

**CHINA AND THE USA, AT THE BEGINNING  
OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: THE CONCEPT OF  
“NEW RELATION BETWEEN THE GREAT POWERS”  
(XINXING DAGUO GUANXI<sup>1</sup>)**

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**Abstract:** In the relations between China and the USA, former adversaries during the Cold War, the 21<sup>st</sup> century poses a challenge as great as the challenge generated by the creation of the three original European Communities: this time, it is not a matter of regional integration, but a matter of peaceful coexistence; however, it is the same post-realist paradigm, in which to great powers, which have been rivals, in the recent history, have the capacity to develop a peaceful, harmonious relationship, for the mutual benefit of the entire international system. This visionary concept is meant to be a concept of countering and overcoming the opposite perspective, the perspective of the realist current, seeing the rise of China as a “serious threat for the stability of the contemporary international system”, in the relations between the great powers (daguo).

**Keywords:** peaceful co-existence, harmonious international society, New Relation between Great Powers, post-realist paradigm

**1. An Innovative Perspective of the China-USA Relation  
and a Premise for the Concept of “Harmonious International Society”**

Considered by China to be *one of the most important of the bilateral relations in today's world*<sup>2</sup>, its relation with the USA is regarded both by the Chinese officials and by the IR Chinese doctrine from *an innovative perspective, based on opening, mutual respect, mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence*. These elements of the Chinese diplomacy, active ever since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reveal once more the *depth and spiritual and ethical dimension, the specific imprint of the Chinese diplomatic culture, as well as China's interest in building a “harmonious international society”, together with other power centres*, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These elements also demonstrate the effort to

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<sup>2</sup> Yu Hongjun, *China and the United States: Building New Relations Between Major Powers*, CIIS, Nov. 25, 2013, source: China International Studies, Sept.-Oct. 2013, p. 16-33, [www.ciis.org.cn/english/2013-11/25/content\\_6486747\\_2.htm](http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2013-11/25/content_6486747_2.htm)

overcome the “cold war” mentality, between the great powers (still active) and to constantly consolidate a global agenda, in which the great powers identify common perspectives and interest, starting from the interdependences existing due to a global society. In addition, through such an innovative concept, China raises awareness between the great powers of *the need to extend their fields of dialogue and not to resist negotiations, not to isolate and not to allow the expansion of the logic of suspicion and weapons race, of hostile behaviour and dissemination of suspicion, prompted by the realist logic*<sup>3</sup>.

Proposed by Xi Jinping, in his speech delivered in Washington/2012 (a key-concept for the relations between China and the United States), also proclaimed at the 4<sup>th</sup> United States-China reunion, in May 2012 (the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue) and subsequently reiterated by a series of Chinese officials, the “New Relation” is based on several fundamental strategic and diplomatic coordinates: “mutual understanding and strategic trust”, mutually beneficial cooperation, each party observing the fundamental interests of the other party, strengthening the cooperation and coordination in international relations and global affairs.

In its essence, the concept of “New Relation between Great Powers” (through which China intends to organize the new set of bilateral relations with the U.S., for the 21<sup>st</sup> century) is of one of *post-realist origin*, emphasizing the perspectives of complex interdependences, of multipolarity, of equalitarian cooperation between nations, of the ethical component in international relations (various visions, which the Chinese policy provides with an ample framework of manifestation and creation of inter-relations, by launching this concept).

The “New Relation between Great Powers” (a concept which, we might say, is dedicated to the relation between China and the U.S.) is part of *a standard of soft policies, adequate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and for how China construes “a new 21<sup>st</sup> century policy”* (one starting from and considering the reality of *an financially and economically interdependent world, a world of peaceful coexistences among various cultural areas, even between the great powers, a world which discourages conflict-based and separatist visions of insulation and limitation between the key-actors, a world of mutual opening towards other cultures, a world interested in developing the global agenda, solving global problems, increasing the responsibility of the large actors in solving global issues, a political world, based on the ethical element*, which is also translated as a responsibility of the great powers towards the terrestrial ecosystem, in their policies).

