China's Agricultural Diplomacy Under the "Going Global" Strategy

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Abstract: Since the inception of the "going global" strategy two decades ago, China has attached increasing importance to agricultural diplomacy. International agricultural cooperation has become both an end and a means of China's diplomacy, as well as an integral part of China's "grand diplomacy." China's agricultural diplomacy has many features, including: the central government playing a leading role; ministerial agencies undertaking specific programs; local governments being responsible for implementation; and enterprises acting as active participants. All these contribute to China's overall diplomacy and help maintain food security of the target countries and promote the overseas interests of Chinese enterprises. Through various practices, China's agricultural diplomacy has been working well with the mutual reinforcement of bilateral and multilateral

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China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies, Vol. 5, No. 4, 557–576
DOI: [10.1142/S2377740019500258](https://doi.org/10.1142/S2377740019500258)

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approaches; and interactions among diversified diplomatic entities are encouraged. China's agricultural diplomacy has enriched the meaning of "major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics" and constitutes an important means for China to participate in global governance and to align with the development plans of target countries. Since China's agricultural diplomacy is still faced with multiple challenges, it is imperative for China to improve related mechanisms, explore new ways of agricultural cooperation in third countries, and formulate new patterns for agricultural diplomacy along the "Belt and Road."

Keywords: Agricultural diplomacy; social governance; international agricultural cooperation; Chinese diplomacy.

Introduction

At the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held in 2017, Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, pointed out that "[t]he trends of global multi-polarity, economic globalization, IT application, and cultural diversity are surging forward; changes in the global governance system and the international order are speeding up; countries are becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent; relative international forces are becoming more balanced; and peace and development remain irreversible trends."¹ In the new era, it has become both necessary and inevitable to promote peace through development, and achieve stability through economic development. China's international exchanges have been shifting from "hard diplomacy" with politics and security at the core to "soft diplomacy" focusing on economy and people's livelihoods. As a significant field of China's participation in global governance on people's livelihood, agriculture has grown to be an important policy goal and a key topic for Chinese leaders in diplomatic activities.² Thus, agricultural diplomacy has become an integral part of China's

¹Xi Jinping, *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era* (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2017), p. 58.

²See also "These Five Years: China's Role in Global Governance of Agriculture [这五年: 农业全球治理的中国担当]," www.moa.gov.cn, January 3, 2018, http://www.gjs.moa.gov.cn/gdxw/201904/t20190418_6184361.htm.

"major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics" as well as a means for China's overall diplomacy.³

At present, academic literature on China's international agricultural cooperation can be found in various disciplines, such as economics, diplomacy and history, and mainly fall into two categories: theoretical research and empirical research. The former is to analyze the significance and value of research of China's agricultural diplomacy from an overall perspective, while the latter focuses on micro analysis, such as agricultural diplomacy between China and Africa, between China and Southeast Asia, between China and Canada, and so on.

Based on the existing literature, this article aims to explore China's agricultural diplomacy by a systematic and forward-looking approach, analyzing how different entities of China's agricultural diplomacy have coordinated with one another, and how practitioners and target actors have been interacting around the tasks and goals since the inception of China's "going global" strategy in 1999. This article also summarizes the core features of China's agricultural diplomacy and provides a prospective analysis on its future direction, according to the existing problems in the institutional functions and interaction among relevant entities, with the aim of improving the comprehensive performance of China's agricultural diplomacy in serving the country's overall diplomacy.

China's Agricultural Diplomacy: Evolution and Core Features

On the whole, China's agricultural diplomacy manifests the following features: the central government playing a leading role, ministerial agencies undertaking specific programs, local governments being responsible for implementation, and enterprises acting as active participants. It includes agricultural cooperation in the areas of trade, technology, talents and agricultural assistance in terms of development and governance. Through positive interactions between the agricultural sector and diplomatic sector in external exchanges, China's agricultural diplomacy not only serves the country's overall diplomacy, but also promotes international agricultural cooperation.

³Bai Fengzhe *et al.*, "China's Agricultural Diplomacy Enters a New Era [中国农业外交迈入新时代]," *Farmer's Daily*, December 26, 2017, http://szb.farmer.com.cn/2017/20171226/20171226_004/20171226_004.html.

