“Win–win cooperation” usually means that the two or more parties involved in a transaction or task can get common benefit by taking a reciprocal approach.

In recent years, China’s new generation of leadership with Xi Jinping as its core has repeatedly expounded win–win cooperation on major international occasions. In the practice of China’s foreign relations, the concept of win–win cooperation has also been fully reflected.

The proposal of win–win cooperation

On March 23, 2013, President Xi Jinping delivered an important speech entitled *Conforming to the Trend of the Times and Promoting Peaceful Development of the World* at the Moscow Institute of International Relations during his visit to Russia. For the first time, the new-type international relations centred on cooperation and mutual benefit was proposed. Xi Jinping pointed out: “In this world, peace, development, and win–win cooperation have become the trend of the times. The old colonial system collapsed, and the group confrontation during the Cold War no longer exists. No country or a group of countries can dominate the world affairs alone”. He also pointed out that:

in today’s world, countries are more interconnected and interdependent, and human beings live in the same global village. Living in the same time and space where history and reality meet, we are interconnected with each other. In face of profound changes in international situation, countries in the same boat of destiny should jointly promote the establishment of new international relations with win–win cooperation as the core. People of all countries should work together to safeguard world peace and promote common development.¹

Xi Jinping emphasised that further multi-polarisation, economic globalisation, cultural diversity and social IT application of today’s world can facilitate humanity to get peace and development by the approach of win–win cooperation. He also solemnly declared that China will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development and commit itself to promoting open, cooperative and win–win development. At the same time, he called on all countries to take the path of peaceful development.
In November 2014, Xi Jinping’s speech at the Central Conference on Foreign Affairs said that “In 21st century, we should not insist on the Cold War mentality and zero-sum game. Instead, we need to keep up with the pace of the times and promote cooperation. So, we need to build new-type national relations centered on win–win cooperation by respecting the concept in political, economic, secure, cultural and other aspects”. Xi Jinping’s speech at the Moscow Institute of International Relations in March 2013 and the speech at the Asia Info Summit in Shanghai on May 21, 2014 both mentioned that “we cannot keep the Cold War mentality and zero-sum game in the 21st century but to keep up with the times”.2

In September 2015, President Xi Jinping attended series of summits on the 70th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations and delivered an important speech at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on September 26, entitled “Towards Win–win Partnership for Sustainable Development”. On September 28, 2015, Xi Jinping clearly pointed out during the General Debate of the 70th UN General Assembly: “In today’s world, countries are interdependent and interconnected. We must inherit and carry forward the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and build a new international relationship with win–win cooperation as the core to build a community with a shared future”.3

In addition, during his visits to Europe, Africa, Latin America, and on major international multilateral occasions such as the Asia Info Conference, Xi Jinping have explained the concept of win–win cooperation. Constructing a new type of international relations centred on win–win cooperation has undoubtedly become an important guiding ideology for China’s diplomacy in the new era.

China advocates the idea of building new-type international relations with win–win cooperation as the core. It adheres to the fine tradition of Chinese civilisation and the consistent policy of PRC’s diplomacy. It is also in line with the UN Charter on sovereign equality, peaceful settlement of international disputes and international cooperation. The purpose and principle, in line with the development trend of the current era, is the transcendence and innovation of the traditional international relations theory, and is of profound theoretical connotation and great practical guiding significance.

The connotation of win–win cooperation

The concept of win–win cooperation has rich connotations, mainly reflecting in the following five aspects.

The first is to view common interests as an important basis for handling international relations. In today’s world, countries are interconnected, interdependent and their interests are further interwoven. The practical needs and political will to create a peaceful and stable environment and seek common development and prosperity are also growing. Building new-type international relations with win–win cooperation as the core calls for a holistic rather than a fragmented perspective on international relations. It also advocates that countries should promote common interests of humanity while protecting their own national interests. Countries should respect each other and treat each other as equals on the basis of seeking common ground while reserving differences, and constantly consolidate and expand common interests. They also need to emphasise the expansion of common interests instead of harming others.

