

The third plenary session of the 19th Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee was held in Beijing on February 26-28. (XINHUA)

New tasks

Editor's Note:

The third plenary session of the 19th Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee was held in Beijing on February 26-28, during which a communiqué was issued. The following is an article by Xinhua News Agency on the meeting and the contents of that communiqué:

The 19th CPC Central Committee issued a communiqué at the end of its three-day third plenary session, which concluded on February 28.

Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, made an important speech at the session presided over by the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee.

The meeting was attended by 202 CPC Central Committee members and 171 alternate members of the CPC Central Committee. Deputy Secretaries of the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and senior officials of relevant departments were also present at the meeting.

The plenary meeting heard and discussed a work report delivered by Xi, who was entrusted by the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee.

The session adopted a list of proposed candidates for state leadership, which is scheduled to be recommended to the first session of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC).

It also adopted a proposed candidate list for the leadership of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which is to be recommended to the first session of the 13th CPPCC National Committee.

The plenary session decided to recommend the two lists respectively to the presidium of the first session of the 13th NPC and the presidium of the first session of the 13th CPPCC National Committee, according to the communiqué.

The annual sessions of the NPC and CPPCC National Committee are scheduled to open on March 5 and March 3, respectively.

According to the communiqué, the plenary session reviewed and adopted a decision by the CPC Central Committee on deepening reform of Party and state institutions as well as a plan for the reform.

The session also agreed to put part of the reform plan to the first session of the 13th NPC for deliberation in accordance with due legal procedures.

The communiqué said the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee well implemented the spirit of the 19th CPC National Congress and the first and second plenary sessions of the Central Committee in face of complicated international situation and heavy domestic tasks of advancing reform and development and maintaining stability.

The Political Bureau has upheld Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development, and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, and enhanced Party's leadership over all work, according to the document.



On February 11, 2018, Xi Jinping, General Secretary of Communist Party of China, also President of People's Republic of China, visits a family in poverty in Sichuan Province. (XINHUA)

The Political Bureau has upheld the underlying principle of pursuing progress while ensuring stability, had the courage to break new ground, worked diligently, and ensured coordinated implementation of the five-sphere integrated plan and the four-pronged comprehensive strategy, the document said.

Leading the whole Party and people of all ethnic groups with firm faith and strong motivation, the Political Bureau has worked hard to deepen reform in all areas, maintain stable and healthy economic growth, promote law-based governance and the system of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics, forestall and defuse major risks, carry out targeted poverty alleviation, prevent and control pollution, exercise strict governance over the Party, improve work style, promote economic, political, cultural, social and ecological advancement and management of the Party, the communiqué said.

The first sessions of the 13th NPC and the 13th CPPCC National Committee are important for mobilizing the whole Party and Chinese people of all ethnic groups to 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, the document said.

Deeper reform of Party and state institutions is a profound evolution in modernizing China's system and capacity for governance, it said.

Party and state institutions form an important part of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and a significant guarantee for Party's governance, it noted.

Led by the CPC, China established socialism as its basic system and gradually created the system for the function of Party and state institutions with Chinese characteristics after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, it read.

During the process of socialist construction and reform and opening up, the Party actively advanced the reform of Party and state institutions and gradually optimized and standardized their functions, it said.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core has worked toward the overall goal of improving and developing the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, while modernizing China's system and capacity for governance.

The CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core strengthened Party leadership, focused on solving problems, highlighted major fields, deepened reform of Party and state institutions, made major progress in important fields and key areas, which provided a guarantee for the historic achievements and shifts in the cause of the Party and the country, it said.

Faced with new requirements for various tasks in the new era, the current function and structure of Party and state institutions are not completely suitable for coordinately implementing the five-sphere integrated plan and the four-pronged comprehensive strategy, nor for modernizing China's system and capacity for governance, it said.

The whole Party must unite in thought, be confident, grasp opportunities and resolve to tackle obstacles and disadvantages of the system for Party and state institutions during the process of deepening reform in all areas.

The whole Party must accelerate and advance the modernization of China's system and capacity for governance and give full play to the advantages of China's socialist system, it said.

Overall Party leadership must be implemented and upheld, while the people-centered, optimized, coordinated and efficient principle, as well as law-based governance must be upheld in deepening reform of Party and state institutions, according to the communiqué.