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<sup>3</sup> Stefano Guzzini, *Realism și relații internaționale*, transl. Diana Istrățescu, European Institute, Iași, 2000, p. 63-65.

## 2. Content of the Concept of “New Relation between Great Powers”, from the Perspective of the “Multipolar World” Paradigm

The reference basis for this new framework-concept for the relation between the two great powers (considered by the Chinese analysts as intending to be *a model for the development of new types of relations among all the great powers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*) is formed of *principles and values* such as: mutual political assurance, mutual economic benefits, mutual community support, mutual learning, in the process of strengthening the national cultural heritage; denouncing the realist paradigm, which has caused more damage to the international system, increasing its vulnerability instead of bringing a real contribution to the international stability and peace; the perception that the increasing development and strength of a country must not be regarded as a threat, but rather as an opportunity shared with the others, to develop and promote a deeper cooperation, at bilateral level<sup>4</sup>; the parties, though each with its own specific values and standards, will bring their advantages to the table, in their specific development, learning from the others<sup>5</sup>. The concept does not impose a certain model, which all the great powers must follow as a development model (from where we identify the respect for the diversity of development models of the countries, included in the traditional tolerance element of China, towards other cultures and civilizations).

As analyzed by the Chinese theoreticians (being a concept proposed by China), the “New Relation between Great Powers”, though envisaging *a special category of actors in the contemporary international system (daguo/great powers, thus called without considering the realist paradigm, which is considered damaging and useless for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, according to the Chinese), is meant to ensure a better stability, trust and cooperation in the international system, in relation to other paradigms of power*. In fact, the power policy itself is rejected, as a concept derived from the realist paradigm, as China considers that, subject to the new concept proposed (in an innovative dialogue on the doctrine, with the U.S.), “seeking each cooperation opportunity, at global level, between China and the U.S.A.” is, for each of these actors, an objective meant to develop trust and cooperation between these two specific cultures, mutual benefit and international peace.

*The concept of “New Relation between Great Powers” operates in a register completely distinct from Huntington’s realist paradigm (conflict between civilizations), which irremediably opposed China to the United States<sup>6</sup>, a priori*

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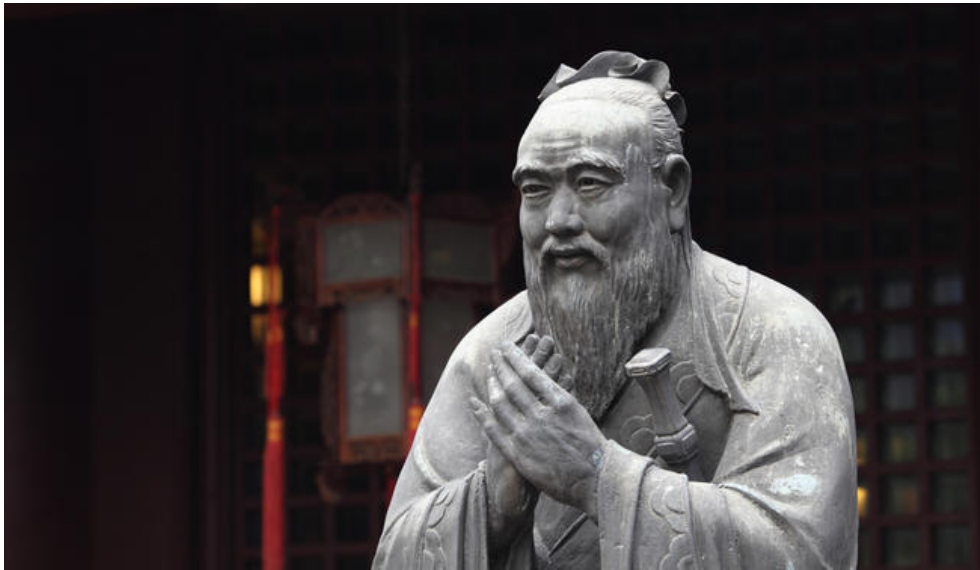
<sup>4</sup> Yu Hongjun, *op. cit.*, [www.ciis.org.cn/english/2013-11/25/content\\_6486747\\_2.htm](http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2013-11/25/content_6486747_2.htm)

<sup>5</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Huntington, *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor și noua ordine mondială*, trad. Radu Carp, Ed. Antet, 1997, p. 332-333.

considering them engaged in an antagonistic relation, according to the null sum game (“the rise of China being associated with the loss of importance, decline and defeat of the United States”). On the contrary, the purpose of the new concept proposed by China *is a clear overcoming of this conflict-based paradigm, which renders vulnerable the entire international system and affects the credibility of the state “of great power”* (in an *ethic sense, that of assuming the responsibility of protecting the peace and stability of the international system, of tackling global issues justly and fairly*).