Fig. 1. A Sketch of China's Agricultural Diplomacy.

Source: Compiled by author.

Indeed, agriculture and diplomacy form an even closer relationship for China. For one, China takes stock from its abundant agricultural resources in international agricultural exchange, so as to promote the realization of its diplomatic goals, the development goals of the target countries, and the interests of related enterprises. For another, by establishing strategic partnerships between countries and formulating multilateral platforms among regional and international organizations, China promotes agricultural “going out” while bringing in advanced foreign technologies through communication and coordination among ministries and agencies (see Figure 1).

Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), its agricultural sector has gone through three phases of development. During the first phase, from 1949 to 1978, “bringing in” was the priority while “going out” played a supplementary role. During the second phase, between 1979 and 1999, “bringing in” and “going out” were undertaken hand in hand. During the third phase, from 2000 to the present, “going out” has taken an increasingly prominent role.

China’s agricultural diplomacy is to serve its “going out” strategy.

From 1949 to 1978, China’s agriculture was recovering slowly from nationwide devastation caused by decades of war. In this period, China’s

agricultural diplomacy was mainly to serve its ideological goals. China accepted much assistance of agronomists and agricultural projects from the Soviet Union and East European countries in the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, it provided agricultural assistance to underdeveloped countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America to support their national liberation movements, so as to expand its influence in the "third world" and win wider diplomatic recognition in international arenas.

Between 1979 and 1999, China went through a period of rapid development; and its agricultural diplomacy was mainly to promote economic cooperation through agricultural exchange. To be more specific, China embarked on a national strategy centered on economic development, carrying out economic reforms domestically and opening up to the outside world, under which agricultural cooperation became an integral part of China's all-round economic and trade cooperation.

Since Beijing put forward the "going global" strategy in 1999,⁴ China's agriculture has entered a new era, which is characterized by promoting all-round strategic relations through agricultural cooperation. Agricultural cooperation thus became an important element and means for China to participate in global governance. In the early 2000s, China built up its top-level design of agricultural diplomacy, within which *Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Promoting International Agricultural Cooperation* and *Plan for International Agricultural Cooperation* were the fundamental guidelines for China's agricultural diplomacy.⁵ Mechanisms of China's agricultural diplomacy have become more mature, facilitating the coordination of goals at national, regional and global levels. Notably, China has grown to be a donor country in promoting global agricultural development.

China's agricultural diplomacy is the result of domestic agricultural development and frequent interaction with the world. According to officials from the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the "going global" aspect of China's agriculture is

⁴"Better Implement the 'Going Global' Strategy [更好地实施"走出去"战略]," www.gov.cn, March 15, 2006, <http://www.gov.cn/node.11140/2006-03/15/content.227686.htm>.

⁵"The Third Plenary Session of Ministerial Joint Conference of Foreign Agricultural Cooperation Convened in Beijing [农业对外合作部级联席会议制度第三次全体会议在京召开]," www.moa.gov.cn, May 11, 2016, http://www.gjs.moa.gov.cn/gdxwgjhz/201605/t20160511_5125914.htm.

gaining momentum. Apart from technical cooperation with developed countries like Germany and the Netherlands, China's agricultural cooperation attaches greater importance to meeting the needs of agricultural development of the target countries, so as to patch up the short-boards in their agricultural development.⁶ As its agricultural diplomacy gets into full swing, China has formed a multilevel agricultural diplomatic institution, consisting of related ministries and government agencies, enterprises, research institutes, agronomists, and agricultural diplomats. Their interaction and cooperation can be seen on three levels: between the central government and local governments, among governments, enterprises and research institutes, and between agronomists and agricultural diplomats.

Above all, China's agricultural diplomacy features close cooperation between the central government and local governments. The central government plays the role of top-level designer; and overseas visits by national leaders and the coordination among ministerial agencies jointly create a favorable international environment for agricultural diplomacy. Local governments follow the guidance of the central government, combine local strategies with national strategic plans, muster provincial or municipal resources, and team up with the target regions and specific countries,⁷ so as to develop their own "going global" model to serve China's overall diplomacy.

