Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to the UK on Tuesday, the first of such since his predecessor Hu Jintao's in 2005, has drawn extensive attention from both China and the international community. The high-speed rail to nuclear power cooperation, major achievements are expected from this visit, which might herald, like British Prime Minister David Cameron said, a “golden time” of bilateral relations.

The Sino-UK relationship has a low ebb in 2012, when Cameron officially received the Dalai Lama regardless of China’s protests. However, re-alizing the repercussions of ignoring China have outweighed the fallacious feelings of moral- ity on certain controversial and sensitive issues, Cameron and his governm- ent have gradually felt out the way of managing a reciprocal relationship with China.

The UK has apparently lifted its China policy to a pragmatic direction, the extent of which is rarely seen in the Western hemisphere. Aware of the subtle global changes with China’s escalation of being a major driver of global economy and an im- portant player in international affairs, the UK has made a judicious decision to go with the tendency in an effort to gain more benefits. London did not only claim to be China’s “best partner in the West,” but by joining China-led Asian Infrastucture Investment Bank despite its Western peers’ concerns, it is willing to put more faith in China leading regional governance that also has a global influence. In fact, as well the UK, the entire Europe is re-calibrating its attitude toward China. But due to its abundant diplomatic experience and an administran- ce basis its national inter- ests on pragmatism, the UK is getting the upper hand over its Western counterparts in finding common ground with China.

George Osborne, British Chancellor of the Exchequer, has taken the lead in transforming. His emphasis on the revival of the British econ- omy is reinforcing his leverage in diplomatic decision-making. Downplaying the role of trivial issues such as religion, human rights and democracy in bilat- eral ties is necessary for a win-win result.

The UK’s open arms toward China have undoubtedly upset the US, which has a “special relationship” with the UK. Analysts argue that a closer Sino-UK relationship might cause more frictions in this alliance. This could also mean that the UK government must have realized that the US is in relative decline as China is narrowing its gaps with the US. It is time for the UK to as- sume a more neutral position between the US and China in- stead of heavily relying on one side. The strategic balance achieved among the US, China, and the EU, serves the best of the UK.

By appearance, London’s embrace of China was not ex- pected by the US, which still harbors strategic mistrust to- ward China, reflected by its strong positions over the South China Sea disputes and cyber- space security. But in the long run, if the UK and China can develop a stable reciprocal approach of cooperation – the first one between China and a major Western country, the US will also benefit. In some sense, the UK’s embrace of China and China’s interaction with the UK are aimed at exploring a truly positive framework of interaction between China and the West. An updated Sino-UK relationship, which can find shared benefits in not only bi- lateral ties, but in terms of glob- al affairs, will be an example for other Western countries to follow.

Although uncertainties still linger, and both countries have gone through ups and downs in the past, the “golden time” still should be anticipated to last for at least five years before the next British election. We hope the wisdom and pragmatism of both Chinese and British lead- ership will move the bilateral ties further toward an estab- lished norm.

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