Second, cooperation is the main way to handle international relations. The new international relations with win–win cooperation as the core advocates shared destiny, shared opportunity and shared challenges showing the only correct choice for countries to get along with each other. It advocates that countries can effectively cope with the increasing global challenges and
work together to solve global challenges like world development and human progress through continuous expansion of mutually beneficial cooperation and dialogue instead of confrontation.

The third is to make win–win outcome the basic principle for handling international relations. As a Chinese saying goes, “A single flower does not make spring; One hundred flowers in full blossom bring spring to the garden”. China advocates respecting the social systems and development paths independently chosen by countries, attaching a balanced approach between friendship and interests and safeguarding their own interests while taking into account the interests of all parties. China will seek its own development and promote common development and strive to achieve win–win outcomes instead of zero-sum game.

Fourth, the concept is of distinctive Chinese characteristics and universal world significance. In traditional Chinese culture, we can find the source of ideas for today’s win–win cooperation. For example, Confucius says “Benevolence and Love” (The Analects of Confucius 12:22), “The World for Common Good”, “Love should not be given only to one’s own parents and sons but to that of others” (Book of Rites). Laozi said “Virtue should be spread across the world” (Tao Te Ching, chapter 53). Zhuangzi said “People should fight for common good instead of the interests of his own” (Zhuangzi Grand Master). The traditional Chinese vision of the world shows a clear idea about the relationship between people and the world, advocating that people should benefit themselves by benefiting others instead of caring only for others without their own interests concerned. Zhao Tingyang, a contemporary Chinese political philosopher, believes that the philosophy of the traditional Chinese concept of world (tianxia) is to think about problems with the entire world as background or coordinates. Many problems are global and need to be solved in a holistic approach. There must be a concept of the world to accommodate the understanding and practice of the community of a shared future.

With strength increasing, the international environment China is in and the international situation China has to face have undergone tremendous changes. “Now we have entered or are close to the center of the world stage. We have to communicate with all kinds of countries in the world and develop relations with countries of different civilizations. Peaceful co-existence is not enough now. We must also hold high the banner of win–win cooperation.”

As a developing country with a rapid growth rate, China needs to make greater contributions to international peace and development as a responsible major country by offering the Chinese spirit, the Chinese concept and the China plan to guide all countries to push their domestic as well as international governance and cooperation to the same direction of peace and development. Only then can the value of peaceful, open and inclusive development be realised.

The fifth is to transcend the law of the jungle in the theory of Western international relations. The old concepts such as zero-sum game and Cold War mentality are outdated. Unilateralism can no longer protect the security of its own, and a “beggar-thy-neighbour” approach and alliance confrontation will definitely hit the wall. Winner-take-all should not be taken as granted.

On the whole, the concept of win–win cooperation emphasises peaceful and harmonious coexistence among countries with different social systems, development paths and cultural traditions. It conforms to the general aspirations of the international community and provides a more just and rational direction for the promotion of the international order. The new ideas not only indicate the correct path for the development of international relations under the new situation, but also inject strong momentum into the international community by expanding exchanges and cooperation and avoiding conflicts. The ultimate goal of win–win cooperation is to build a community with a shared future.
Yang Danzhi

The practical significance of win–win cooperation

China is not only an active proponent of win–win cooperation, but also a positive practitioner. Its efforts mainly reflect in the following aspects.

First, we are actively committed to promoting international cooperation. Over the past 60 years, China has actively participated in international development cooperation. It has provided nearly 400 billion yuan in aid to 166 countries and international organisations, dispatched more than 600,000 workers. More than 700 Chinese have sacrificed their lives to the development of other countries. China will also set up a South–South Cooperation Assistance Fund to provide US$2 billion in the first phase to support developing countries in implementing the development agenda after 2015. China will continue to increase investment in the least developed countries and strive to reach US$12 billion by 2030. China will waive the inter-governmental interest-free loan obligations that have not repaid up to the end of 2015 for the least developed countries, land-locked developing countries and small island developing countries. China will set up an International Development Research Centre to work with other countries to study and exchange development theories and development practices that suit their own national conditions. China is proposing to explore the construction of a global energy network that will meet global electricity demand in a clean and green way.7

The second is to promote a new pattern of inclusive development in economy. China’s full participation in discussions and cooperation on issues such as sustainable development within the UN framework has actively promoted the development of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. China also promote participants in the G20 summit in Hangzhou to put the development issue at the forefront of the global macro policy framework for the first time which efficiently promote the world economy to achieve strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth. China also took the opportunity of the G20 Hangzhou Summit to contribute to the development of an innovative, dynamic, coordinated and inclusive world economy by guiding members of the G20 to deepen reform, promote innovation and strengthen coordination.