The guiding thought for deepening reform of Party and state institutions is to implement the spirit of the 19th CPC National Congress, follow the guidance of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, the Scientific Outlook on Development, and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.

The reform should also adapt to the needs of the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, uphold the underlying principle of pursuing progress while ensuring stability, keep the reform in the right direction, take a people-centered approach and

adhere to law-based governance.

To carry out the reform, it is essential to take strengthening the Party's overall leadership as the overarching principle, take modernization of state system and capacity for governance as the guidance, and take enhancing efficiency and optimization of Party and state institutions as the focus of efforts, it said.

The communiqué also called for efforts to reform the institutional setting, optimize function disposition, and improve efficiency and effectiveness to provide an institutional guarantee to secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, as well as embark on a new journey to fully build a modern socialist China and realize the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation.

The goals of deepening reform of Party and state institutions include:

-- establishing a Party and state institutional function system that is well conceived, fully built, procedure based, and efficiently functioning;

-- forming a CPC leadership system that ensures the Party always provides overall leadership and coordinates the efforts of all involved, a law-based administrative governance system with clear functions and responsibilities, a world-class armed forces system with Chinese characteristics, as well as a sound work system of people's organizations for bridging and serving the general populace;

-- promoting coordinated actions and resultant forces among the people's congresses, governments, political advisory bodies, and supervisory, judicial and prosecutorial organs, people's organizations, enterprises, public institutions, and social organizations under the unified leadership of the CPC.

Deeper reform on the CPC and state institutions will improve China's governance level and capacity, according to the communiqué.

A primary task of deepening reform of the Party and state institutions is to improve the system for upholding overall Party leadership in a bid to strengthen the CPC's leadership in every sector, ensure its all-encompassing coverage and make it more forceful.

Efforts should be made to establish and improve the institutions and mechanisms by which the Party exercises leadership over major tasks, and elevate the status of Party organizations among organizations of the same level.

The reform should also give better play to the role of the Party's functionary department, set up Party and government institutions with integrated plans, and advance reform of the Party's disciplinary inspection and the country's supervisory systems.

The CPC Central Committee has stressed the need to transform

government functions and the resolve to remove institutional barriers so that the market plays the decisive role in resource allocation and the government plays its role better.

The transformation should focus on promoting high-quality development, developing a modernized economy, adjusting and optimizing functions of government institutions as well as allocating the functions of macro-management institutions in a reasonable way, according to the document.

It called on efforts to further streamline administration and delegate powers.

It also stressed better systems of market supervision, natural resources and environmental management, and public service management.

The government must strengthen operational and post-operational oversight, enhance administrative efficiency and government effectiveness to build itself into a service-oriented government able to satisfy the needs of the people, according to the communiqué.

The CPC will promote coordinated reforms of institutions in the Party, the government, the military and people's organizations, according to the document.

Such reforms are necessities for strengthening the centralized and unified leadership of the CPC leadership as well as achieving the coordinated and effective functions of these institutions, according to the communiqué.

The reform should eye optimizing the functions of Party departments, state organs, people's organizations and public institutions. The arrangement of Party and government organs should be improved, according to the communiqué.

It calls on deepening reforms for the people's congresses, political advisory bodies and judicial organs.

The reform should strengthen the CPC leadership, enhance the government's administrative capacity, inspire vitality of the people's organizations and social organizations, sharpen military combat capability so that various institutions connect and coordinate with each other.

The CPC Central Committee called for improved relations between central and local authorities.

A relationship with clearly defined responsibilities is key to governing a big country like ours, said the communiqué.

It said the setup of central and local institutions and the allocation of responsibilities should be improved to build a smooth, vigorous system in which orders are executed without fail.

While the central authorities will strengthen macro-management, the local authorities should carry out orders from the top to the detail and do their jobs well. More decision making power should be given to organs at and below the provincial level.

At local levels, the setup of institutions should be improved, each with clearly defined work responsibilities to strengthen local governance, the document said.

The CPC Central Committee envisions a lean and effective grassroots governance system.

The communiqué also said it was important to legalize the staffing of institutions. Rules and regulations should be drawn to better define the functions, powers, responsibilities and operations of such institutions.

Identifying reform as a complex project, the plenary session asked Party committees and governments at various levels to concentrate on fully implementing the reform decision and to provide guarantees to reform in accordance with the law and regulations. They were also required to pursue reform in a more systematic, holistic, and coordinated way.