If, according to the logic of the vicious circle of suspicion, in the realist paradigm, the state of “great power” hides a maximum degree of egotism and, therefore, *a lack of responsibility* (for the fate of international peace and of the international system), limiting to a look at things solely from the perspective of interest in expanding and prospering at the expense of other states (realist logic with great strength or power policy), the new concept proposed by China operates with **a firm separation from every sense of the realist logic**: emphasis is put on cooperation, ethics, on the responsibility of the great powers (the state “of great power” entails *global responsibility*, i.e. observing the international law, the sovereignty of states, their equality, in order to prevent conflicts among states and not to interfere with the balance between the great powers).



Confucius

Source: <http://asiapacifico.utadeo.edu.co/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/confucioestatua.jpg>

*The states receiving the title of “daguo” (great power) are states regarded in a post-realist sense, as great powers with increased responsibilities in*

preserving the peace and stability of the international system, in developing the cooperation among nations, introducing and developing the ethical and ecological dimension, in international relations, in identifying new domains of cooperation and dialogue with other great powers (active contribution to the development of the global agenda).

*Unlike the great powers with which the realist paradigm operates* (actors that do not care about anything else, besides the fulfilment of their own interests, hence *their political and moral responsibility* towards the international system and the people, engaging in a relation of perpetual conflict), *daguo in the post-realist paradigm are great powers, which understood they need to grow up from the viewpoint of global and bilateral policy, overcoming the old antagonisms, the strategies of surrounding and attacking the adversary.*

*The post-realist world in which China operates* is no longer a world of irredeemable adversaries, engaged in a conflict at all levels (political, military, economic, cultural and social). It is a world of opportunities, of great opening towards various cultures, of tolerance, diversity, peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and non-interference. We note *an original association between the approach of Westphalian inspiration*, in the case of the daguo policy (the world of sovereign nations, the principle of non-intrusion, of territorial integrity), also transposed in *the world of complex interdependences*, (where the actors – being interconnected, in an age of economic, cultural and political globalization, a world of increased interferences between their internal and external policies, strongly competed by non-state actors – are no longer interested in engaging in exhausting and useless rivalries; instead, they intend to find common grounds, which allow them to engage in common projects, in strategic mutual help visions, when facing unconventional phenomena and challenges, with which nation-states are confronted, overall<sup>7</sup>).

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China intends to stabilize its relation with the United States, on the basis of the concept of “*New Relation between Great Powers*”, in order to subsequently propose the expansion of this diplomatic model, to the relations between other great powers, starting from the success of this framework-relation (somewhat close in principle and ambition to the French-German cooperation, in the European project, through the same overcoming of the realist paradigm). *This concept derives from and continues to be strongly connected to the concept of “harmonious society” (he)*, reflecting an aspiration (which is not only China’s aspiration, but a universal aspiration) to develop nations peacefully and to achieve international cooperation for peace<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Qianqian Liu, *China’s Rise and Regional Strategy: Power, Interdependence and Identity*, vol. 5, no.4, [journal.acs-cam.org.uk/data/archive/2010/201004-article7.pdf](http://journal.acs-cam.org.uk/data/archive/2010/201004-article7.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Yu Hongjun, op. cit., [www.csis.org.cn/english/2013-11/25/content\\_6486747\\_2.htm](http://www.csis.org.cn/english/2013-11/25/content_6486747_2.htm), p. 35.



