

The future is golden

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LIU XIAOMING was educated at Dalian University of Foreign Languages and also earned a Master's degree in International Relations at Tufts University, USA. He joined the Chinese Foreign Service in 1974. Following postings in Zambia and the US, he was appointed Ambassador to Egypt in 2001. He became Vice Minister of the Office of Foreign Affairs Leading Group of the CPC Central Committee in 2005 and was appointed Ambassador to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 2006. He was appointed Ambassador to the United Kingdom in 2009.

President Xi Jinping will pay a State Visit to the UK at the invitation of Her Majesty The Queen in October 2015. This will be the first State Visit by a Chinese President in a decade. This heralds a happy and significant event as it will mark a new milestone in China-UK relations. Indeed, October 2015 and the State Visit is sure to be remembered as the start of a 'Golden Era' in the Sino-British bilateral relationship.

This 'Golden Era' has arisen from solid foundations built up over the past ten years. 2015 marks the tenth year of the establishment of the 'China-UK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'. This means that the two countries now enjoy a more mature and stable relationship. This has been achieved against a background of profound transformation of the international landscape. Despite these far-reaching changes, the interests shared by China and the UK have become deeply intertwined. In addition, the China-UK relationship is mutually complementary and has brought tangible benefits to the peoples of our two countries. Relations between the two nations have a global and strategic significance – for example, bringing many benefits to world peace and development.

2015 saw the China-UK comprehensive and strategic partnership embarking on a fast track. This trend is expanding the reach of the 'Golden Era'. It is one of many highlights creating a golden glow across the panoramic view of the China-UK relationship.

The first bright highlight is the unprecedented level of official visits. This is matched by the increasingly deep mutual political trust. Earlier this year, the Duke of Cambridge paid his first-ever visit to China, which was the most important royal visit to China in nearly three decades. In June, shortly after the UK General Election, there were a succession of high level visits to London from China to establish contact with the new Government. These visitors included the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, Secretary of Beijing Municipal CPC Committee, Guo Jinlong and special envoy of President Xi Jinping, Secretary Meng Jianzhu. In August and September, three of the annual key bilateral dialogues were held. These included the Strategic Dialogue, the High-Level People-to-People Dialogue and the Economic and Financial Dialogue. The outcome of these top-level meetings are being translated into all-round progress in China-UK

cooperation. On top of that, new British and Chinese consulates were established in Wuhan and Belfast, respectively.

The second highlight is the productive economic, trade and financial cooperation. Added to that is the reality of an excellent match between Chinese and British development strategies. These factors helped deliver, in the first half of this year, China-UK trade in goods totaling US\$36.74 billion. This means that China now ranks as the UK's fourth largest trading partner in the world. It raised Britain to the level of China's second-largest trading partner in the European Union. China's cumulative investment in the UK now exceeds US\$40 billion. As a symbol of deeper China-UK financial cooperation, Britain became the overseas trading centre for the Chinese currency, the yuan or renminbi (RMB). That is a ranking second only to Hong Kong. Most significantly, the UK became the first developed country to become a founding member of the China-initiated Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

China and the UK are also making progress on a number of cooperation projects. These include nuclear power generation and high-speed rail. From China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative and 'Made in China 2025', to Britain's 'National Infrastructure Plan' and 'Northern Powerhouse' project, the two countries are exploring the opportunity to pool their respective strengths and dovetail their development strategies. All this adds up to a new era where China and the UK are already deeply engaged in all-round economic and financial cooperation. The result will reap all-round benefits for the peoples of China and Britain.

The third highlight is better understanding and closer affinity. This is as a result of flourishing cultural events and exchanges. 2015 is designated as the Year of China-UK Cultural Exchange. The UK Season in China ran from January to June and was a resounding success. This enabled the unique British creative industry to enjoy full exposure to the Chinese public. The China Season in Britain was launched in July. Entitled 'Creative China', this China Season is rolling out a rich variety of events across Britain. In Edinburgh, Chinese performing artists put on powerful and captivating shows at both the Military Tattoo and the International Festival. In London, Chinese creativity, Chinese design and Chinese fashion lit up the stages

of the London Design Festival and London Fashion Week. The close affinity between Chinese and British people can be highlighted by the fact that there are more Chinese students and Confucius Institutes in the UK than in any other European country. A further testimony to such closeness is the concurrent commemorations in both China and the UK of the 70th anniversaries of VJ Day and the Victory in the World Anti-Fascist War. Through these many commemorations, the two countries relived their time of fighting side-by-side. In turn, both nations reaffirmed their commitment to safeguarding world peace and security.


Looking ahead, the future of the China-UK relationship glistens golden bright. That glow will get ever brighter as both countries build on existing consensus, expand cooperation and keep making new progress in their comprehensive strategic partnership.

Building stronger China-UK ties calls for determination and confidence. One must always adopt a long-term, strategic approach and see the relationship between China and the UK not as a rivalry but an opportunity for both countries. Indeed, China and the UK have every opportunity to set an example for East-West cooperation in this new era. Progress can move at optimal speed if the advance is mixed with realism. It is realistic to ground any relationship in the recognition there will be bumps and obstacles. Travelling forward with open minds can help identify these potential disruptions and obstacles. With this spirit bound into the relationship, delays can be minimised. In the final analysis, it all comes down to respecting each other's core interests and carrying on with equal and win-win cooperation.

Building stronger ties calls for broader and deeper cooperation that is mutually beneficial. China and the UK are both committed to economic growth, to structural adjustment, to reform and innovation, and

to emerging industries. By dovetailing their respective strengths, China and the UK can engage in mutual investment, infrastructure cooperation and joint advanced research. China's 'Belt and Road' initiative and the UK's 'Northern Powerhouse' are excellent platforms for production capacity cooperation on an international scale. China and the UK should make use of these platforms to showcase a number of flagship projects in order to make the 'cake' of mutual interests larger and enable both countries to grow.

Building stronger ties also calls for enhanced global significance and influence of China-UK cooperation. As permanent members of the UN Security Council and key players in the G20, China and the UK have on their shoulders the heavy responsibility of safeguarding world peace and promoting common development. Both countries should work to build a new type of state-to-state relationship based on win-win cooperation, to improve the global economic and financial governance systems and to enhance global trade liberalisation and facilitation. Going forward, the world is to face global challenges such as epidemics, climate change and terrorism. This means that with any post-2015 agenda, China and the UK should coordinate their policies, play a leading role and engage in effective cooperation.

President Xi Jinping's State Visit to the UK will unveil the goals for the 'Golden Era'. The State Visit will map out the 'blueprint' for the second decade of the China-UK comprehensive strategic partnership. The historic significance of this State Visit cannot be overstated. The State Visit will carry China-UK relations into the future. Now is the time for both China and the UK to seize the opportunities presented by the 'Golden Era' and join hands in writing an exceptional new chapter for China-UK relations. 

China and the UK can engage in mutual investment, infrastructure cooperation and joint advanced research



The China Conservatory Orchestra performs in Edinburgh as part of the 2015 UK-China Year of Cultural Exchange