently by their peoples should be respected. No country is superior to others, and there is no one-size-fits-all model of governance. Bullying the weak, interfering in other countries' internal affairs, or imposing one's will on others should never be the norms for state-to-state exchanges.

Third, common security should be promoted. Security is universal and interconnected; no country can achieve absolute security in isolation from others. All countries have equal rights to participate in international and regional security affairs and equal obligations to maintain international and regional security. China has consistently adhered to the path of cooperation, resolving inter-state conflicts through peaceful means, enhancing mutual trust through dialogue, resolving disputes through talks, and promoting security through consultation. Facing a complex and evolving international landscape, China has imbued the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence with new contemporary values, advocating for a common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security approach.

Fourth, common development should be pursued. As the world's largest developing country and a responsible major country, China seeks its own development while actively promoting the common development of other countries and the world. President Xi Jinping stated, "*The sky, earth and world are big enough to allow the common development and prosperity of all countries*"² (CCTV, 2014). Guided by the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, China has strived to promote trade and investment liberalisation and facilitation, working with like-minded partners to foster sustainable and balanced global economic development. China has consistently resolved economic and trade frictions through consultation and actively safeguarded global economic security. As a member of the Global South, China has consistently advocated for and supported South-South cooperation and promoted North-South dialogue, thereby contributing to the establishment of a more just and equitable international economic order.

Fifth, win-win cooperation should be embraced. "Cooperation" refers to China's commitment to engaging in equal cooperation with other countries on the basis of mutual benefit. President Xi Jinping emphasised, "*Cooperation generates strength while isolation only leads to weakness. Win-win cooperation should be the basic policy of all countries in handling international affairs*"³. As the world continues to move towards multipolarity, economic globalisation, and cultural diversity, global challenges have become more prominent. China has consistently regarded win-win cooperation as its basic policy in international affairs, adhering to the principles of solidarity and shared responsibility, and working with other countries to address global challenges such as climate change, major natural disasters, resource and energy security, and cybersecurity, and to build an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity.

Sixth, value inclusiveness and mutual learning should be valued. Civilizations have no superior or inferior distinctions, only unique characteristics. Mutual exchanges, inclusivity, and mutual learning among different nations and civilizations are important driving forces for the progress of human society and world civilizations. President Xi Jinping stated that to solve outstanding contradictions and problems facing humanity, it is necessary to rely on material means to overcome difficulties and rely on the strength of the spirit to rectify mind through thinking with sincerity. China has consistently respected the diversity and equality of civilizations, adhered to promoting the common values of humanity, advocated for a civilization outlook of equality, mutual learning, dialogue, and inclusivity among all

² CCTV. Full text of Xi Jinping's speech at meeting marking the 60th anniversary of the initiation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (2024). <http://news.cntv.cn/2014/06/28/ARTI1403965452108355.shtml>

³ People's Daily Online. Honor the history for a better future (2015). <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2015/0508/c64094-26966607.html>

countries, actively implemented the Global Civilizations Initiative, and worked with other nations to jointly promote the progress of human civilization.

Seventh, fairness and justice should be upheld. Fairness and justice are lofty goals pursued by people worldwide. In today's international relations, fairness and justice are far from being realised. President Xi Jinping emphasised, "*All countries should jointly shape the future of the world*".⁴ Guided by the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, China has promoted the democratisation, rule of law, and rationalisation of international relations, working with all parties to uphold international law and the international order. China opposes certain countries seeking their own private interests, placing themselves above the international community, engaging in exceptionalism, distorting international laws, infringing upon the legitimate development rights of other countries in the name of the "rule of law," and undermining international peace and stability. China firmly safeguards the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries and continuously enhances the representation and voice of Global South countries in international affairs.

III. Contemporary Value of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Discussion)

In the new era, the international landscape is evolving at an accelerated pace, and the world has entered a new period of turbulence and transformation. Unilateralism and protectionism are on the rise, local conflicts are frequent, and global challenges threaten the common interests of all countries. In this context, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have been endowed with new contemporary value and show new vitality in China's diplomatic practice, opening up a new horizon for major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. This section examines the current significance of the five principles through an exploration of several major diplomatic practices in the new era.

First, the five principles provide ideological guidance for a world in disarray. Currently, the Western-dominated world political order is plagued by chaos after a century of changes. Neoliberalism is in decline, while protectionism, unilateralism, and bullying practices are on the rise. Regional conflicts and local wars have erupted frequently, causing untold negative impacts on global development. In this context, the contemporary significance of China's promotion of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence has become increasingly prominent. On the one hand, the five principles offer Eastern wisdom for correctly handling state-to-state relations by transcending differences in social systems and ideologies. On the other hand, based on these principles, China has proposed the building of a new type of major-country relationship characterised by "no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation", transcending the Western international relations theories and practices represented by the "Thucydides Trap."

