



DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS: AFRICA AND THE CHINESE REVOLUTION 70 YEARS ON

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The Second China International Import Expo reveals China as the "world's factory" contributing more than 30 percent to the global economy and projected to have 24 percent of the global GDP by 2030. 70 years on, China is forging "a community of a shared destiny with Africa" and spreading the benefits of its development path. As a result, it is able to ride on nationalism and Pan-Africanism to establish relations with African states and regional institutions. Perhaps, this signifies a ripe moment for the two civilizations to work together to push for a better governed, equitable and just new world order within the existing frameworks of multilateral institutions and forums.

On September 21, 1949, Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed the birth of modern China. Seventy years on, China has risen from extreme poverty and closed system to the world's second largest economy and the de facto leader of globalization.

"Economic globalization represents the trend of history", President Xi Jinping declared during the opening of the Second China International Import Expo in Shanghai on November 5, 2019.

"Like the world's great rivers, the Yangtze, the Nile, the Amazon and the Danube — they all surge forward in relentless flow, and nothing can stop their mighty movement, not the current of undertows or hidden shoals or rocks beneath the water," he added with a poetic tinge.

On the sidelines of the Shanghai Expo, China also invited some 270 scholars and media experts from 90 countries to the Second Hongqiao International Economic Forum on "China's 70-Year Development and the Building of a Community of a Shared Future for Mankind", organized by the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS) on November 5-6, 2019.

Our largely chaotic and uncertain post-September 11, 2001 world is a perfect tale of two grand visions competing to shape the future of global power. One of these grand visions is modern China's idea of "building a community of a shared future for humankind." China's journey to the helm of globalization started when Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, unveiled the 'reform and opening-up' in December 1978, the most innovative and effective economic strategy in modern history.

Deng's successors embraced the market, replaced doctrinaire socialism with a "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" hoisted on China's 5,000-year old civilization, and re-engineered the Communist Party on the basis of "democratic centrism" as a stabilizing force to underpin

development. "We realized that if we do not open up, we will choke up", said a Chinese official. The result of reform and opening up is what has been lauded as "China's development miracle", which has transformed China and the world in an emphatic and irreversible way.

The miracle in China's development is obvious. In less than seven decades, China has become the world's second largest economy. It had pulled an estimated 850 million of its citizens from the clutches of poverty, contributing to 70 percent of the mass of humanity liberated from poverty, the largest in human history. The life expectancy of its people has risen from 42 years in 1949 to over 70 years by 2019. Over 500 million Chinese have joined the middle class. The lesson is clear: poverty is not a destiny of any nation.

The Second China International Import Expo reveals China as the "world's factory". In 2019, China is the world's largest manufacturer, contributing more than 30 percent to the global economy and projected to have 24 percent of the global GDP by 2030. No other country has accomplished such a feat with a huge population of 1.4 billion people.

The other grand vision shaping the future of global power is the American-led liberal international order with its long roots in the liberal revolutions in America (1775-1783) and France (1789-1799).

China's rise has profoundly challenged the liberal order, now in retreat. As the world slipped into the dark age of egoism, major western powers have suspended globalization, resorting to unilateralism, populism, isolationism and protectionism. Globalization is weaponized in the form of trade barriers, sanctions and other obstacles to free exchange of goods, services and ideas. Rightwing theorists paint doomsday scenarios of a world inexorably hurtling down to a "clash of civilizations" or the "Thucydides Trap" where the old power resorts to war to stop its challenger.

China's views globalization as the safest pathway to its "peaceful rise". It has adopted three strategies to de-escalate superpower rivalry and calm the world. First is a strategic foreign policy based on twin propositions. One is the "peaceful development" strategy premised on the thesis that war impedes development.

Two is Beijing's idea of "building a community of a shared future for mankind" as an alternative paradigm that views the whole world as "a symphony" rather than a cacophony.