### The Analects of Confucius

Source: <http://history.cultural-china.com/en/173History495.html>

*China's contribution to the development of peace and art of maintaining peace, in the complex and dynamic world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, through all these visionary and strategic concepts, is a fundamental one.* According to Sun Zi, it is more important and more difficult (also more commendable) to seek to maintain peace than to carry a hundred wars. True strength is demonstrated by a state's capacity to preserve peace (by using keys of the bilateral, multilateral and global diplomacy, with the last one being the prerogative of the daguo), rather than by winning a hundred wars (which increase the vulnerability of the international system, on the long term, and weaken or cancel the development efforts of the nations).

*The China-USA bilateral relation is considered by Chinese analysis as being not only of limited interest (only for these two large actors of the contemporary international scene), but having a direct impact on the entire Asia-Pacific area, as well as on the entire world, as a whole.* Hence the need for these two actors to engage in a relation of peaceful cooperation, avoiding conflicts (especially in the Asia-Pacific area, strategic area for the both actors) and development of a common understanding of their shared interests.

In China's strategic vision, phrasing the "New Relation between Great Powers", this concept is not only exclusively designed to outline the China-USA bilateral relation, but also meant to harmonize the future relations between "the emergent daguo" (emerging great powers, the ones from the BRICS group, such as India, Brazil, South Africa) and "the traditional daguo" (traditional great

powers, as qualified by the Chinese doctrine, listing countries such as the Great Britain, France, Germany or Italy). Concerning Russia, it is regarded *from the standpoint of its original position*, as a daguo belonging both to the group of emerging powers and to the group of European traditional powers; however, analyzing the concept of "New Relation between Great Powers", the Chinese doctrine considers that *all these great powers can contribute to defining an international system, based on post-realist values* (mutual trust, cooperation, mutual benefit, mutual respect, cooperation for development, solving disputes, through peaceful means).

The concept of "New Relation between Great Powers" is regarded as *reflecting an opening and inclusive attitude and an initiative with universal benefits*, designed to progressively harmonize the interests between the two categories of powers ("emerging daguo" and "traditional daguo")<sup>9</sup>, *starting from the development of a harmonious relation between China and the United States*. Through this concept, China intends to *determine the other great actors to overcome what it considers to express an obtuse, conflict-based, vision, an obsolete mentality, of the "cold war" type* ("the rise of a power must entail hegemonic aspirations" or "the great powers, in relations of rivalry, will inevitably go to war"<sup>10</sup>). The political concept (also launched by China) of "harmonious society" also stems from this connection to the concept of "New Relation between Great Powers" (setting relations between daguo on a new track, that of peaceful coexistence and common development).

Through the both key-concepts of its external policy (bilateral, multilateral and global), in process of development and implementation, in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *China intends to overcome* (political mentality included) *the bipolar period focused on the paradigm of mutual limitation*, between rival blocks, on the confrontation between socialism and capitalism, a paradigm in which the USA-Soviet bloc relations developed in that period. China intends to embrace *a paradigm of peaceful coexistence, which turns the old rivals into dialogue partners, in a world of interdependences*, in which confrontation, isolation and limitation of the rival cause damages even to the initiator of these measures, on the long term.

Looking admiringly at this new paradigm, in which at least one power of the 21<sup>st</sup> century responsibly intends to play this game, inviting other powers to this framework, as well (*an inclusive paradigm*), we cannot ignore *a similar previous initiative (the same idea of overcoming the realist logic)*, i.e. *the tremendous European effort to delimit from the conflict-based and destructive history, which weakened the European continent, through two world wars, and deeply fragmented the European nations, generating a vulnerable image and status for*

<sup>9</sup> Yu Hongjun, *op. cit.*, [www.csis.org.cn/english/2013-11/25/content\\_6486747\\_2.htm](http://www.csis.org.cn/english/2013-11/25/content_6486747_2.htm), p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Idem, p. 34.



these nations, in the global game, before other ascending great powers, in the post-1945 period.

Today's result (*creation of the European Union*, based on an original combination between the intergovernmental method – the method of multilateral diplomacy – and the method of regional economic-political integration method, of the neo-functional paradigm<sup>11</sup>) was obtained *due to the extraordinary capacity of the traditional great powers* (if we were to adopt the name used by China), such as Italy, Germany, France (plus the subsequently added great European powers and other European small and medium states) to found three regional Communities, which bring together strategic aspects of the hard and soft power (coal and steel industries, through the creation of CECA, atomic power industry, through the creation of EURATOM and construction of the common market, through the creation of EEC).