The plenary session called on the whole Party and Chinese people of all ethnic groups to rally closely around the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core, achieve unity in thought and action, and ensure the full implementation of tasks in institutional reform. Continued efforts are needed to improve the system of Party and state institutions that are well-conceived, fully built, procedure based, and functioning efficiently, said the communiqué.

It also called for hard work to secure a decisive victory in finishing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, to speed up the socialist modernization and to realize the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation.

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Theory and practice

Xi Jinping's diplomatic thought guides China's interactions with its neighbors

By Han Fangming



Chinese President Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan walk alongside Indonesian President Joko Widodo and his wife Iriana Widodo during a symbolic march with other Asian and African leaders in Bandung, Indonesia, on April 24, 2015, to commemorate the 1955 Bandung Conference (XINHUA)

In his report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) last October, President Xi Jinping, also General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, expounded the guidelines of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in the new era, proposing a new form of international relations that could better promote a community with a shared future for mankind. The diplomatic theory, forged through careful deliberation on the future of human society and developing trends in China and the world, has opened a new chapter for China's diplomacy.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, Xi has completed 29 overseas trips, setting foot in 57 countries and visiting almost every major international and regional organization, which has helped China establish a network of partnerships around the globe. Diplomatic efforts made by China in accordance with Xi's thought have created a favorable external environment for China's development, as well as making more and more Chinese solutions and proposals appealing to the world. It is in China's immediate neighborhood that Xi's diplomatic thought is most visibly taking effect.

Foreign policy core

Xi has attached great importance to China's relations with its neighbors. In October 2013, the CPC Central Committee held a seminar on China's diplomacy toward the periphery under changing global circumstances. In his speech, Xi addressed the changes and new characteristics of the international situation faced by China, and mapped the targets, plans and basic principles of China's neighborhood diplomacy. He stressed that sound relations with neighboring countries are of strategic

importance. Lancang-Mekong Cooperation mechanism has grown in stature to address regional challenges and promote mutual benefit.

Promoting development

In 2013, Xi proposed the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, collectively known as the Belt and Road Initiative, in order to create greater trade, infrastructure and people-to-people connections between Asia, Europe, Africa and beyond by reviving the routes of the ancient Silk Road. In March 2017, the UN Security Council passed resolution 2344, which called for the international community to reach consensus on increasing aid to Afghanistan and strengthening regional cooperation through the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative. The initiative is becoming one of the most popular international and regional public products, and one of the largest platforms for international cooperation.

The Belt and Road Initiative is representative of China's commitment to the world. It is also reflective of equality as it seeks to address the deficit in peace, development and governance across the globe. The situation in China's neighborhood is relatively stable, but problems such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, environmental and ecological degradation, sluggish economies and poverty remain severe in many surrounding countries. The Belt and Road Initiative provides potential solutions for these regional challenges.

Xi has noted that the essence of the Belt and Road Initiative is the construction of infrastructure and the facilitation of interconnectivity. Among those nations in China's immediate neighborhood are many developing countries. There is great potential