China is envisioning the world as a mosaic of many equal civilizations with its own development as an alternative path to modernization. There is no one path to modernization; modernity is plural, not singular. As such, western modernity is one way, but not the only way.

As its second strategy, Beijing is consciously downplaying rivalry with the United States. "Rise does not mean hegemony", says one of its experts. "We have no ambition of replacing America as the 'shining light upon the hill' or to impose our civilization on the world", he adds. Officially, Beijing contrasts itself from America, insisting that it is a "developing country".

As its third strategy, China has taken the lead in globalization, using development as a means to global peace. In 2013, Beijing launched its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as its instrument of spreading the benefits of its development to the rest of the world and the remaking of the world.

Building on Africa's Triple Heritage

In Africa, China is forging "a community of a shared destiny with Africa" and spreading the benefits of its development path to a continent once theorized by Ali Mazrui as a "triple heritage". China is forging its relations with Africa at three levels. First centuries before colonialism ancient Chinese and African civilizations and peoples

had interacted and established non-hegemonic relations based on mutual respect and win win cooperation in culture, commerce, technology and development.

Second China and Africa have a share history of external conquest, occupation and humiliation. Third is China's track record in supporting Africa's anti-colonial liberation movements and development.

In view of this, Beijing is not a stranger to Africa. In the 1950s, Chairman Mao Zedong tasked Chinese scholars to undertake a study of Africa as a basis of China's informed, knowledge-based and non-hegemonic engagement with the continent. This commenced a dialogue of the two civilizations. It also provided the rationale for China's support for Africa's struggle for liberation and post-colonial development despite its poverty.

China has established an elaborate architecture of engaging Africa. In engaging Africa, China is not hampered by an obsession with the the nation-state, which has been the West's major blind-spot. As a result, it is able to ride on nationalism and Pan-Africanism to establish relations with African states and regional institutions. China's emerging architecture of engaging Africa has four pillars.

First Beijing is directly engaging Africa through existing continental and regional structures. It has supported Africa's Peace and Security architecture (APSA) weaved around the African Union and its Regional Economic Communities (RECs). It is contributing to peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance in areas affected by Ebola and other epidemics, combating piracy off Africa's Indian Ocean Coast and providing behind-the-curtains support for negotiations for peace in South Sudan, Sudan and other hotspots in Africa.

Second, at the same time Africa was transforming the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union in 2000, Beijing established the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). The

forum has evolved into the premier platform for China's dialogue and cooperation with the continent on policy and development and people-to-people interactions.

FOCAC is an inextricable part of the narrative of Africa rising from a "hopeless" and impoverished continent to prosperity and progress. Through FOCAC, China has channeled an estimated \$150 billion to support African development, way larger than America's Marshall Plan to post-War Europe. African Agenda 2063 is the fulcrum of China-Africa cooperation. China is supporting Africa's efforts to realize its Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) that entered into force in 2018.

Third, in April 2019, Chinese and African experts launched the China-Africa Institute (CAI) as an inter-civilizational platform to promote research and policy dialogue to deepen understanding between the two peoples and civilizations.

The Institute is a sharp intellectual instrument to repudiate divisive ideologies and doomsday narratives, which accuse China of being a neo-colonial power and using debt to trap Africa as part of the new scramble for African resources, and to counter populism, protectionism and isolationism and to provide a knowledge base for unity and tolerance of diversity.

Fourth, Africa is increasingly participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as an alternative pathway to building a prosperous, non-hegemonic and peaceful world along the idea of a community of shared destiny for mankind. But Africa's participation in BRI is still low.

Finally, China and Africa are collaborating within the framework of existing multilateral institutions and forums. In the 1970s, Africa supported China's campaign to retake its seat in the UN Security Council. Since then, China has readily used its veto to support African agenda. Beijing should support Africa's increased role in the UN Security Council, including Kenya's campaign for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

The two civilizations should work together to push for a better governed, equitable and just new world order. Of necessity, this order must balance between development and the environment, creating an ecological civilization.

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