Next, the government maintains close ties with enterprises and research institutes. Enterprises are the major entities to implement overseas projects and the major players in realizing overseas national interests, whose business development in the international market constitutes an important part of national interests. That makes enterprises an indispensable member of the community of shared interests between China and the target countries, and thus warrants government support in finance and publicity. In this sense, each overseas Chinese enterprise can be an envoy of China's agricultural diplomacy — by participating in local development

⁶Interview with officials from the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs in Beijing in July 2018.

⁷Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, "Mobilization Meeting to Deploy the Drafting of the 'Going Global' Plan for Agricultural Industry in Key Provinces Convened in Beijing [重点省份农业'走出去'规划编制工作动员部署会在京召开]," Heilongjiang Academy of Agricultural Sciences, March 18, 2015, <http://www.haas.cn/newsview.aspx?id=3463>.

and construction, and promoting the understanding and mutual trust of the local governments and the people.

China has developed a three-level, multi-actor mechanism for agricultural diplomacy.

The government also works closely with agricultural research institutes. In the field of agricultural diplomacy, the government provides funding or policy support to research institutes in their research and academic exchange. In turn, research institutes establish professional networks and cultivate research talents according to the needs of the country and development in international agriculture. Academic exchange is conducive

to the friendly relations and long-term exchange mechanisms, which will promote the transfer of agricultural technologies and agricultural development concepts. It also helps serve the diplomatic goal of "strengthening people-to-people ties."

Finally, agronomists and agricultural diplomats work together to achieve government goals. Agronomists act as representatives of China's image and narrators of China's stories, for they can adapt China's agricultural technologies according to local conditions,⁸ and help resolve the technical difficulties in the agricultural development of recipient countries. Their contribution not only receives favorable coverage by the local media, but also wins acclaims by local officials and even national leaders. Besides, they often help local residents with problems in their daily lives, which enhances the trust of local people on China and promotes the relationship with their local counterparts.⁹ From this perspective, Chinese agronomists have become actual practitioners of China's neighborhood policy of "closeness, sincerity, shared prosperity, and inclusiveness."

As professional diplomats, agricultural diplomats not only boast diplomatic savvy, but also have professional knowledge and expertise in

⁸See also Lila Buckley, Chen Ruijian *et al.*, "Chinese Agriculture in Africa: Perspectives of Chinese Agronomists on Agricultural Aid," Discussion Paper, January 2017, p. 14.

⁹Lu Jixia and Li Xiaoyun, "Analysis of the Role Transition of China's Agronomists in Africa: Taking China's Agronomic Aid Project in Africa as an Example [中国援非农技专家角色分析——以中国援非农技组派遣项目为例]," *Foreign Affairs Review* (No. 4, 2017), p. 99.

agriculture. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs is mainly responsible for the open selection of agricultural diplomats, while Chinese embassies in the host countries assign specific jobs and responsibilities, such as assessing the situation of agricultural development in the host countries and the changes of agricultural policies, making policy proposals, and creating better conditions for China's agriculture to "go global."¹⁰ Bi Meijia, Director of the Personnel Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, once called these diplomats the "eyes" and "ears" of China's agricultural diplomacy.¹¹

From the top designers of agricultural diplomacy to civil envoys, to state representatives and agricultural diplomats, these diversified actors reflect the practice of China's multi-level diplomacy in agriculture, which shows that China's agricultural diplomacy has entered an era of all-round development since the inception of the "going global" strategy.

Innovated Mechanisms of China's Agricultural Diplomacy

Incorporating various mechanisms, China has devised an agricultural diplomacy model with Chinese characteristics, in order to meet the development needs of the target countries and regions while realizing the goals of its "going global" strategy. So far, mechanisms of bilateral, regional and global cooperation have been jointly promoting China's agricultural diplomacy in the new era.

To be more specific, China's agricultural diplomacy has established a bilateral cooperation mechanism with ministerial dialogues as the main platform. Under the ministerial bilateral cooperation mechanism, China has signed contracts on a number of new projects with its partners to promote their bilateral exchange and cooperation. Agriculture has become a critical resource for China's diplomacy; and the establishment of demonstration

¹⁰Interview with officials from Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs in Beijing in July 2018.

