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Transcript of Ambassador Cui Tiankai's Interview with China-US Focus' James Chau

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China-US Focus: 40 years ago, Deng Xiaoping and Jimmy Carter, as we all know, made the decision that changed the world, that is to establish the diplomatic relations for China and the United States, and in doing so to merge interests of over a billion people on different ends of the planet. 40 years later, do you think that they have achieved as countries, as people, what the original architects had in mind?

Ambassador Cui: I think the answer is a clear yes. The world is changing and so are our two countries, but for the better. Both countries have benefited from 40 years' diplomatic relations, and the world as a whole has also benefited from it. You see, think about history, back in the 1950s and 1960s, we had two hot wars in the years of the Cold War in Asia. But since the so-called reopening of America

to China and re-opening of China to America, since Dr. Kissinger and President Nixon's visits to China and especially since the normalization of relations, the Asia-Pacific is now, on the whole, peaceful and stable. While there are still a couple of hot spots remaining, but they are under control, we're handling them and we are working together on these things like the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue. And economically, the Asia-Pacific is very different from forty years ago. Now it's one of the main powerhouses of the global economy. Frankly speaking, China and the United States can take a lot of credit for this and so we are very grateful to people like President Carter and Mr. Deng Xiaoping for taking that historic decision with great courage and vision.

China-US Focus: A few weeks after January 1st, 1979, Deng Xiaoping went to the United States and he said when he was standing on the south lawn of the White House, "The world today is far from tranquil. There are not only threats to peace, but the factors making for war are visibly growing." There has been no world war since 1979 and I've heard it said in the last couple of days that no American soldier has died in a battlefield in East Asia since 1979. Do you think that the US-China relationship is a direct contributor to that peace?

Ambassador Cui: Yes, of course, especially for the Asia-Pacific. I think forty years ago it was still hard to imagine that we could have such an overall peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific. But now this is a reality. Sometimes people take these things for granted. They tend to forget how hard peace was won.

China-US Focus: When Deng Xiaoping was in the United States, one of the stopovers was in the Johnson Space Center, and he climbed into the lunar rover, and then he went into a spacecraft simulator. And of course, China was a country where the vast majority was living in poverty in those days. Fast forward to a couple of days ago, China is the first country in the world to explore the far side of the moon. With all that advancing technology, with all the innovations that have become part of contemporary China, how best do you think China as a country can apply the innovation so to benefit humanity?

Ambassador Cui: I think that is the actual purpose of China's efforts in developing science and technology. Of course our goal is to bring better life to the Chinese people. But we are also ready to contribute more to the progress of entire humanity, including in terms of science and technology. Another thing is

(that), honestly, the United States is still the leading country in science and in most of the technologies. China is still learning from the US and others and trying to catch up. Our emphasis is not to replace them, but to cooperate with them for the greater good of the entire mankind.

China-US Focus: But they all looked at these innovations. They'll see these pictures from the far side of the moon. They'll see that as a threat and a lot of people do. They say that this science and technology is being used to advance China without putting people up-rouned. What do you say in trying to get people to understand that China, you know you've grown up in China, you represent China,why is it so different to the other China that people talk about?

Ambassador Cui: I think the 1.4 billion Chinese people are working very hard for the modernization of the nation and for realizing our two centenary goals, and that would include the efforts of our scientists. I don't think there's anybody in China who is planning any invasion or so-called regime change in another country or enforcing our system or ideology on others. There's no such a plan in China, and no one is doing these things in China.

China-U.S. Focus: And so by default, they may apply their own internal fears to what they think China might be projecting?

Ambassador Cui:Well, if we look at history of the past half century or since the end of the Second World War, it's quite clear which country or which countries have invaded others for most of the time, which countries have tried regime change all over the world, and which countries are fully engaged in the pursuit of peaceful development. I think the fact is so clear.

China-U.S. Focus: The end of 1978, the beginning of 1979 was a monumental few weeks for the world, although people may not necessarily know it. You had January 1, 1979, of course, two great nations on this planet decided to be real friends and to work together in the future. And just a couple of weeks before that when they made that decision, Deng Xiaoping in China began the reform and opening-up process that changed everything for the majority of the world. Those two events I've heard you speak about in recent weeks, especially, are closely interlinked. Opening up China's domestic policy meant opening up China's outreach to the world, its foreign

policy as well. Is there an experience from within that China can share with everybody and say, look, that's worked for us and could work for you as well?

Ambassador Cui: Well, I think actually in the couple of years following Deng Xiaoping's comeback at the end of the Cultural Revolution, the historic change in China started, maybe initially not many people noticed it. But I think it all started with Deng Xiaoping's call to emancipate the mind and seek truth from facts. And China reassessed the global situation and came to the conclusion that there's no imminent danger of a world war. So China should focus itself on economic development, on its modernization drive. That's why we launched reform and opening-up. And we all believe in order to achieve that goal we cannot do it in isolation. We have to build better stronger relations with our neighbors and with major powers in the world, like the United States.