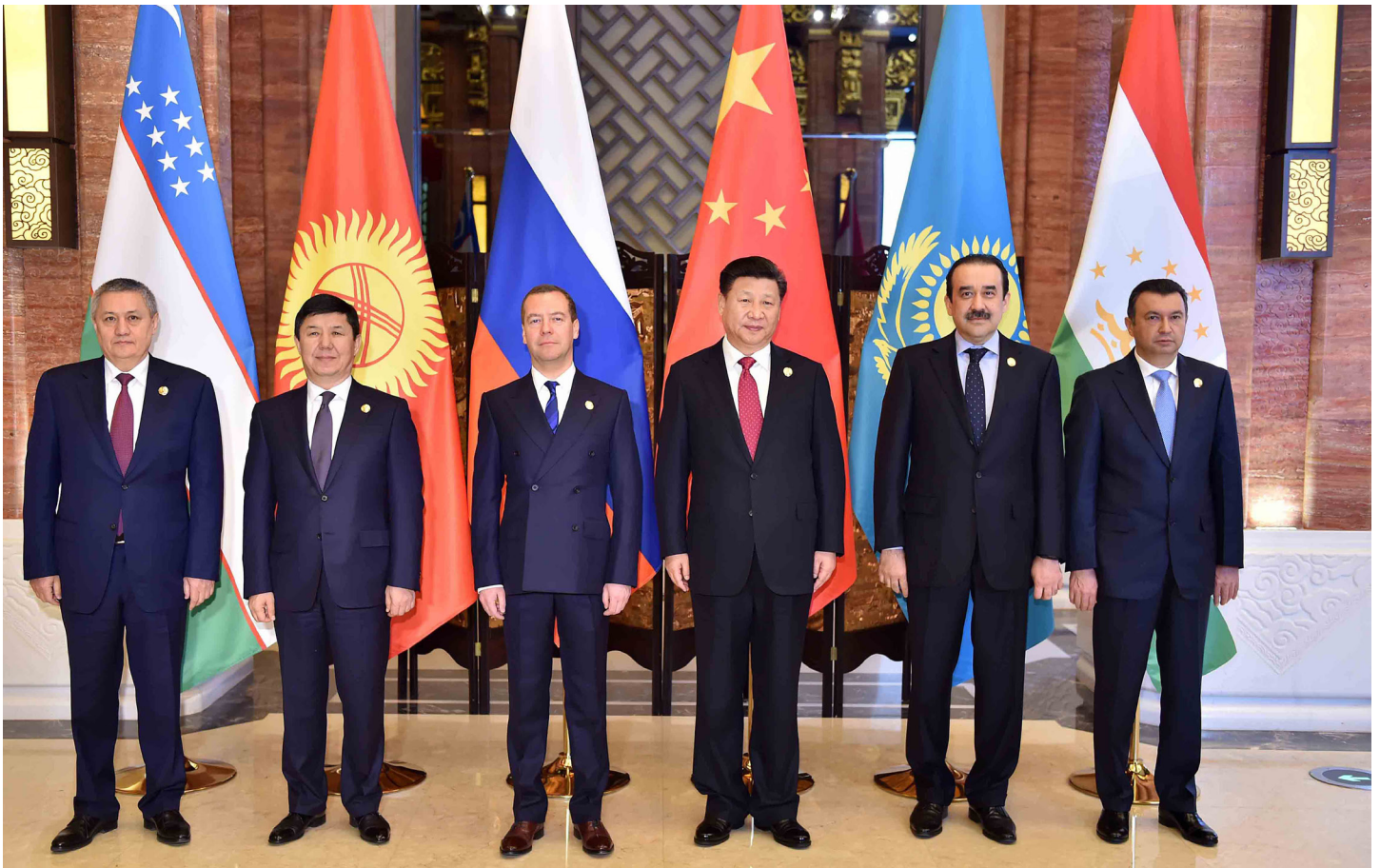
for their improvement as poor transport and communication infrastructure has significantly impeded their economic and social development.

Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Partners can reach consensus on issues of common concern as their relationship as equals predisposes them to solve problems through collaboration and dialogue. Partnership-building is a major contribution made by China to international relations, as well as an important part of China's approach to developing relations with its neighbors.

However, this does not mean that there is no divergence within these partnerships. Even in cooperation at the highest level, there is still the possibility of major rifts on certain issues due to differing strategic perspectives. Nevertheless, the fact remains that partnership emphasizes a spirit of dialogue and consultation instead of confrontation, and is better suited to avoiding misunderstanding.

Enhancing bonds

At the same time, in developing partnerships with other countries, China should also fully display its diplomatic confidence. Not only should China seize every chance to develop partnerships, but also its ability to turn crisis to opportunity, making partnerships an effective approach through which to promote neighborhood diplomacy.



Chinese President Xi Jinping meets with leaders of other Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states in Wuzhen, east China's Zhejiang Province, on December 16, 2015 (XINHUA)

significance to achieving the great renewal of the Chinese nation.

Xi's report at the 19th CPC National Congress reiterated that China is to deepen relations with its neighbors in accordance with the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness, as well as the policy of forging friendship and partnership. Only adherence to these principles and policy can consolidate the peace and stability of China's neighborhood.

Through dozens of visits to much of Central, South, Southeast and East Asia in the past five years, Xi has backed up China's good-neighborliness foreign policy with concrete actions, which represent the top-level design of China's neighborhood diplomacy as well as major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.

At present, its neighboring countries remain the most important area in which China can put into practice its ethos of foreign affairs and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind. Xi's thought on neighborhood diplomacy is significant to many aspects of China's foreign policy.