¹¹Permanent Representative Office of China to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "The First Exchange Meeting on the Work of Chinese Agricultural Diplomats Assigned by the Ministry of Agriculture of China to Europe was Held in Rome [首届农业部派驻欧洲农业外交官工作座谈会暨工作交流会在罗马顺利召开]", *World Agriculture* (No. 8, 2016), p. 229.

agricultural parks helps promote friendly exchanges between China and countries in the region. Ministerial dialogues have also grown to be a standing mechanism in bilateral agricultural cooperation, which not only guides the direction and areas for future cooperation, but also helps to enhance regular exchange and communication between the agricultural departments.

Besides, China's agricultural diplomacy has developed a regional development mechanism with various forums as the main channel. Under this mechanism, multilateral diplomatic activities are more open, inclusive and on an equal footing. Growing common interests among member states thus accelerate diplomatic processes and facilitate state cooperation and result sharing.¹² At present, China plays a major role in such regional agriculture-related mechanisms as the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF), Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (10 + 3), Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC), and Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (17 + 1). Through these mechanisms, China and other member states advocate the cooperation philosophy of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, and jointly establish regional agricultural cooperation frameworks. In terms of agenda setting, China's position and concept have received wide attention from other member states.

China promotes its agricultural diplomacy under bilateral, regional and global mechanisms.

Moreover, China's agricultural diplomacy has improved international agricultural cooperation mechanisms. Agriculture is one of the major concerns of developing countries. They tend to attach great importance to agriculture-related international mechanisms, through which they hope to safeguard their food security.¹³ However, their voices are usually weak under the

¹²See also Stuart Murray, "Reordering Diplomatic Theory for the Twenty-first Century: A Tripartite Approach," doctoral thesis, Bond University, March 2006, p. 53.

¹³Nora McKeon, "Global Governance for World Food Security: A Scorecard Four Years after the Eruption of the Food Crisis," http://www.momagri.org/UK/personal-accounts/Global-Governance-for-World-Food-Security-A-Scorecard-Four-Years-After-the-Eruption-of-the-Food-Crisis_1018.html.

existing international mechanisms. As the largest developing country, China has been striving to improve the international mechanisms to better meet the development needs of developing countries. For instance, China has not only persuaded the Group of Twenty (G20) to set food security as a top agenda,¹⁴ but also become one of the earliest participants in South-South cooperation under the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Over the past two decades, China has changed from a net recipient of aid to a major donor in agricultural cooperation, an initiator of agendas, and a leader in global agricultural governance.¹⁵

Among the above three types of mechanisms, the first one lays the foundation for bilateral dialogues, whilst the latter two help establish the platforms for multilateral communication, shaping China's agricultural diplomacy in the new era with the characteristic of "promoting multilateral cooperation through bilateral cooperation, and vice versa."

Challenges and Solutions to China's Agricultural Diplomacy

Through years of practice and exploration, China has established an all-round innovative mechanism and nurtured diversified diplomatic actors for its agricultural diplomacy. However, it is still faced with challenges that need to be properly addressed.

Investment risks in the target countries pose a major challenge. Country risks usually arise from the natural, economic, or socio-political environments. Currently, socio-political risks are the most frequent ones, which indicate that in agricultural diplomacy, when related Chinese enterprises fail to balance the interests among local interest groups, or adapt to local cultures, or readjust their policies in accordance with the local conditions, the results of agricultural cooperation may be at risk. In contrast, the occurrence of natural disasters is relatively rare. Yet, whenever a natural disaster happens, it will result in severe losses. According to statistics from 2013 to 2016, except for a minor decrease in the occurrence of economic risks in 2016, other types of risks all increased (Figure 2), which

¹⁴Niall Duggan and Teemu Naarajärvi, "China in Global Food Security Governance," *Journal of Contemporary China* (Vol. 24, No. 9, 2015), p. 943.

¹⁵Interview with officials from the former Bureau of Agriculture of Henan province in January 2018.

