

UK shifts China policy for national interests

By Zhao Chen

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. From 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, realizing the repercussions of irking China have outweighed the fallacious feelings of morality on certain controversial and sensitive issues, and the Cameron government has gradually felt out the way of managing

a reciprocal relationship with China.

The UK has apparently shifted 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 drive of global economy and an important 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 Infrastructure 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 administration basing its national interests 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 this transformation. His emphasis on the revival of the British economy is reinforcing his leverage in diplomatic decision-making. Downplaying the role of trivial issues such as religion, human rights and democracy in bilateral 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.

The Cameron government must have realized that the US is in relative decline as China

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is narrowing its gaps with the US. It is time for the UK to assume a more neutral position between the US and China instead 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 expected by the US, which still harbors strategic mistrust toward China, reflected by its strong positions over the South China Sea disputes and cyberspace 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 bilateral ties, but in terms of global 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 for five years before the next British election. We hope the wisdom and pragmatism of both Chinese and British leadership will move the bilateral ties further toward an established norm.

The author is a research fellow at the Institute of European Studies under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. opinion@globaltimes.com.cn

Chinese community feels change brought by warmer Sino-British relations

Editor's Note:

Both UK Prime Minister David Cameron and Chinese President Xi Jinping have spoken of a new "golden time" in Sino-British ties in anticipation of Xi's ongoing visit to the UK. What impact will it have on the ground? How do local Chinese see the visit? Global Times (GT) London Correspondent Sun Wei interviewed Wang Xingang (Wang), a parish councilor for Claygate in North Surrey. The 35-year-old was born and raised in China's Heilongjiang Province and came to England after his university degree in 2001. Wang was selected as the Conservative candidate for the heavily Labour-supporting Manchester Central in May's General Election.

GT: Both some Chinese and Britain officials say that Xi's UK trip will start a "golden time" in the bilateral relationship. What do you think?

Wang: The bilateral ties are going to be even better. Britain needs strong partners to realize its long-term economic plan. China is the best choice. Britain achieved the fastest economic growth in the developed world last year. China, on the other hand, has been developing at the fastest pace for the last 20 years. Although the speed has slowed down a bit, China is still the world's economic engine. The economic relationship is going to be a mutually beneficial one.

GT: What outcomes are you anticipating Xi's visit will bring? In what way the visit will boost the relationship?

Wang: Xi's visit is going to be a major milestone for the bilateral relationship in the coming years. Both countries realize that Britain can be China's best partner in the West. Of course, there will be ups and downs on the road ahead, but we can create a golden decade if we stick together. From the royal



Wang Xingang

visit in March to the Chancellor's recent visit to Beijing, and now Xi's visit, there will be more and more closer relationships. More projects will be announced during the visit. The visit is sure to further strengthen the two countries' relationship.

GT: Chinese companies have increasingly invested in the UK. What kind of influence do they have?

Wang: I can see influence in day-to-day life. For example, the taxi company of the London black cab was acquired by Chinese carmaker Geely. Whenever I took a taxi, I am using a Chinese service. Also, some major mobile operators like O2 have been bought by Chinese companies. And some Chinese mobile phones like Xiaomi and Huawei are widely used in the UK. Chinese technologies are becoming world class, and so are Chinese investments. I can

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see very close collaboration between the two countries. The market has opened. Chinese companies and investments should come here in the UK to join the open market.

GT: Since the Conservative Party won election in May, how do you see the progress that has been made in Sino-British government communications?

Wang: The Conservative Party won the general election, which was one of the most unpredictable elections in Britain's modern political history. The party has to deliver what it promised in the election manifesto, which is continuing on the road to a stronger economy. One of the key parts of the long-term economic plan is to have a strong northern powerhouse.

Chancellor George Osborne led a delegation visiting China in September, and brought investments including 24 billion pounds (\$37.06 billion) of investment opportunities in the northern powerhouse. The government announced a 2 billion pounds infrastructure guarantee for the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station. Also, the Xinjiang-based Hualin Industry & Trade Group announced its plans to invest in major property projects worth 1.2 billion pounds in Manchester, Leeds, and Sheffield. In order to encourage more children to learn Putonghua, the

government has committed 10 million pounds to recruit and train more teachers in state schools across the UK.

Another 6 million pounds in government grants have been given to support some of Britain's museums, galleries and theater companies to raise their profile globally including China. These are the major steps committed and performed by the new government to improve the economy.

The Conservative Party also has an organization called "Conservative Friends of the Chinese" to link with Chinese communities. They have organized many events to bring the minister members to speak to Chinese communities in the UK face to face. The ministers are able to see their supporters in the Chinese community, and Chinese communities representatives can express their concerns directly to the ministers. The Conservative Party has more support from Chinese than from other ethnic minorities.

The Conservative friends of the Chinese has done a good job in linking the government and the local communities. During the general election, there were five ethnic Chinese minority candidates, and we elected the first Chinese origin MP in the House of Commons this year. And we also have the only current Chinese member in the House of Lords. Chinese communities strongly supported the Conservative Party during all the campaign events. The Conservative Friends of the Chinese has made very impressive progress in increasing the awareness of Conservative policies among Chinese communities.