Improving governance

In his report at the 19th CPC National Congress, Xi called on "the people of all countries to work together to build a community with a shared future for mankind, to build an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity." The idea of a community with a shared future for mankind adheres to the current framework of global governance. To solve the deficit in peace, development and governance, all members of the international community must work together, innovate theories of governance and optimize potential solutions. It is in this context that China is offering to build a community with a shared future for mankind to achieve mutually beneficial results.

In the 2013 seminar on neighborhood diplomacy, Xi urged the need to integrate the Chinese dream of national renewal with the aspirations of people in neighboring countries for a better life, and through the prospects of regional development, let the idea of a community with a shared future take root in neighboring countries and strengthen relations with them in accordance with the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness. The concept of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration, as proposed in Xi's report at the 19th CPC National Congress, makes China's promotion of and participation in regional governance even more charismatic and influential.

As the theory of building a community with a shared future for mankind matures, the significance of the idea becomes more and more visible in global and regional governance. Regional collaborations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Boao Forum for Asia and



Chinese President Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan take a group photo with visiting U.S. President Donald Trump and his wife Melania Trump at the Forbidden City in Beijing on November 8, 2017 (XINHUA)

for their improvement as poor transport and communication infrastructure has significantly impeded their economic and social development.

The construction of six economic corridors under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, best embodied by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, have spurred enthusiasm in neighboring countries for participating in the China-proposed development initiative. These nations can share the benefits and opportunities from China's development, and expand their cooperation in trade, finance, infrastructure and people-to-people exchanges to achieve mutually beneficial results. It will also lay the foundation for promoting common development and forging a community with a shared future in the region.

Forging partnerships

Though there are many differences between China and its neighbors in terms of political, social and cultural conditions, they are alike in their pursuit of peace and development. This is why when developing relations with neighboring countries, China insists on enhancing exchange and mutual learning among civilizations, seeking to expand their converging interests and forge a partnership network in accordance with the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness.

Currently, China has established partnerships of different types with dozens of surrounding countries, including Russia, South Korea, Viet Nam and Pakistan, as well as regional organizations such as ASEAN and the South

policy of building amicable relations with other countries via personnel bonds and promoting communication between minds.

In his speech during the 2013 seminar, Xi urged China and its neighbors to meet and visit each other more frequently, and to do more things that would win and warm people's hearts. China endeavors to become people's friends with its neighbors so that they remain close and supportive, increasing China's affinity, magnetism and influence. At present, China is the largest source of tourists to many neighboring countries and a major source of foreign students. China's intercity diplomacy is also growing rapidly. These exchanges have promoted mutual understanding between the Chinese people and the peoples of surrounding countries, which is of great importance to China and its neighbors in their mission to build partnerships and a community with a shared future.

Public diplomacy is also embodied in foreign aid. China's massive effort in assisting the Maldives with its drinking water crisis and contribution to earthquake relief in Nepal are a reflection of China's responsible and capable public diplomacy. These practices portray the ideas of public diplomacy inherent in Xi's diplomatic thought, adding luster to China's image around the world and winning greater trust from its neighbors. Alongside the Belt and Road Initiative, it represents a new arena for China's public diplomacy.

(The author is chairman of the Charhar Institute and deputy director of the Committee of Foreign Affairs of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference)



Unstoppable trends

International cooperation is the only secure path through the challenges of today's world

By Ye Qing



Chinese President Xi Jinping addresses the UN Sustainable Development Summit at the UN headquarters in New York City on September 26, 2015 (XINHUA)

The world is currently at an historic juncture of a new phase of development. Peace and development are the prevailing trend, nurtured by conditions which suit their advancement as never before. But we are also gradually moving toward a new period of transformation and instability. An increasing number of global challenges demand that countries upgrade their philosophies of global governance and overcome their differences.

In recent years, China has outlined a series of ideas on global governance which may provide solutions for dealing with these challenges.

New conditions

People are embracing a new era of global governance, and calls are growing for reforms in this regard because the order of the world as we have known it for the past 60 years is evolving.

In today's world, an inclusive system is needed more than ever before, as the material base and conditions for effective global governance are strong. Globalization continues to move forward at an unprecedented pace, and the peoples and countries of the world are becoming ever more interdependent. Although voices against globalization are emerging in some corners of the world, this itself demonstrates the pervasiveness of our collective international system: globalization and anti-globalization are two sides of the same coin. Information technology has connected the entire world, and people's means of communication and the nature of our connections have fundamentally changed.

