

Rethinking Education, National Security and Social Stability
in China

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China's National Security Goals

After more than twenty years' of reform and open policy, it is clear that domestic economic development is the overarching focus of the Chinese government. Promoting economic development and enhancing people's standard of living are the principle tasks of Chinese government. In order to implement economic growth and social progress, China needs a peaceful international environment and domestic social stability.

These two goals--maintaining domestic social stability and pursuit of a peaceful international environment--reflect both China's national interest and form the basis of China's national security policy. A peaceful international environment is an important goal of China's national security policy. As China's former leader Deng Xiaoping said in 1980, it is in China's interest to have a peaceful environment in order to achieve the four economic modernizations. (Deng, 1980). In 1982, Deng emphasized this point again when he met the former general secretary of UN. He said that China hoped there would be a period of at least 50 to 70 years of peace. Maintaining worldwide peace is based on China's needs; of course, it also meet the needs of people the entire world, especially meet the need of people of the third world. (Deng, 1982). In 1987, Deng emphasized once more that China needs at least a 70 years' peaceful period. These are sincere words, not just empty rhetoric. The national security goal of a peaceful international environment will allow China to trade and develop.

Another goal of China's national security policy is preserving domestic social stability, union and development. China is great power with a huge population. It is also a developing country. Domestic stability and prosperity in China influences the world, especially the stability and progress in the Asia Pacific region. When he met with Brent Scowcroft, former U.S. national security adviser to President Bush in 1989, Deng Xiaoping said that China has a special importance in international society. Domestic instability in China would affect the world, which would not be to the advantage of either China or the United States. (Deng, 1989). It is difficult to completely separate domestic stability and world peace in an era of globalization; thus maintaining China's domestic stability contributes to worldwide peace. The goals of

maintaining domestic social stability and pursuing a peaceful international environment form the basis of China's national security policy.

Education and Domestic Social Stability

The national security goal of enhanced social stability has several aspects. China should establish a complete legal system to protect the stability of society. China also can improve education to carry out this aim of social stability. These are two sides of one problem. An enhanced legal system can contour social principles and resolve individual conflicts. An enhanced education system can contour individual principles and minimize social conflicts.

Some of the issues that harm the continuity and stability of China are the economic development imbalances that exist between regions. Environmental degradation is another such issue. Low educational levels are part of the problem and improved education is part of the solution.

1. Domestic regional development imbalance and environmental degradation impact national security

National security is affected by a myriad of domestic and global factors. Domestic factors cannot be ignored. China has begun to pay more attention to maintaining domestic stability, unity and development. After more than twenty years of reform policy, China is still developing rapidly. The rapid development has created the strong bases for solving domestic problems. However, the rapid development is also bringing great challenges. Two of these challenges, the imbalanced growth between regions and the increasing environmental problems, influence the stability, unity and development in China.

Given its rapid economic development, China's economic situation has changed significantly. As the results of the policy called "let a part of the area get rich first" as well as some historical and geographical factors, the southeast coastal areas in China, like Guangdong, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang, are developing faster than other areas. The speed of economic development and social progress in these provinces is more rapid than other inner and remote regions. The social development level is much higher in these economically developed regions. These provinces have become the

rich and developed areas in China. Other areas, especially in the western part of China, are less developed.

The great gap in economic development between the east and the west, the rich and the poor areas, is illustrated in Chart 1. The GDP figures used in this chart come from a report of the Chinese State Statistic Administration in 1998. The data of the population aged 6 and over, which was used to calculating per capita GDP, was obtained from the sample survey on population changes in 1998; the sampling fraction is 0.0101%.