Fig. 2. Occurrence of Different Types of Risks in China's Agricultural Foreign Investment Cooperation, 2013–2016.¹⁶

Source: Report on China's Agricultural Foreign Investment Cooperation (2014–2017).

reflects that risks of the target countries have become a major concern of China's agricultural diplomacy.

At the same time,¹⁶ the overall strengths of Chinese enterprises must be enhanced. Agricultural production has to endure lengthy cycles and slow business returns. Therefore, sufficient funding is crucial to the successful implementation of agricultural projects and the construction of agricultural inter-connectivity. China's agricultural enterprises generally have difficulties in finance and vulnerabilities in risk management. According to the author's interview with officials from the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the government

provides limited financial support for agricultural enterprises, but the enterprises themselves have to manage their own finances on the platforms established by the government.¹⁷

Chinese private enterprises find it difficult to participate in overseas agricultural projects.

In comparison with state-owned enterprises (SOEs), the disadvantages of private enterprises in the field of agriculture are

¹⁶Five reports, from 2012 to 2016 consecutively, have been published. The contents related to country risks first appeared in the 2013 report.

¹⁷Interview with officials from the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs in Beijing in July 2018.

quite prominent. According to the statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, in 2016, 81 private enterprises set up 153 agricultural enterprises overseas, which accounted for 73.56 percent of the total number of agricultural enterprises that made overseas investments. However, the average investment scale of the private enterprises was less than a third of that of the SOEs.¹⁸ As a result, many private enterprises went bankrupt due to capital chain rupture. Meanwhile, because of limited financing, agricultural enterprises lack the comprehensive ability to cope with the risks in host countries. Business failure of agricultural enterprises obstructs, to a large extent, the overall implementation of China's "going global" strategy.

What is also worth noting is that the allegation of "China's agricultural threat" cannot be overlooked. China's agricultural diplomacy is always under media scrutiny. International public opinion has often accused China of "buying out farmlands abroad" and "agricultural colonialism," — another form of the "China threat" notion. Research shows that China's agricultural diplomacy has hindered the vested interests of Western countries, for the "principle-comes-first" concept proposed by China runs counter to the "interests-come-first" concept held by Western countries, which has prompted the latter to taint China's image by painting China as a threat to the food security in its partner countries. Meanwhile, some political elites in the partner countries still harbor doubts about China. For instance, the *Nezavissimaia Gazeta* of Russia published an article which expressed great concerns that Russia's farmland in the Far East may turn into China's enclave.¹⁹

Chinese agricultural enterprises have their own shortcomings to blame, too. For example, some small enterprises tend to seek profits at the expense of the environment of the host countries, arousing rebuffs from local governments. Besides, due to weak publicity on the Chinese side,

¹⁸Department of International Cooperation of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China, Foreign Economic Cooperation Center of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China, *Analysis Report on China's Outward Agricultural Investment and Cooperation* (2017), *General Information* [中国对外农业投资合作分析报告 (2017年度)总篇] (Beijing: China Agriculture Press, 2018), p. 97.

¹⁹Guan Jianbin, "Russia is Leasing its Farmland of Millions of Hectors to Foreign Countries [俄罗斯远东百万公顷农田要对外出租]," *China Youth Daily*, January 30, 2012, http://zqb.cyol.com/html/2012-01/30/nw.D110000zgqnb_20120130_1-04.htm.

people in the host countries often do not have an adequate understanding of China, which sometimes leads to an imbalance between invested resources and actual results of China's agricultural diplomacy.

In order to tackle these challenges, China should tap into diversified diplomatic actors and abundant agricultural resources to improve the existing mechanisms for agricultural diplomacy.

First, efforts should be made to improve the domestic development mechanisms. The government should further enhance coordination among related actors, continue modernizing its agriculture and better safeguard China's food security. Apart from establishing platforms and creating a favorable environment for Chinese agricultural enterprises, the government needs to increase its financial support for them. In this regard, the government should not focus on developing SOEs and large multinational companies, but should nurture competitive private enterprises instead.