The international order too has changed from one based on the principles of divide and rule, dominated by the Western world, to one notable for its diversification and unification. The system formed in the aftermath of World War II, while having ensured over seven decades of global peace, is no longer a suitable fit for the modern world.

The very concept of global governance was born in the West and is naturally western by design, generating a tendency to set the experiences of the West as models for the rest of the world to follow. If a region fails to conform to this specifically Western experience, it is consequently deemed less civilized and developed.

Global society is arriving at a place where the existing system is being confronted by a new balance of power, leading to a disrupted world order.

The status of developing and developed countries has changed. The rise of new powers and the steadily increasing stake held by emerging markets and developing nations have catalyzed a shift which sees the international system now moving toward multipolarization. These countries' contribution to global economic growth has exceeded that of developed nations, and they have also made more and more breakthroughs in technology and innovation.

The transformation of the world's economic structure is also bringing about a change to its geopolitical center. Developing economies

are voicing the need for reform of the global governance system to reflect their economic clout, while developed countries stick to conservative attitudes, pushing back against this trend.

Global governance is also changing in regard to its participants. In addition to governments, multinational enterprises, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, industrial associations, professional societies and online communities are all exerting an influence on the direction of mankind. According to renowned U.S. scholar Oran R. Young, the world is entering the Anthropocene, an era in which human actions have become drivers of change on a planetary scale. Complex systems pose novel challenges for governance because of their high levels of connectivity, nonlinear dynamics, directional patterns of change and emergent properties. Meeting these challenges will require the development of new intellectual capital.

In such a climate, the disparate ideologies and cultures of the world are also engaged in closer communication and conflict, and the strictly Western theory of governance is becoming but one voice among many competing voices. Developing countries no longer unthinkingly follow the previous model. The liberal international order is facing an identity crisis and the Western world has busied itself with contemplative introspection.

This current phase of transformation is complex and acts as a crucible for all manner of trends and ideas, which has on occasion manifested itself in the form of extremism. However, a new inclusive ideology is emerging too, providing space for diversity and an alternative to the West's monopoly on values.

Fresh direction

China in recent years has sought the reform of the global governance system. On multiple occasions, including the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York City in 2015, the G20 Hangzhou Summit in 2016 and the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2017 in Davos, President Xi Jinping has elaborated on China's proposition for global governance reform, which has been well-received by the international community at large.

China is also giving global governance a new direction through its own practices. The report Xi delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in October 2017 made it clear that "China follows the principle of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration in engaging in global governance." It was the first time that global governance had been addressed at a CPC congress.

Engaging with global governance is an important part of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics. It is a fundamental principle of China's approach to the world and serves the goal of fostering a new type of international relations and building a community with a shared future for mankind. There are three words key to this concept:

confidence, responsibility and cooperation.

At a time of transition full of risks and uncertainties, the priority for the international community should be to build confidence. International order represents a certain degree of consensus among states. The reason for today's disorder is that the old consensus has collapsed and the new one is not yet established. Facing threats caused by the drastic changes in the global situation, the international community is struggling with what is essentially a mess of discordant ideas. It is thus necessary for the nations of the world to seek unity in thinking in order to build a new and peaceful consensus.

In the transformation process of the international system, there are many smaller actors involved in global governance. Numerous global security issues are not appropriately dealt with. Movements against peaceful development have appeared. The negative side of globalization has revealed itself. Fearing further marginalization or decreased influence, the world's established powers have come to believe that history is a cycle between peace and war. They seek to rewind history and return to an outdated model of isolation and confrontation.

China, on the other hand, has long positioned itself as a defender of world peace and is full of confidence about global society. As laid out in Xi's report delivered at the 19th CPC National Congress, "The future of the world rests in the hands of the people of all countries; the future of mankind hinges on the choices they make."

China is ready to shoulder its responsibilities on the world stage. Major countries must first conform to the irreversible trend of globalization and work from within to steer the world onto the right path of global governance.

The world today is full of uncertainty and insecurity. People worry about the future, but many still hold out hope for a harmonious world. The international community echoes China's proposition for building a community with a shared future for mankind because it reflects the current international situation and aspirations of people across the globe.

China is a champion of inclusive growth, the essence of which is cooperation. The Belt and Road Initiative, proposed by China, reflects these values as a program which is supported by and of benefit to the entire world. It is an embodiment of the cooperative spirit.