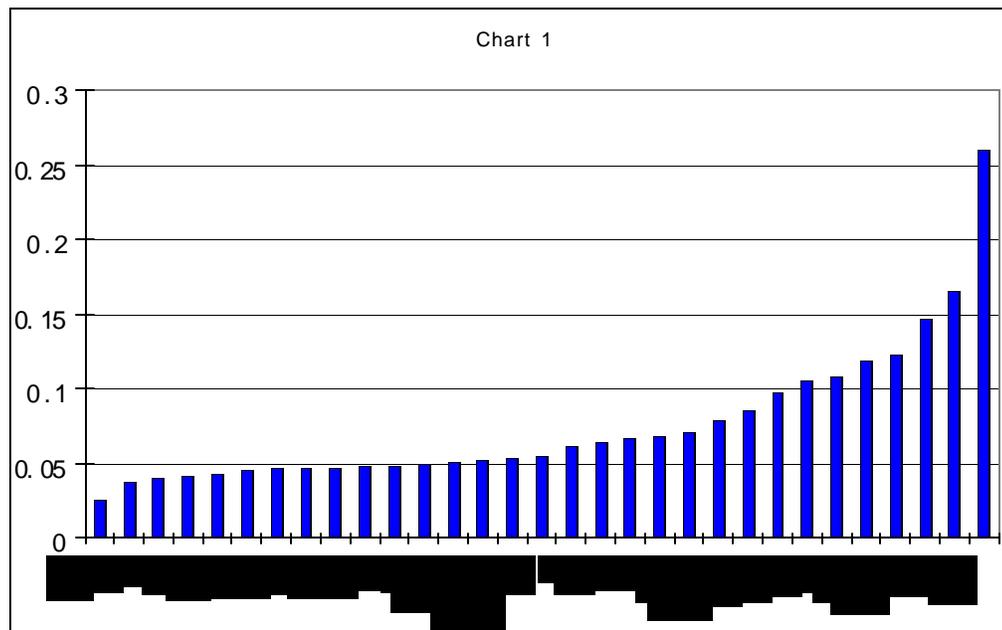


Chart 1. GDP Per Capita by Region

Sources: China Population Statistics Yearbook, 1999; China Statistics Yearbook, 1999

The provinces are separated into three groups by per capita GDP. The first group is the provinces that have a per capita GDP higher than 0.1 units. They are Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjing, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangsu. The second group is the provinces with per capita GDP between 0.1 and 0.05. They are Liaoning, Shandong, Heilongjiang, Xinjiang, Hebei, Hubei, Hainan, Jilin, Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Hunan, and Chongqing. The third group is the provinces with per capita GDP less than 0.05. They are Henan, Anhui, Qinghai, Yunnan, Jiangxi, Ningxia, Sichuan, Guangxi, Shanxi, Tibet, Gansu, and Guizhou. Comparing these three groups of figures, it is seen that the figures in first group are larger than ones in the third group by two or three times. For instance, the figure of Shanghai (0.2595 unit) is over ten times as

high as the figure of Guizhou (0.02556 unit). Regional imbalance is one of the important factors that will have a negative effect on the stability of society.

In addition to regional economic imbalance, there is also the issue of overall income disparity. It is estimated that in 1993 there were still 80 million Chinese living in poverty, mainly in 592 poverty-stricken counties, which constitute 9.3% of the whole rural population. (Zhang Chunyuan, 1992) Regional imbalance and income polarization challenge the stability of Chinese society. Even Confucius advocated that China should worry about the inequality more than the poverty. The adverse effect brought by imbalance has been apparent. A case in point is the huge annual surge of rural residents to urban areas in order to obtain employment and the concurrent increase in crime and disorder.

Another important factor that is harmful to social stability is the issue of the environment. As the Chinese economy rapidly grows, the environment is destroyed. This is a heavy cost for economic growth. Although the Chinese government is concerned about environmental protection, the situation is serious. As the report by the Beijing Review said, the statistics and analysis of the environmental monitoring results show that the country still faces a severe environment situation. The amount of various hazardous discharges is still quite large; the pollution level remains high; the environment in some localities continues to deteriorate; the water, air, noise and soil environment pollution in many cities is still very serious; and the rural environment has declined.

The environmental deterioration has not yet been controlled in an effective way, and the ecological destruction in some localities has been aggravated. Xie Zhenhua, the general director of the State Environmental Protection Administration, provided a similar view of the environmental situation in his paper and pointed out that, “(e)nvironmental pollution and damage is still one important factor that will threaten people’s health, economic growth, and social development”. (Xie Zhenhua, 2001)

The environmental problem is a general problem that will cross regional boundaries. Environmental deterioration in one region will affect the survival and development of both local residents and people in adjacent areas. Problems such as air pollution, water contamination, and resource abuse tend to provoke the conflicts across regions, and then affect social stability. In order to peacefully solve the conflicts, the Chinese government has established a system that solicits and disseminates advice via the mail. The conflicts and appeals in the area of environment

is an important part of this system. In this regard, the tendency of diversification has come to stage, which can be seen from the change from individual action collective action. More and more appeals take the form of collective action and repeated action.