Chinese agricultural enterprises, in turn, must try to enhance their capability to prevent and manage risks. Before venturing into overseas markets, agricultural enterprises should develop a thorough understanding of the destination countries, which requires not only a clear interpretation of the specific policy documents of China's "going global" strategy, but also field investigations into the destination countries, outreach to the local people, local governments and overseas Chinese agencies. Chinese agricultural enterprises should be encouraged to become competitive "grain dealers" with their expertise and experience.

In the same vein, agronomists, agricultural diplomats and agricultural research institutes should join hands to serve China's "going global" agricultural strategy. Agronomists need to improve their language capabilities, so as to have direct dialogues with local farmers and find out their actual needs. Agricultural diplomats should not only establish good relationships with the local government and enterprises through governmental platforms, but also conduct field trips in private capacity and make friends with local farmers. Agricultural research institutes should fortify their research in line with their respective disciplines, carry out country-specific studies, cultivate talents, especially those specializing in the studies of developing countries, and encourage researchers to carry out field studies in the rural areas of the partner countries.

Second, China should increase efforts to enhance bilateral agricultural cooperation. In carrying out agricultural diplomacy, China should not only identify its own advantages in agriculture, but also fully understand the agricultural situation and related policies of the partner countries. Similarly, it should give full play to its own advantages to help with the development of the partner countries while trying to promote Chinese agriculture abroad through closer bilateral exchanges.

In bilateral cooperation with countries with advanced technology in agriculture, China should carry out project cooperation in line with the principles of mutual learning, talent exchange, and technical innovation. Meanwhile, it should strengthen overseas technological renovation, taking into consideration the geographical distribution of technology and the actual situation on the ground, in order to prevent over-dependence on foreign technologies.

In cooperation with countries that have abundant natural resources but lack funding, China should focus on agricultural demonstration parks and farms, which will not only help partner countries develop their agricultural resources and improve agricultural infrastructure, but also spur Chinese enterprises to upgrade their agricultural technologies and explore new cooperation models for win-win outcomes.

In cooperation with countries that have scarce natural resources but adequate funding, China should try to combine its agricultural technologies with the funds of partner countries, in order to explore and upgrade agricultural technologies that are suitable to local farming conditions, which can help the host countries to make up for their lack of natural endowments. In the end, it will increase the recognition of Chinese agricultural technologies abroad.

Third, efforts should be made to promote regional development mechanisms. Forums are an important platform for China to carry out host diplomacy. Before each forum, China should summarize the general features of agricultural development in related regions based on the country reports provided by the overseas missions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce, and draft an updated blueprint for China to

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participate in regional agricultural governance — setting up special agricultural development funds with other member states, for instance — to help natural disaster-stricken areas to manage crop failures. On each forum, China must endeavor to coordinate the development demands of all stakeholders, so as to find the best solution to their common problems. After the forum, China should actively implement agricultural development agreements and monitor the progress of relevant projects; it also needs to propose new road-maps to address the specific issues before the next forum.

Fourth, China should step up efforts in promoting international agricultural cooperation mechanisms. With its rising international status and louder voice in international affairs, China can better safeguard the rights of survival and development of developing countries, and patch up their short-boards in agriculture with the help of various international actors. Besides, South-South cooperation is an important means for China to participate in global agricultural governance. It should attach more importance to sharing with other developing countries “how to fish,” such as by providing expert guidance and facilitating technology export. In so doing, China can build up the image of a responsible major country, dismiss the “China threat” notion, deepen the trust of other developing countries, and expand cooperation and development in all areas.

Prospects for China's Agricultural Diplomacy

China's agricultural diplomacy is not only a key element of its “going global” strategy, it also helps Chinese agricultural enterprises to build their strengths and increase international competitiveness. Today, China's agricultural diplomacy is at the initial stage, where the country is still exploring its targets and means, resource allocation and institutional design, as well as domestic and external coordination. In the long run, China's agricultural diplomacy is in line with its diplomatic targets: enhancing people-to-people ties under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the construction of inter-connectivity networks. As Chinese agricultural enterprises step up their “going global” efforts, and as China builds up its diplomatic resources, it should seek a new model for agricultural cooperation and foster a new pattern of agricultural diplomacy.