Cooperation can not only increase areas of common interest, but also reduce losses by stepping out of the zero-sum game. In an interdependent international community, non-cooperation which causes loss to others will essentially prove self-destructive. Building a community with a shared future for mankind is a process of promoting mutual understanding, integration and harmonious coexistence. Increasing cooperation is one of the most urgent items on the agenda of mankind, since it is the only road leading to the resolution of multilateral and global challenges, and an inexorable trend of globalization.

(The author is director of the Institute of Global Governance of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies)



Belt and Road diplomacy

China's proactive and communicative foreign policy stance works within the global system

By Kerry Brown



Participants in the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation pose for a group photo at the Beijing Yanqi Lake International Convention & Exhibition Center on May 15, 2017 (XINHUA)

In the era since China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the country's boom in productivity has brought massive benefits in terms of delivering prosperity and material wealth to the Chinese people, and indeed through GDP growth contributions to the outside world, but it has also posed a problem: How does this economic prowess translate into other forms of influence and power?

Up to 2012, China's position was an unusual one. It had risen to become the world's second largest economy, overtaking Japan in 2010, and yet it still didn't figure much in the thinking of the Western public, or, for that matter, many of their politicians. The priority for them was often the U.S. or Europe. China had a position subsidiary to these places in their thinking—a partner that needed to acclimatize and fit into the already extant global architecture of governance and economic decision making, and aim to cooperate, rather than actively participate.

Since 2012, however, there has been a more proactive and more communicative Chinese foreign policy stance. That has manifested itself in some of the key narratives that have come from China's new-generation leadership with President Xi Jinping at its core—the U.S. and China being, for instance, a “new model of major power relations” or the EU figuring as a “civilizational partner.” Of all of these, the Belt and Road Initiative is the most distinctive, and the idea over which China has most ownership. What does this indigenous foreign policy stance from China mean for the outside world?

Globalist approach

In 2018, we can say that the first striking issue about the Belt and Road and what it says about China's belief in its foreign policy position as it continues to grow as an economy is that it does not fit into any neat, pre-created spaces. China is not contesting the global system—it continues to work in the UN, the World Bank, the WTO and the International Monetary Fund. It has not denied the importance of these though it has raised questions about the representativeness of their structures of governance. With the election of U.S. President Donald Trump and a more introspective American view of its place in the world, in many ways, China has become a more prominent and more internationalist actor than even the most daring would have imagined three decades ago. China has continued to support free trade deals and has positioned itself as a staunch “globalist.” It stands by the philosophy it adopted at the start of reform and opening up almost four decades ago—looking for a country integrated into the world around it, supportive of the stable governance of that world and seeking mutual benefits from that stability. This is a very open attitude.

The notion therefore of a China which, having built up its economic and industrial capacity, would march into the rest of the world demanding things on its terms and upending the existing system simply hasn't happened, and the Belt and Road Initiative, with its incremental and often very liquid format, is symptomatic more of caution, creating spaces rather than trying to conquer them, and setting in place dialogue rather than insisting on monologue. If this is a bid for global diplomatic dominance, it seems to be a very slow, laborious one.

But nor does this mean that with China's new global prominence everything just carries on as normal. Chinese leaders, particularly since 2012, have wanted a more representative and just settlement for their country, and one where its status in terms of trade partnership and financial and investment contribution does give it a bigger voice. This has been accompanied by the creation of Chinese initiated entities like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which now has over 80 members and is starting a number of investment projects in the Asian region. Again, the more frenetic interpretation of the AIIB when it appeared was that it would compete with already extant entities like the Asian Development Bank (ADB). In fact, the reality has been more complex. For some of its projects, it has actually cooperated with

the ADB, and as many have pointed out, the immense need for infrastructure investment across the continent means there could be dozens of similar organizations and they would still only be able to meet some of the demand.

At the heart of these proactive efforts originating from China in the last half a decade are two major impulses: One is to seek ways of converting Chinese economic success into other areas where the country's status and rightful international place are at least recognized by others and accepted without contention. The logic of this is simple: As the world's second biggest economy, China's continuing to occupy a subsidiary position is odd and unsustainable. There needs to be a new settlement, which the Belt and Road Initiative is driving toward, where China inhabits a legitimate space, and is able to pursue its vision and narrative of global development in a way which is at least heard, and able to make a contribution, rather than being marginalized and unheeded.