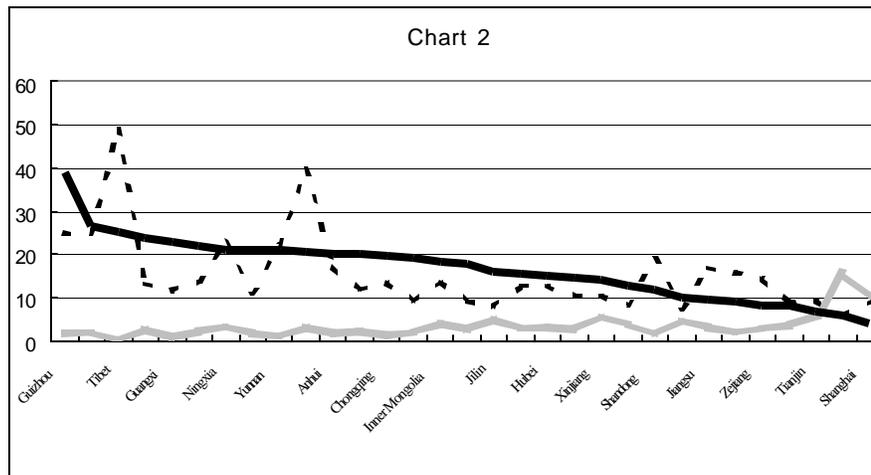
More importantly, poverty is often related to environmental damage. In some poverty-stricken areas, the environment is seriously damaged. Some reports have shown the correlation between these two problems. For example, one report, a case study of poverty and surplus in Hotan, said that poverty was the main mechanism in the shift from oasis conditions to desert conditions in this region. (Zhang Yi, 1999)

Poverty-stricken areas in China are mainly in the central and western regions. However, environments in these regions are not protected effectively. Because the central and western regions are located at a higher altitude and at the headwaters of important rivers such as the Yangtze and Huanghe, environmental deterioration in these regions will have a direct impact on the environment in the wealthier coastal regions. Consequently environmental deterioration directly impacts the entire river and surrounding ecosystems, thus disturbing the security and stability of the whole society. For instance a research report, prepared by Wang Li-hong and others, said that Shandong Province is short of water resources. The Yellow River is the most important river and the main source of water in Shandong. The continuing flow interruptions of this river in Shandong Province impacted the yield stability of agriculture, delayed the industrial development, postponed the urbanization process, and caused critical shortage of drinking water for people and livestock. (Wang Lihong and Wang Xiumiao, 2000)

2. Education and development

In the final analysis, these two factors--imbalance of regional development and environmental degradation--influence social stability and development and are closely related to education. Education is essential for maintaining balanced development between regions and solving environmental problems.

There is a close relationship between economic development and education. The imbalance in regional economic development correlates to the imbalance in regional



educational development. Chart 2 shows the relationship between educational development levels and economic development levels. The data is also obtained from the sample survey on population changes in 1998. The selected population of the sampling fraction is 0.0101% divided by the GDP of the region in 1998 as an indicator of the economic situation of the region. When this indicator is higher the region is poorer, when the indicator is smaller the region is richer. The education development level of the region is indicated by two figures. One is the illiteracy rate. Another is the rate of the population with a college level education or higher. Chart 2 shows that the economic underdevelopment level, denoted by bold series line, has the same orientation with the illiteracy rate, denoted by a black broken line. Economic underdevelopment is in inverse proportion to high educational level, denoted by the gray line. This chart clearly elucidates that the imbalance between regional development is close related to the educational development level of the region in China.

Environmental problems are also closely related to educational levels. Many research reports on China's environment problem educe the same results. For instance, the research on analysis of the environmental situation in Liaoning province indicated that it is hard to build environmental protection awareness due to lower levels of education and a poor knowledge of the environment. Being strongly conscious of environmental protection responsibilities ensures the implementation of the various environmental protection regulation and law, policy and steps. Governments, especially the administrations of environmental protection, have done a lot for the

implementation of environmental policies but have not achieved efficient results because of the lower educational levels and environment protection awareness. In other words, because of the lower quality of education, the ability to apply science and technology is also lower. Therefore, in order to achieve a high industrial output, there is an inefficient use of energy and materials. This mode aggravates environmental pollution. Pollution is wasted resources. The traditional production mode with high input, high expenditure and lower output is a main factor in creating environmental pollution.(Jiang Zhixue, 2000)