Most importantly, China should explore new ways of agricultural cooperation in third countries. This is a major direction of China's agricultural diplomacy, as well as an emerging cooperation model, which will help transform bilateral cooperation into trilateral and even multilateral cooperation, so as to realize the scale effect of win-win results.²⁰ Specifically, it comprises the following two areas.

First, China should play the role of a mediator in trilateral cooperation. It should promote diplomatic relations among countries through agricultural cooperation in third countries. For example, when the countries concerned have political conflicts and cannot make any breakthrough in other areas, they may find new solutions through agricultural exchange. The trilateral agricultural cooperation among China, Israel and Egypt, which is at the exploration stage, serves as a good example. In fact, Israel is eager to carry out trilateral agricultural cooperation with China and the Arab countries. In early 2017, when Israeli prime minister Netanyahu visited China, the Sino-Israel Global Network & Academic Leadership (SIGNAL) expressed to the Chinese side its intention of carrying out trilateral agricultural cooperation with China and Egypt, which was to make full use of Israeli technologies to boost the agricultural development in Egypt through the channels of friendly relations between China and Arab countries. It would improve Israel-Arab relations and demonstrate China's diplomatic potential in the Middle East. This initiative has won support from the Israeli government. As noted by Hagai Shagrir, Director of the Northeast Asia Department of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, it is a strategic initiative for win-win results in regional multilateral cooperation,

²⁰Ning Jizhe, deputy head of National Development and Reform Commission, pointed out at "Belt and Road in Five Years: Progress and Outlook," a press conference of the State Council Information Office of China on August 27, 2018, that "third-country cooperation is conducive to realizing win-win-win results." See "Third-Country Cooperation Promotes Win-win-win Effects [通过第三方市场合作实现"1 + 1 + 1 > 3"的共赢效果]," State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, August 28, 2018, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/xwfbh/xwbfbh/wqfbh/37601/38866/zy38870/Document/1636290/1636290.htm>. Also see "Lv Kejian, Former Director-General of Department of Asian Affairs of Ministry of Commerce, Said Cooperation between China and Japan in Third Countries Will Generate Win-win-win Effects [商务部亚洲司原司长吕克俭: 在第三方市场合作上中国日本可以 1 + 1 + 1 > 3]," *The Cover*, November 19, 2018, <http://www.thecover.cn/news/1392457>.

Third-country
agricultural
cooperation is
conducive to regional
peace and common
development.

representing the huge potential of agricultural cooperation between China and Israel.²¹

For another, China needs to seek win-win outcomes by optimizing agricultural resources through agricultural cooperation in third countries. For example, it can cooperate with countries in the Gulf region to carry out agricultural cooperation in Sudan by adapting to the model of “capital plus

technology.” Sudan is both a recipient of China’s agricultural assistance and one of the major destinations for the Gulf states to purchase land and plant crops abroad. China’s agricultural technologies are a necessary complement to the capital from the Gulf, which will greatly help reclaim the arable land and increase employment for the rural surplus labor in Sudan, while satisfying the demands from the three parties concerned: expanding China’s economic interests, ensuring food supply of the Gulf Area, and promoting the agricultural development of Sudan.

Similarly, China can join hands with the European Union and carry out agricultural cooperation in Africa by such models as “capital plus technology” and “technology plus means of production.” As Africa is the main region for agricultural cooperation between China the EU, they should include more agricultural cooperation — for example, sustainable agriculture, organic agriculture, and food security — in the framework of the *China-EU 2020 Strategic Agenda For Cooperation*, which will not only help the two parties to learn from each other, but also reduce their costs in undertaking cooperation individually in Africa.

Besides, China can expedite negotiation with Japan and South Korea under the “10 + 3” mechanism and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), with an aim to implement projects covering agricultural infrastructure construction and emergency rice reserves in the ASEAN countries, and avoiding overlapping investment in the same projects.

²¹Interview with Ms. Carice Witte, Director of Sino-Israel Global Network & Academic Leadership (SIGNAL) in Beijing on March 25, 2017.

The 2019 government work report initiated the policy of “expanding third-country cooperation,”²² indicating an important direction for China’s “going global” strategy, which would encounter both opportunities and challenges. In expanding third-country cooperation, China should guard against possible intervention from countries outside the region and pay close attention to such issues as the distribution of agricultural interests, the ratio of factors in agricultural production input, and investment risks in third countries.