*Through the method of regional integration (economic, at first, political, subsequently), Europe was able to overcome the realist paradigm, which turned it into a constant victim of the disputes between great powers and of the wars. Thanks to adopting a post-realist paradigm based on neo-functionalism, as well as on the idea of complex interdependences among actors, rivals such as France and Germany have become partners in a unique economic and political project, unprecedented in other regions of the globe, subsequently proving a capacity to export this successful idea (of regional integration) to other areas of the globe, as well.*

### Certain Conclusions

In the relations between China and the USA, former adversaries during the cold war, the 21<sup>st</sup> century poses a challenge as great as the challenge generated by the creation of the three original European Communities: this time, *it is not a matter of regional integration, but a matter of peaceful coexistence; however, it is the same post-realist paradigm*, in which to great powers, which have been rivals, in the recent history, have the capacity to develop a peaceful, harmonious relationship, for the mutual benefit of the entire international system.

This visionary concept is meant to be a concept of *countering and overcoming the opposite perspective, the perspective of the realist current*, seeing the rise of China as a “serious threat for the stability of the contemporary international system<sup>12</sup>”, based on arguments such as: expansion of Chinese

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<sup>11</sup> Graham Evans, Jeffrey Newnham, *Dicționar de relații internaționale*, trad. Anca Irina Ionescu, Universal Dalsi Publishing House, 2001, s.l., pg. 197-198. Jean Jacques Roche, *Rélations internationales*, 3e éd., LGDJ, Paris, 2005, p. 182-192.

<sup>12</sup> Perceived as a current of thinking and referencing other civilizations (such as the Chinese civilization), from an Occidental perspective, with roots in a history marked by values such as



influence in Central Asia and South-East Asia (area considered to have a priority strategic importance, in China's external policy); accelerated arms race; involvements in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East<sup>13</sup>.

According to China's new strategic vision, for outlining a "21<sup>st</sup> century" relation with the great powers, especially with the United States, stereotypes related to the dualist age of the Cold War must be overcome, stereotypes such as "the great powers will be inevitably engaged in a war with each other", because, *in the global world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are shared interests, global issues that must be solved between the great powers building a level superior to the conflict-based level, in the realist world, a level of global governing and rational management of multiple interdependences between nations.* At this point, we can assess China's vision as being a wise and pacifist vision, on the long run, based on identification and need to manage (in common) the globalization trends (especially economic).

*The "New Relation between Great Powers" is a concept that goes deeper than a simple proposal to improve the China-United States bilateral relations, deeper than might seem on a first look.* We could say that an in-depth analysis of this concept *opens a window to the new types of relations, which will be created between the great powers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and which will fundamentally redefine the international system, during the first half of this century, changing its basis and vision, the reference paradigm.* If this political paradigm has been a realistic paradigm so far, mutually opposing the great powers, the paradigms of complex interdependences and of multipolarity draw a different face of the international system, of its nature and dynamic, starting with this period. The new paradigms (and we must acknowledge here the visionary force of the Chinese global policy, able to deeply analyze and define the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) build the foundations for the post-realist, globalist world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In addition, we must mention *an already existing progressive implementation of the concept to the relation between China and another daguo (Russian Federation).* However, certain authors consider that this concept was *already present in the Asian-Russian relations, ever since the mid '90s,* and that it was used between the two daguo, to stabilize their framework-relation but, at the same time, *for China, it was regarded as an opportunity to extend this relation to*

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individualism, militarism, ruthless competition, economic competition, fundamentally opposed to the Confucius philosophy and leading in the history of China to a period of brutal colonization, after coming into contact with civilizations of the European powers (following which China's traditional reference system to other peoples and civilizations, called Chaogong, failed). See Anna Eva Budura, *Diplomația chineză. Chaogong, sistemul de relații ale Chinei cu lumea din afara ei*, Annex 9, în Anna Eva Budura, *Diplomația chineză. Premise istorice și spirituale*, Ed. Top Form, Bucharest, 2008, p. 219.