Poverty and environmental destruction are due to the underdevelopment of education and the underdevelopment of education is due to the destructive forces of poverty and environment. Thus, there is a cycle within poverty, environmental destruction, and educational underdevelopment. For example, this cycle is evident in the poor, national minority-inhabited areas of China. The poor, national minority-inhabited areas have fallen into the difficult position of rapid population growth, educational underdevelopment, sluggish economic development, ethnic problems, low economic efficiency, inadequate industrial structure, error in government decision-making, and environmental deterioration.

Influence of Education on National Security Policy

In the globalization age, an era that is chiefly characterized by access to massive amounts of information, the main functions of education are not limited to the teaching of fixed, old knowledge. Education is now a dynamic process whose main target is to help humankind cultivate new principles that adapt to the modern world, so that humankind can learn to adjust to the rapid changes of their surroundings. This functional adaptation of education will have great impact on the peace and stability of the world.

Education will help create a security concept that fits the globalization age. This concept bases itself not only on the security of domestic territory, but also on the security and stability of the whole world-- the harmonious coexistence between nations, cultures, and peoples, the harmony between the humankind and nature, and the sustained growth of the whole world. This new security concept also advocates a new way to settle disputes –through education, disputes can be minimized; through

peaceful talks, conflicts can be resolved in peaceful ways. For a long period, what people cared about was the resolution of disputes after they emerged, not the prevention of disputes. However, the new security concept stresses the establishment of general principles, the mechanism of self-regulation through peaceful means, like education. Therefore small conflicts can be resolved before they occur. If the world community can eliminate the potential conflicts, or turn large-scale conflicts into minor ones, or turn minor conflicts into nothing, the world will be safer and more stable.

In the process of the formation of the new security concept, education functions in two layers: the first layer is the public. On this layer, education gains popular support of the public for security policies. Policies need popular support for several reasons.

The rationality of policies depends to some extent on the rationality of the public. For national security policies, this is even more the case –the rationality of the public leads to rational security policies, and lays solid rational foundations for these policies. Enhanced education will increase the quality of citizens, and in turn increase the national quality, which will not only guarantee the rational thinking of the populace over the issues like national security and world peace but also eliminate blindness and fanaticism. Meanwhile, one must take into consideration the dual nature of education in the globalization age. That is, the education of principles and learning skills also provides the ethical foundation for the new security policies. Only through education, can the public possess high principles, form a reasonable value system and make sound judgments. In this way one can also judge whether the governmental security policies conform to the general ethical standards and the ethical rules.

The second layer is the elite layer. The elite class is the class who makes and carries out the policies. So the rationality of the security policies also depends upon the quality of the elite. Education can also instill general principles and ethical rules to the elite, and cultivate their abilities to adapt to the changing world. Upgrading the quality of the elite can make them not only pass more rational policies, but also understand and carry out those policies better. If those decision-makers make the laws rationally, but the enforcement officials cannot understand them, those security policies are still useless.

China's Educational System Reforms

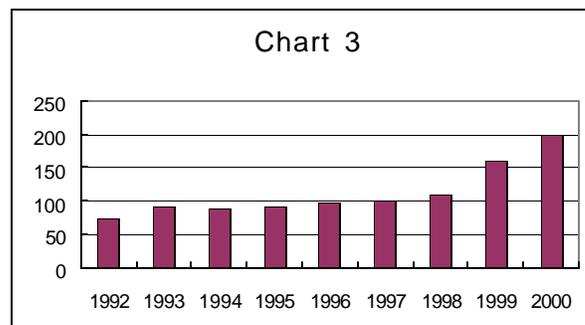
The Chinese government and people believe that improving education is important to the stability of society. A high priority has been given to the development of education. China's educational system has begun a reform since 1998. The reform addresses the purpose of education. The new purpose is geared toward qualification and preparation for the future. The reform of the national education system is to promote qualification-oriented education, deepening reforms in the education structure and system, and enhancing the public's awareness of the concept of "revitalizing the country through science and education".