So if you look at the diplomatic schedule of Deng Xiaoping in these months, he visited our neighbors Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, before the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee, which took the decision of the reform and opening-up. At the same time, negotiations were going on between China and the United States to normalize relations. So actually, the announcement of the joint communique was published two days before the party plenum took the decision for the reform and opening-up. Then shortly after that, in late January, 1979, Deng Xiaoping came to the United States for a nine-day visit, which was unusually long, but was a very fruitful, very historic visit.

So I think all this is, if we may borrow the term, the "grand strategy" for China to really launch the modernization drive to focus on economic development and to contribute more to global peace and stability and start a new relationship with countries like United States.

China-U.S. Focus: You mentioned that nine-day visit to the United States. I spoke to President Carter this morning, and he said that when he extended that invitation, he got an answer in 24 hours. And I think what he was trying to say is that it was an indicator of a quick but also strong decision that Deng was able to make. I know you remember that period yourself because Deng Xiaoping went to the space center, as we said, he went to the White House, he went to Texas, he put that cowboy hat on. He was a sensation in many ways. He was the first Chinese leader long time that people got to see for

themselves in their own homeland. As an ordinary Chinese yourself at that time in Shanghai, what do you think Deng's visit and his 9 days in the United States did for young Chinese everywhere at that time?

Ambassador Cui: A great deal. First of all, it opened up great opportunities for all the young people in China to pursue their studies, to work for much better future. And specifically, you see, every time I met with President Carter, he would like to tell us the story that he got a call in the midnight from his science advisor in Beijing. He said, Deng Xiaoping wanted to send students to the United States. And President Carter said they're absolutely welcome. So this is also part of the decision they took at the time. And I myself personally benefited from that decision. Some years later, I came to the United States to pursue my graduate study. So without Deng Xiaoping's visit, without the decision he took with President Carter to open the doors for exchange of students, I would not have had the opportunity to come here.

China-US Focus: And you had an incredible start to your career, you went to the United Nations and you engage with the international community on behalf of your country and for yourself as well. What is globalization mean to you?

Ambassador Cui: I think globalization is a fact of life. In today's world, maybe thanks to the development of technology, people are more connected. It doesn't matter whether they're in the U.S., in China, in Africa, you can get connected instantly. So, information flow is much greater and more powerful than ever before. Now the exchange of people, of goods and services, everything is almost globalized. Of course, this is mainly driven by the advancement of science and technology and driven by the economic imperatives. I don't think people can really reverse the trend, but in the meantime, we have to be very careful about how the benefits are shared equitably by everyone. How we can achieve an inclusive, open and mutually beneficial process of globalization. I think this is actually the challenge in the last few years for the international community.

China-US Focus: Muhammad Yunus, pioneer of Microfinance has spoken about this as well, saying that China has managed to emulate the success of the traditional powers in its own economy, but wouldn't want to copy the failings of that same success, which is, of course, social inequity in the big gaps between the rich and the poor. What is the way forward? And I ask you, because China managed to

find a solution to poverty, and if China can do on the scale of hundreds of millions of people, surely that means it's possible anywhere. So conversely, now when we go to the next stage of development, what's the solution for inequity and the injustices that come out of that, out of being poor, out of not having a job, out of having to pull your children out of school. How do you solve that gap in society?

Ambassador Cui: I think it's important to make sure that people have access to opportunities. If poor kids could have access to good education, they could change their lives, and they could make more contribution to the society. Of course there are maybe groups of people who are more vulnerable than others, for instance, people with disabilities and of old age and so on. Then it is our duty to take good care of them, especially for the government. The government has to adopt policies that will take care of the needs of these vulnerable people. So the benefits of globalization, the benefits of technological progress will be more equitably shared.

China-U.S. Focus: You talked about the progress in technology and how we all have reliance on it and how that's driving a new kind of globalization. And then you talk about Deng Xiaoping talking about seeking the truth. Is that now very complex and difficult to establish the truth in a world of technology, where there's fake news, where there's such a rapid spread of information that it can't always be controlled.

Ambassador Cui: Yeah, I think people are still learning how to act, or behave responsibly in this information age, because now everybody is free to receive information, to send out information, to try to influence others. But honestly, there are cases of so-called fake news every now and then. Sometimes it's very difficult for individuals to distinguish. So I think governments, institutions, and the whole society have to work out some rules, some code of conduct, if I may use the term, for people to behave in a responsible way in this information age.

China-U.S. Focus: In a way that's decent and respectful of one or another. I want to return a bit now to the China-U.S. conversation again, because we talked about that in the beginning that we moved on to a global part, because of course, that's what informs. Jimmy Carter credits China and the U.S. for significantly securing global

peace and their economies for driving and generating global prosperity. But he says, you know very well, that the relationship is in jeopardy, and that if misperceptions and miscalculations are allowed to continue, then these two countries could be at the head of what he called in modern cold war. Do you agree?