<sup>13</sup> Teodor Frunzeti, Sebastian Oprescu, *Lumea marilor puteri (2011-2013)*, col. Geopolitica, Top Form Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013, p. 171.

*other great powers, in the international post-bipolar framework*<sup>14</sup>. As historians of the concept, the analysts quote the 1992 mentioning by Boris Yelʹin, during his visit to Beijing, “laying the foundations for the New Type of Relation” between the two countries, as well as Jang Zemin’s phrase (in a speech delivered in Moscow, in 1995), according to whom “the New Type of Relation is viable and will provide not only benefits to the Chinese and Russian people, but also international peace and development”<sup>15</sup>.” If the term “great powers” was adopted in China and Russia only in March 2013 (without bringing a change in the meaning of the concept), the first coining of NTR dates back to 1997, with the adopting the Common Russian-Chinese Declaration “over the multipolar world and creation of a new international order”, which expressly specified one of the key-principles of NTR (“the countries should not have hegemonic policies, they should not be engaged in power policies and they should not monopolize international relations”<sup>16</sup>).

*The key-principles of NTR*, as presented in the set of official documents of the framework-relation, during the post-bipolar period, between China and Russia, are the following: accepting multipolarity and promoting it as a means to enable a distribution of global power, which leads to “forming a new international just and rational order”; acknowledgement of the areas of influence of between the great powers (the right of the great powers to have peripheral areas of interest, corresponding to their status of “power poles”, in a multipolar order – for example, China’s objective to build “a harmonious Asia” or Russia, proclaiming in 2008 “an area of privileged interests”-); an emphasis placed on an increased UN role, in the new multipolar world, as an instrument of multilateral diplomacy, as a stepping stone for any legitimate action of the states, in the field of international policy, as a key-element for the democratization of international relations (with the deriving principle of opposition by use of force and threat, without the prior approval, granted by CS-UN)<sup>17</sup>.

Moreover, there are other principles to take into consideration: protection of key-interests between the great powers (here, China and Russia), starting in fact from the first of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (each party has the right to freely set its economic, political, military and social system; promotion of national interests of each party, observing the national interests of the other party; support for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and development model specific to each of them; rejecting the promotion of certain universal values or of a particular political system, declared as universally valid). Another

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Mancinelli, *Conceptualizing “New Type Great Power Relations”: The Sino-Russian Model*, China Brief vol. 14, issue 9 May 7, 2014, [www.jamestown.org/regions/chinaasiapacific](http://www.jamestown.org/regions/chinaasiapacific)

<sup>15</sup> Idem, quoted op., p. 4. Beijing Review, November 13, 1995: Xianhua, May 9, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> Idem, quoted op., p. 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, op. cit., p. 5-6.

principle included in the NTR between two daguo such as Russia and china is the principle regarding a strengthened cooperation between the two parties (through dialogue emphasized at bilateral level and at the highest levels, strategic coordination in regional matters and crises, political alignments within CS-UN and in other multilateral organizations, mutual support in matters regarding the defence of their key-interests) (Xinhua, March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013)<sup>18</sup>.

*There is also a connection between the NTR concept between China and Russia and the concept of NSC (New Security Concept), as regarded by China (multidimensional, but also as a model of "concert between the great powers", to "interact on security subjects, in a multipolar world, lacking exclusivist alliances" (Xinhua, August 1<sup>st</sup> 2002). Therefore, the framework relation between these two daguo excludes the forming of political alliances and takes into consideration organizations such as SCO, as a model of "security based on cooperation" in the "harmonious world" (as a multipolar world, with UN and the UN Charter as a system of support, for the states and especially for the great powers)<sup>19</sup> (Xinhua, 1 August 2002).*

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, op. cit., p. 6.

Analectes of Confucius, <http://history.cultural-china.com/en/173History495.html>  
<http://armoniefeminina.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/circle.jpg>



A possible illustration of the concept of “dialogue of civilizations” and harmony among nations/ the concept of “harmonious global society”

Source: <http://armoniefeminina.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/circle.jpg>