From the domestic perspective, China should draft an overall plan for agricultural cooperation in third countries, clarifying the functions of all the related ministerial agencies and enterprises, and establishing the mechanism to safeguard Chinese overseas interests in third countries. From the global perspective, China should work together with relevant partner countries and conduct research and field studies in third countries, especially in the countries with weak government and strong civil society. China should take into full consideration the appeals from stakeholders in the partner countries, including the central government, local governments, agricultural enterprises and the farmers, establish suitable means and ways to allow participation and for profit distribution, and seek to develop an effective system for risk warning in agricultural cooperation.

China should also seek to build a new pattern of agricultural diplomacy along the Belt and Road. The BRI runs through the continents of Asia, Europe and Africa, connecting the vibrant East Asian economic circle with a long farming history at one end and the developed European economic circle with advantages in modern agriculture at the other, and connecting countries in the middle where the agricultural resources are abundant. Countries along the Belt and Road are highly complementary in agricultural cooperation,²³ where agricultural development is a major concern for all the parties. For that matter, Russia’s *Development Outline for Agricultural Machinery Industry in the Federation of Russia before 2030*, Turkey’s *Middle Corridor Construction Plan*, and Egypt’s *Reclamation Plan of Egyptian Farmland by 1.5 million Feddans* have all included agriculture as an integral part of

²²“Report on the Work of the Government (2019)”, www.gov.cn, March 5, 2019, <http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2019qglh/2019lhzhfgzbg/index.htm>.

²³“Vision and Action on Jointly Promoting Agricultural Cooperation on the Belt and Road,” May 2017, http://english.agri.gov.cn/news/dqnf/201705/t20170512_247847.htm.

their future development and external exchange, laying the foundation for China to build a new pattern of agricultural diplomacy along the Belt and Road.

By connecting the BRI with the national development strategies of the countries along the Belt and Road, China can provide tailored support for partner countries in finance, technology and human resources and try to establish a model for all-round agricultural cooperation with countries along the routes. For example, by speeding up the transfer of the seawater rice planting technology in Dubai to the whole Arab region, China can help the countries concerned to overcome the constraints of the natural environment (such as vast deserts) for more agricultural outputs, so as to reduce their dependence on food import.

In addition, China can help improve transportation infrastructure in countries along the Belt and Road, such as railways, highways and ports, as well as agricultural infrastructure like sowing and irrigation. Building transportation infrastructure will help connect the maritime and land transportation lines and promote conditions for bilateral agricultural cooperation. Countries along the Belt and Road can also utilize the transportation networks facilitated by China, take stock of the factors of production, and facilitate the trade of agricultural products. Likewise, building agricultural infrastructure can help China to export agricultural machinery and technologies, and provide momentum for the countries along the Belt and Road to speed up agricultural modernization.

As a major participant in China's agricultural diplomacy, Chinese local governments should actively integrate into the sub-regional integration process and seek to expand agricultural cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road. For example, Yunnan province can tap into the Great Mekong Sub-region Cooperation (GMS) mechanism, transforming it into a major platform to serve China's agricultural diplomacy and implement the agricultural projects between China and the other five member countries (Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam). Agricultural cooperation at the sub-regional level would help local governments to more effectively utilize the local resources for national agricultural diplomacy. Local governments should also draft their own "going global" blueprints for agriculture in line with local conditions, which will serve as a new window for China to observe global agricultural development and help elevate China's position in the international agricultural market.

Based on the above analysis, since the inception of the “going global” strategy in 1999, China’s agricultural diplomacy has been faced with such challenges as how to balance domestic food security with that of the partner countries, how to coordinate China’s international agricultural cooperation with other major countries, how to match China’s agricultural diplomacy with the development goals of international or regional organizations, and how to balance material interests and moral interests. As an integral part of China’s “grand diplomacy,” agricultural diplomacy with Chinese characteristics has become an important means for China to contribute not only to the improvement of people’s livelihoods in the developing regions, but also to the joint construction of a community of shared future for mankind.