Ambassador Cui: I think, there may be people out there with some real intention to initiate a kind of new cold war between China and United States. We have to guard against these attempts. But at the same time, I think the common interests, the great common interests between the two countries are clear. They're just there. So if we can really focus on the great common interests and mutual needs between the two countries, I think the choice is quite clear. We should cooperate rather than have a cold war against each other.

China-U.S. Focus: One of the important developments of the past year is, of course, the trade war between the two countries. I don't just talk about the trade war because they could come and go, but rather talk about fundamental mindset. Do you think that this event is going to permanently alter this great forty-year relationship? And in any case, will China look elsewhere for other partners or expand existing partnerships?

Ambassador Cui: Well, you see, China and the United States, we are the two largest economies in the world, so a trade war will hurt both countries and probably hurt the global economy. I think the consequences of the trade dispute in the last couple of years are already felt not only in two countries, but also globally. That's why there's a widespread concern about continuation of such a dispute without a clear solution in sight. I think we should speed up our work to conclude the current round of consultation to find a practical, effective, and mutually beneficial solution to the existing issues. Of course, if we solve all the existing issues, new things might come up. But we have always handled these things in the spirit of mutual respect, mutual benefit.

China-U.S. Focus: You're not just a highly skilled creative diplomat, you are known for being very kind and very thoughtful. Obviously, you traveled the world and you take in different opinions. What would you want Americans to know about China and the Chinese people?

Ambassador Cui: I hope American people could have a much better knowledge of the real China, not the China sometimes reported in some of the media here, not the China that some of the so-called strategists are writing about. That's not the real China. Honestly, some people here are trying to demonize China. What they're talking about, what they are imposing on the American people is not the reality in China. So I hope and I think my job here, part of my job here, is to facilitate better mutual understanding between the two countries.

China-U.S. Focus: If someone wants to learn about China and to acquire a serious understanding of this fascinating country in the process. How do you suggest they go about it? What's the first step?

Ambassador Cui: There are a lot of good books to read. If they are interested in history, they could certainly start with some reading in the Chinese history. That will certainly help them. Of course, if they can go to China and see for themselves, I think seeing is really believing. It is most convincing for people to go there and see what the Chinese are doing every day, what their aspirations are, and what the country's goal is. It's not very difficult. You just go there and try to see what is happening there, and try to talk to the Chinese people, to listen to the Chinese people, to see the evolving China stories there. It's quite clear and a lot of misunderstanding will be gone.

China-U.S. Focus: These are two countries that are very different in some aspects, language being one, culture being another, their beginnings, their systems of governance of course. Do you think that's there is a capacity in the future for America to say 'Yes, we have a number-two economy not so far behind us these days. And we can give a bit of space and we can lead together.' Is that in the capacity to do that?

Ambassador Cui: I think the Chinese people have every right to seek a better life. This is our inalienable right. Nobody can deprive us of this right. So whether others are happy or not, China will continue to develop peacefully, the Chinese people will continue to work hard for a better life. But at the same time, China's development has not been and will not be at the expense of anybody else. On the contrary, China's development enables it to contribute more to global economic growth, global peace and stability. For instance, starting from this year, 2019, China is the second largest contributor to United Nations regular budget and peacekeeping expenses. Of course, the United States is still the largest

contributor. China is not Number One. We are catching up. We are taking up greater international responsibility.

And at the same time, I don't think China and the United States would become identical anytime in the future. This is impossible. Why should we have a world that all countries are identical to each other? This would be a very dull world. We have to respect and make the best use of the diversity. Because China has a different culture, because China has a much longer history, because China even has a different language, I think that all these can attract many Americans. And of course, America is always a fascinating place for many Chinese. So this will motivate people of both countries to learn more about the other side. And with such mutual understanding there will be stronger friendship. I think this is great news for all.

China-U.S. Focus: I'd like to finish our conversation by returning to the two architects of the China-U.S. relationship. Ambassador, you've said a number of times that people shouldn't lose sight of why this relationship began, that it was in pursuit of global peace, and that a certain element of global peace has been directly achieved because of these two countries. When you look at pictures of Deng Xiaoping and Jimmy Carter, and you go to google and you look, there are so many pictures of them where they're physically touching each other, casting each other's hands, hugging each other, embracing one another. And Jimmy Carter said yesterday, and you heard him say this as well, that this relationship and the people that represent this relationship should now go forward and creates a new partnership which really is based not only on mutual respect, but also use the word based on love. Is that still possible?

Ambassador Cui: Well, I think for international relations, maybe most of the time they are based on common interests. And this is certainly the case for China and United States. Of course, if people from different countries just love each other, this is great. But you cannot expect everybody to do that. So in relations between two great countries, I think it's important to identify our growing common interests and base the relationship on that.

China-U.S. Focus: Ambassador Cui Tiankai, thank you very much.

Ambassador Cui: Thank you! Great pleasure talking to you.

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Your comments are welcome.