The third is to gradually step out a new path of state-to-state exchanges. China adheres to the principle of “dialogue without confrontation, partnership and non-alliance” and has established different forms of partnership with more than 80 countries and regions or regional organisations forming a global network of partnerships. China conscientiously implements the peripheral diplomatic concept of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness, and works with regional countries to build a community with a shared future in Asia. Cooperation at all levels and in all fields is fully carried out and interest in integration is deepening. China actively takes a balanced approach between friendship and interests, and focuses on strengthening solidarity and cooperation with all developing countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and other regions.

In recent years, under the guidance of the concept of win–win cooperation, China’s relations with African, Arab and Latin American countries have witnessed not only further consolidation but also all-round expansion. China–Africa relations, China–Arab relations and China–Latin America relations have become models of win–win cooperation.8

The fourth is to implement the overall national security concept in security. President Xi Jinping pointed out at the first meeting of the National Security Committee: “To implement the overall national security concept, we must attach importance to both external security and internal security. Domestically speaking, we want development, reform, stability and peace. Externally speaking, we want cooperation, win–win outcomes and a harmonious world”.9 China advocates a common, integrated, cooperative and sustainable security concept by putting forward the “Three Principles for Solving Hot Issues”, playing an important role in solving
hot issues such as the Iranian nuclear issue, Syrian issue and the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue. China advocates the “two-track thinking” regarding the South China Sea issue, resolutely safeguards the country’s territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests and is firmly committed to maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea together with regional countries. China is also actively participating in international anti-terrorism cooperation and in-depth participation in UN peacekeeping operations. It is the country with the largest number of peacekeepers among the five permanent members of the Security Council, and its contribution to peacekeeping funds has risen to the second place in the world. For seven consecutive years, Chinese warships have carried out escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali waters, and have escorted more than 6000 Chinese and foreign ships. In addition, China is also actively promoting cyber-security, coping with climate change, providing more and more public goods for maintaining world peace and security and fully demonstrating the responsibility of a responsible major country.  

The fifth is to create a new atmosphere of exchanges and mutual understanding between different civilisations in culture. China actively advocates mutual respect between different civilisations and promotes mutual exchanges and understandings among different civilisations. China has always respected the diversity of civilisations and the social systems and development paths that countries have chosen independently by replacing confrontation with mutual learning between civilisations. China promotes mutual learning between nations, cultures and religions. China proposes to seek common ground while reserving differences, to achieve common development, to build new type of international relations of win–win cooperation, to promote exchanges between people of different countries, cultures and historical backgrounds, to enhance mutual understanding and to build a community with a shared future.  

Sixth is to actively promote the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, which has brought China closer to the countries along the Belt and Road and promoted sustainable growth of the world economy and brought benefits to peoples of the countries concerned. Although the Belt and Road Initiative is initiated by China, the dividends and opportunities created are shared by the world. China actively promoted the construction of interconnection and intercommunication, promoted the comprehensive development of major win–win cooperation projects under the framework of the Belt and Road and has achieved important early harvests. China vigorously deepens international capacity cooperation and initially forms an international capacity cooperation layout covering Asia, Africa, Europe and the United States. By doing so, China makes its own development achievements benefit more regions.

Notes

2 Ibid.


10 Wang Yi, “Building new-type international relations with win–win cooperation as its core—the Chinese answer to the future of international relations in 21st century,” www.qstheory.cn/zhuanqu/zywz/2016-06/20/c_1119071966.htm