Second, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have opened up a new horizon for major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. China has consistently implemented these principles in a series of international affairs it participates in, promoting fairness of global governance. Based on these principles, China has proposed theories and assertions such as "peace and development are the themes of the times", embarking on a path of Chinese modernisation characterised by peaceful development (Liu and Chen, 2023). Entering a new

⁴ Xi, Jiping. Follow the trend of the times and promote peace and development in the world. *People's Daily*, 24 March 2013, p. 2.

era, China's role on the international political stage has undergone significant changes, and its implementation of the essence of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence has continued.

In the economic realm, China adheres to the principle of equality and mutual benefit, actively implementing the BRI, upgrading the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, constructing economic corridors such as the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and proposing the Global Development Initiative in 2021 to create a global open platform and initiate the establishment of the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative. A batch of small but effective public well-being programmes has been implemented in developing countries, such as the Smiling Children School Feeding Program in Nepal and the cervical cancer screening and prevention programme in Sierra Leone, bringing tangible changes and achievable goals to the people of developing countries.

In the security realm, China practices the principle of peaceful coexistence, grasps the characteristics of the times, and through the Global Security Initiative proposed in 2022, advocates that countries establish a common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security concept under the guidance of the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and actively promote the political resolution of regional hotspot issues. Equally, in the civilization realm, China adheres to the principle of mutual respect and proposed the Global Civilizations Initiative in 2023, advocating that countries jointly respect the diversity of world civilizations, strengthen international cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and promote cultural exchanges and world peace.

Finally, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence serve as a value compass for promoting the development of a harmonious world. President Xi Jinping stated, "*The Party will continue to work with all peace-loving countries and peoples to promote the shared human values of peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom. We will continue to champion cooperation over confrontation, to open up rather than closing our doors, and to focus on mutual benefits instead of zero-sum games. We will oppose hegemony and power politics and strive to keep the wheels of history rolling toward bright horizons*". (Xi, 2021).

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence advocate for seeking common ground while reserving differences, refraining from drawing ideological lines, transcending value differences, and respecting the diversity and multiplicity of each other's development paths and political systems. Since the end of the Cold War, the West has disregarded the history and reality of developing countries, advocating the "End of History" thesis and promoting Western models through "colour revolutions", causing severe humanitarian crises and prolonged political turmoil in some countries and regions.

The common values of humanity proposed based on China's foreign exchange concepts and principles, including the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, represent the broadest consensus for building a better world. These values, encompassing peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom, are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, forming a coherent whole. They are not only important ideological public goods provided by China to a world plagued by frequent turbulence but also common wealth for the progress of human civilization.

IV. The Strategic Significance of Practicing the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in the New Era (Conclusion and Recommendations)

In the face of unprecedented global, epochal, and historical changes, a pressing question arises: how can the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence continue to be implemented in the new

era to promote the development of new international relations? In response to the profound transformation not seen in a century and the crucial question of where humanity is heading, General Secretary Xi Jinping has proposed the concept of building a community with a shared future for humanity. This initiative transcends the Western logic of “might makes right” and represents a genuine commitment to multilateralism.

First, the vision of a community with a shared future for humanity inherits and expands the essence of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and other Chinese diplomatic norms. In the new era, this vision carries forward the spirit of those principles and plays a vital role in promoting international cooperation and mutual benefit as well as in building a just and equitable international order. On the one hand, the vision of a community with a shared future for humanity is a continuation of the essential spirit of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence:

On global governance, the vision aligns with the Five Principles and places greater emphasis on fairness and justice. It upholds the principle of mutual respect for each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. In promoting the community with a shared future for humanity, China insists on equality and respect for national sovereignty, actively advancing the democratisation of international relations. On national security, the vision upholds the same stance as the Five Principles, emphasising an objective and just position. The principles of non-aggression and non-interference in internal affairs of other countries are essential for international peace and stability. China inherits and develops this thinking, upholding objectivity in major international events and conflicts, making its position based on the merits of each case, and calling for dispute resolution through dialogue and consultation.

On development, the vision echoes the Five Principles while focusing more on interdependence among nations. It highlights the importance of promoting common development while pursuing national development, and of establishing more equitable and balanced global development partnerships. On the global perspective, the vision reflects the essence of the Five Principles while further emphasising shared human values. The Five Principles advocate friendly cooperation and joint development. Both the vision of a shared future and the proposals of shared human values are extensions of these principles.