This adjustment and reform of the national education system has three main goals. The first goal is to create a qualification-oriented education system. China has a long history of examination-oriented education. This kind of education leads students to pursue high examination marks but may result in poor ability in actual practice. This examination-oriented education observably did not meet social needs. The new education approach, called qualification-for-life education, aims to deal with the deficiencies of an exam-dominated approach. It will teach students to gain more ability to practically apply their knowledge as well as to cooperate and get along with others, to correctly settle various conflicts and disputes and distinguish right from wrong. It also makes it clear to students the historical tasks they should undertake with lofty ideals and firm convictions, as well as their deep historical and cultural background.

A second goal of education reform in China is increasing the investment in education especially in underdeveloped areas and national minority-inhabited areas. Chinese President Jiang Zeming pointed out in the National Education Conference in 1999 that education initiatives must be developed in poor, rural, remote and underdeveloped areas, and school should provide lifetime education programs. To hasten the training of talented people for the western region, the Chinese government has earmarked 600 million yuan for infrastructure construction of universities and colleges in the western region, with a focus on 85 major universities and colleges. When the project of an additional 1 million square meters is completed, the capacity to receive students will increase by 10 percent.

The third goal of Chinese educational reform involves the improvement of higher education. The higher educational methodology used in China was developed by the former Soviet Union. This methodology did not satisfy the demands of social and economic development, especially building a market economic system. The separation of universities and research institutions has hindered the establishment of excellent higher education. The goal of higher educational reform involves three new approaches.

One approach to higher educational reform is to increase the enrollment of universities and colleges. Since 1999, new student enrollment in China has increased rapidly. The total new student enrollment in 1999 and 2000 increased 47.4% and 25% respectively. Chart 3 shows the new student enrollment from 1992 to 2000.



Another approach to higher educational reform is to develop a more complete higher education system. A complete system not only contains the normal higher learning, but also a first-rate professorial training system and adult higher education. The new system will meet the requirements of economic development for wide-ranging skills and life-long education in a market economy.

A final approach to higher educational reform is to encourage private investment in education. For a long time, there was only government-funded education in China. Given the priorities of economic and social progress, the government now encourages privately funded education. Private educational institutions have developed rapidly since 1990.

Education Relates to Economic Development and Social Stability

Not only can education promote the national security goal of enhanced social stability by remedying certain social ills, but education can also play a strong, positive

role in the national security goal of a more peaceful international environment. Education plays a unique role in mutual understanding between different cultures. Education is the undertaking of educating people, who are and will be the main force in all lines of work in the 21st century. Whether they are qualified undoubtedly has tremendous influence upon the development in the new century. Education bears two duties in the new millennium: the duty to disseminate knowledge and principles; and the duty to cultivate people's method of study. Knowledge and ethical education constitutes much of educational content. The main goal of education is to disseminate knowledge and ethical concepts, and to build up a knowledge foundation for new principles. The function of education is the formation of general principles: through the dissemination of knowledge and ethical concepts, education can foster students' spirit of tolerance and justness so that students can learn to respect different cultures, as well as to abide by the general social orders and principles in the globalization age.

Tolerance and justness can only be achieved through the understanding of different cultures. Only through the understanding of different cultures, can one tolerate cultural differences or fairly judge between right and wrong. In the globalization age, therefore, there must be more mutual understanding. On the basis of mutual understanding, along with mutual respect and tolerance, hostility can be eliminated and trust promoted. In the educational process, students can be given practical knowledge about the real world; their view can be enlarged. Their skill to cope with people with different cultural backgrounds and their techniques to peacefully resolve disputes may be acquired; their optimistic attitude toward life and basic value outlook of peaceful coexistence may be cultivated.

Education should shoulder certain responsibilities. One of the basic roles education plays is to help people find common humanity among different nations. However, the dissemination of this value was often overlooked in the past. Even worse, education itself sometimes actually widened the difference among different peoples. In practice, only power history was taught, not knowledge history; only war history was taught, not cultural history. As a result, people resorted to non-peaceful means to settle conflicts. This is harmful both to the peace of humankind, and to the prosperity of humankind. With the establishment of general principles, education will change as well so that peace education will be the mainstream in the 21st century.

Another responsibility of education is to teach peaceful coexistence. Education should advocate the resolution of disputes in peaceful ways and should take peace as a

basic value. As a result, in international relations states can seek common ground and reserve differences, get along with each other peacefully, and in the end create a more nonviolent world.