The second is that China's experience of development over the last 40 years has given it a unique set of experiences, things that it can now share as a knowledge partner. After 1978, it was often the one learning, with delegations traveling throughout the developed world from China looking at how others had experienced growth and built advanced economies and societies. Now it is in the position of having a lot of experience and understanding of, for instance, how to construct infrastructure, how to alleviate poverty and how to improve human development indicators. These are issues which the rest of the world, and in particular those countries still developing, would want to look at and at least know more about, and consider adopting elements of in their own environments.

Normalizing dialogue

On top of this, there is also the issue of China being a stakeholder in global public goods—in particular the environment and natural resources. While many seem apprehensive and skeptical about a newly prominent China and what its objectives may be, we can't lose sight of the fact that it is in everyone's interests—China's, America's and the rest of the world's—to do as much as possible to address the pressing issues of environmental degradation. These are the ultimate global public goods. Having China as engaged as it currently is on these issues is a hugely positive thing. But there needs to be recognition of China's broader role, rather than just admission for it to areas where things work for the rest of the world, and demand for silence on matters where there is less concord. That sort of asymmetrical outcome has many issues, but the most obvious is that it would be unsustainable, causing resentment and tension.

So with the Belt and Road Initiative, we do have a major opportunity for improved dialogue between China and the outside world, and one that avoids stark extremes and contrasts. A normalization of dialogue, and a focus on exchanges of knowledge and the different perspectives these come from, is among the best things this new idea offers. China is already too prominent to simply try to force it into a marginal position, even if it were content for that to happen. Attempts to marginalize China would be an injustice for everyone simply because the things that China can deliver now and the contribution that it can make are so significant. It would be a terrible tragedy were China not able to be a full, active and positive part of global development, and impoverish the potential future outcomes if it were not given a stronger, constructive role. From that perspective, in terms of mutual learning and increased understanding, the Belt and Road Initiative operates as an attempt to set up a global knowledge community that is engaged, alert and accessible to the opportunities that deeper dialogue with China brings. It is in that space, more than any other, that this initiative holds most promise and has the most long term significance.

(The author is director of the Lau China Institute at King's College, London)

Major events in February

February 1: Premier Li consults public opinion on draft government work report

Keywords: Li Keqiang; government work report

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on February 1 chaired a seminar to consult representatives from the education, science and technology, culture, health, and sports sectors, and members of the public, on the draft government work report.

February 3: Top legislator eyes Hong Kong's role in Belt and Road Initiative

Keywords: Zhang Dejiang; Hong Kong; Belt and Road Initiative

China's top legislator Zhang Dejiang urged Hong Kong to actively contribute to the national development strategy when participating in the Belt and Road Initiative.

February 4: China maps plan to fight for cleaner air in 2018

Keywords: cleaner air; three-year plan; environmental protection

China will release a three-year plan to fight for cleaner air in 2018, Minister of Environmental Protection Li Ganjie said at the two-day national environmental protection work conference which concluded on February 3.

February 10: China unwavering to support private sector: vice premier

Keywords: private sector; Vice Premier; Wang Yang

China remains unwavering in its support of the private sector and will create favorable conditions for its development, vice-premier Wang Yang told entrepreneurs on February 10 at a meeting held to solicit their opinion.

February 14: Xi calls for hard work in new era

Keywords: Xi Jinping; new era; Spring Festival speech

President Xi Jinping encouraged Chinese people to work hard in the new era during his Spring Festival speech on February 14.

February 21: CPC leaders stress high-quality construction of Xiongan New Area

Keywords: CPC; Xiongan New Area; high-quality

Senior leaders of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on February 21 stressed efforts to build Xiongan New Area into a “high-quality modern socialist city.”

February 25: Beijing Winter Olympics in 2022 to carry forward Olympic spirit

Keywords: Beijing; Winter Olympics; 2022

According to the Chinese government's plan, the country will have about 650 skating rinks and 800 ski resorts by 2022. By the end of 2016, about 11.3 million Chinese skied at least once a year. China aims to lift that number to 300 million before the next Winter Olympics.

February 25: Xi Jinping Thought in proposed constitutional amendment common aspiration of CPC, People

Keywords: Xi Jinping Thought; CPC; Constitutional amendments

The Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee made public its proposal on amendments to China's Constitution on February 26.