On the other hand, the vision continues to be congruent with the perspective of the Five Principles in handling inter-state relations. By carrying forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, China has become an indispensable participant, builder, and contributor in the current international system, extending the spirit of the principles to all areas of global governance. The Five Principles serve as fundamental norms in handling state-to-state relations. In building a community with a shared future for humanity, China has proposed a series of principles to handle relations with major powers, neighbouring countries, and developing countries: from advocating new international relations based on mutual respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation, to developing major-country relations with the US and building peaceful, reform-oriented, and civilizational partnerships with Europe; from creating communities of shared future with neighbouring countries, to strengthening unity and cooperation with the Global South by pursuing the greater good and shared interests – all continuing the inter-state relational principles of peaceful coexistence.

China faithfully adheres to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, promoting their creative transformation and innovative development to make them the broadest common ground in terms of universal values. China insists on non-interference in internal affairs of other countries and consistently resolves disputes through dialogue and consultation. Amid

major-power competition, China promotes coordination and sound interaction based on peaceful coexistence, striving to shape a peaceful, stable, and balanced major-power relations paradigm, and resolutely opposes all forms of hegemony and power politics. Regarding regional security issues, China advocates for political solutions through dialogue and has actively engaged in diplomatic mediation in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. On sovereignty issues, China consistently calls for resolving disputes through negotiation, demonstrating a strong commitment to sovereignty and territorial integrity. In response to the “clash of civilizations” theory, China promotes dialogue and cooperation between civilizations, fostering mutual understanding and friendship among peoples.

Furthermore, the vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity injects new meaning to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, elevating them from principles for state-to-state relations to a comprehensive perspective on humanity. President Xi Jinping pointed out: *“In the new era today, the spirit of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, instead of being outdated, remains as relevant as ever; its significance, rather than diminishing, remains as important as ever; and its role, rather than being weakened, has continued to grow”*. (Xi, 2014). This vision represents both a practical continuation and a theoretical elevation of the Five Principles and offers China’s answer to the question of “what kind of world to build and how to build it”.

The vision expands the application of the Five Principles and elevates their perspective. In recent years, The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China with Xi Jinping at its core has introduced a range of new concepts and propositions in international relations, forming Xi Jinping Thoughts on Diplomacy. At its core is the vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity – a concept that not only inherits the essence of the Five Principles but also brings them to address today’s global challenges. This marks a transition from a focus on inter-state relations to a broader, humanity-centred vision.

It is ambitious in scope, aiming to build a world that is peaceful, secure, prosperous, open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful—and to work with all nations to create a new world of peace and progress. It is global in focus, advocating global governance based on consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits. In response to global challenges, China encourages international cooperation to combat climate change and promote sustainable development, staying committed to friendly cooperation and joint advancement. It is rooted in humanity’s shared interests, upholding the common values of peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom.

It strongly supports the authority of international multilateral institutions such as the UN and endorses their important role in safeguarding global justice and promoting peace and development. It aligns with the trends of the times and responds to the voices of people around the world. By implementing the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilizations Initiative, China provides principles and pathways for addressing the world’s four major deficits—in peace, development, trust, and governance. It addresses economic stagnation by promoting high-quality Belt and Road cooperation as a practical platform, thereby facilitating inclusive global economic development.

Finally, the vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity represents not only an innovation in China’s foreign policy but also a new development in international relations theory—a theoretical innovation built upon the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The essence of the Five Principles is consistent with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and is rooted in the traditional cultures of China and other Asian nations.

For example, China values “benevolence toward neighbours,” “trust and harmony,” and “unity among nations,” while India upholds the Panchsheel philosophy. China, India, and Myanmar were the first to advocate the Five Principles, which transcend ideological and systemic differences and align with the fundamental interests of most countries.

The vision of a community with a shared future for humanity, inheriting the essence of the Five Principles, offers a universally accepted ideological foundation for humanity. Guided by the Five Principles, China adheres to the nature of international relations, aligns with the shared expectations of the global community, and consistently promotes the building of a shared future for humanity. China advocates for a world where all countries look out for each other, upholding openness, inclusiveness, fairness, justice, peaceful coexistence, mutual learning among civilizations, and solidarity. Today, the vision rooted in the essence of the Five Principles has grown from a Chinese initiative into an international consensus, from a vision into tangible practice. It now serves as a guiding light that shapes our times, offering wisdom and strength to achieve lasting peace and common prosperity for the world.

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