Education that stresses peaceful coexistence in international relations would include several principles. First, along with the traditional values of patriotism and individualism, a progressive, just internationalism should be cultivated. Second, students should be taught to care for and respect other peoples' happiness, and establish the concepts of global benefits. Third, students should be educated about the necessity to maintain and promote the consciousness of peace and development. Only after our generation firmly establishes the value of peace, can the world realize peace and prosperity in the 21st century.

Environmental problems derive from ignorance and education is enlightenment. As a result, environmental education has great impact, and is regarded as a very important part of education in the new century, especially in the Asia Pacific region. Environmental education is a life-long education, which can react according to the fast changing environments. Environmental education should be taught in all kinds of schools, to all kinds of people so that environmental consciousness such as protection and ecological equilibrium may be deeply embedded into everyone's mind. At the same time people can learn to correctly look at the affirmative and negative influences of science and technology. People can use their knowledge to recover the harmonious relationship between them and nature, and recover the sustained growth of our planet. In the Asia Pacific region, there are abundant human resources, plentiful natural resources, and comparatively serious environmental problems. Educational institutions in the Asia Pacific need to cooperate to promote environmental education, shoulder the responsibility of instilling the concepts of environmental protection and rational exploitation of natural resources into the whole society, especially the next generation.

The Chinese government attaches great importance to environmental education. In fact, environmental education and sustained growth are inculcated through the whole educational process: from kindergarten through elementary school to high school and then to college. Environmental education is carried out continuously in order to create a national environmental consciousness.

Another goal of education is to teach students learning skills, so as to adapt to the rapidly changing world. Globalization mostly refers to the information revolution: the

development of communications technology, which in turn stimulates the emergence of more information. This information cycle constitutes the information age. The information age has several characteristics: on the one hand, the increase in information transmission efficiency and the augmentation of the information transmission rate greatly shortens the information cycle; on the other hand, information with different prescriptions, useless information, fake information, and harmful information are also increasing. Meanwhile, information is playing an increasingly important role in modern social life and international relations. Without reliable information, one cannot make sound judgment over the present situation, nor can one have rational anticipation of the future. So information is the basis of all correct, sound decisions. In this sense, information is the decisive resource for development. In the global information age, the ability to acquire knowledge, differentiate information, and correctly handle information in time becomes the basic quality and basic learning skill. Without the ability to handle information effectively, one cannot acquire knowledge from outside, cannot learn. In the future, illiteracy will not refer to those who cannot read, but those who cannot correctly handle information or master learning skills. Therefore learning skills are a basic skill every one has to master in this generation. Especially in the process of the formation of the general principles, if people cannot learn, they cannot reach a common view over the basic value system and the ethical rules that everyone has to accept and adhere to.

Since “learning skills” are indispensable skills and the foundation of the new principles, to teach students learning skills is the duty of education. However, China’s educational system still remains at the stage where emphasis is put on the acquisition of fixed ideas, methods, rules, and how to deal with repeating situations. The main goal of this teaching method is to maintain the present thinking and living styles. This method always finds itself unable to adapt to the fast changing information society. In the globalization age, education should not only disseminate the knowledge that is already acquired, but also teach students how to acquire information, differentiate information, correctly handle information, make sound judgments on the basis of information so as to adapt to the fast changing world. And only with learning skills, can students spontaneously cultivate their justness, tolerance, environmental protection consciousness, and peace concepts.

Conclusion

Domestic economic development is the overarching focus of the Chinese government. In order to implement economic growth and social progress, China needs a peaceful international environment and domestic social stability. These two goals form the basis of China's national security policy.

Education is playing an increasingly important role in modern societies, because it is assisting both China and the world to achieve the goals of a more peaceful international environment and increased domestic social stability. In the globalization age, especially with the development of modern information technology, everyone is merged into a global network, which requires every individual to possess global principles of tolerance, an appreciation for cultural differences, environmental consciousness, and the value of peace. One of the duties of education is to promote the formation of common principles. These principles work together to form the principles for the world's peace and stability in the new century.

In the future we can anticipate that the arrival of globalization requires this new security concept to adapt to humankind's ever increasing contact and interdependence. Globalization also provides the technical and systematic foundations for this new thinking. As a result, a self-regulated mechanism is formed, which effectively prevents conflicts, and safeguards the world's long-term peace.

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