

Feature: Xi Jinping -- a champion of multilateralism in a world of contradictions

Source: Xinhua | 2019-11-19 20:30:44 | Editor: huaxia

BEIJING, Nov. 19 (Xinhua) -- "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," English novelist Charles Dickens proclaimed in 1859, alluding to the chills and hopes after the Industrial Revolution.

One and a half centuries later, it is still a world of contradictions, brought forth by yet another round of industrial and technological revolutions, observed Chinese President Xi Jinping debuting at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in early 2017.

Global challenges from regional conflicts and terrorism to widening income gaps and climate change have nudged humanity to a crossroads of conflicting solutions: globalization or anti-globalization, multilateralism or unilateralism, integration or isolation.

While some are retreating to the easier option of unilateralism and isolationism, the Chinese president has been leading a spirited defense of multilateralism to make economic globalization more invigorated, inclusive and sustainable.

This commitment was also featured in Xi's latest overseas trip, which took him to Greece for a state visit and to Brazil for the 11th BRICS summit last week, and witnessed his call for global efforts to uphold multilateralism and steer the world towards the vision of "a community with a shared future for mankind."

HISTORICAL CROSSROADS

"We are meeting at a time when crucial developments are taking place in the world economy and international landscape," Xi told the recent summit of BRICS, an emerging-market bloc that groups Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

While leaders of five of the biggest emerging economies met in Brasilia, the world was clouded by causes for concern: Trade tensions and policy uncertainties were taking a toll on the world economy, some politicians were ignoring the fact that the globe is warming up, Britain was still divorcing the European Union and Syria was mired in an eight-year-old war. It was not the first time for the Chinese president to sound the alarm on the crucial situation mankind was in.

"What has gone wrong with the world?" Xi asked at the annual gathering of the WEF in the Swiss ski resort of Davos in January 2017, a big question on which the whole world was reflecting.

That the world has been going through profound changes unseen in a century was Xi's answer.

He expounded on his observation at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting held in November 2018 in Papua New Guinea (PNG):

While economic globalization surges forward, global growth is shadowed by protectionism and unilateralism; a new revolution in science, technology and industry is in the making, but old driving forces are yet to be replaced by new ones; the international landscape is undergoing profound changes, but imbalance in development is yet to be addressed; and the reform of the

global governance system is gathering momentum, but improving its efficiency remains a major challenge.

To highlight the ever critical situation faced by humanity, Xi has repeatedly resorted to the analogy of a crossroads.

"Mankind has once again reached a crossroads," he said.

Which direction to choose? Cooperation or confrontation? Openness or closing one's door? Win-win progress or a zero-sum game?

Amid the myriads of changes one thing is certain: It is as impossible to reverse the trend of globalization as to channel the waters in the ocean back into isolated lakes and creeks. In today's world no country could possibly stay aloof to take good care of itself alone.

At the APEC meeting in PNG, convened on board a cruiser anchored by Port Moresby, Xi said, "We are all indeed fellow passengers in the same boat."

SAME BOAT

In order to help the world sail forward through wind and waves together, Xi has put forward the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind, two important components of what is known as "Xiplomacy."

In a show of their growing global popularity, more than 160 countries and international organizations have signed BRI cooperation documents with China, and Xi's grand vision is being incorporated into more and more UN resolutions.

"I came up with the proposals of building a community with a shared future for mankind and the BRI while pondering on how world countries can achieve joint consultation and shared benefits, harmony in diversity and cooperation for win-win results in the face of divergent interests and concerns," Xi told UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on the sidelines of the G20 summit held in Buenos Aires in November 2018.

There is no better choice for world countries other than strengthening multilateral cooperation in the face of one global challenge after another, Xi said.

In this line of thought, Xi sees his country's development inseparable from that of the rest of the world. "China will do well only when the world does well," he said.

Accordingly, experts have observed that Beijing pursues an ever more engaging foreign policy, striving for a stable international environment to enable its development as well as recognizing its global responsibilities as it moves towards center stage.

"To pick one word to exemplify China's foreign policy under President Xi, I would choose 'engaged' or 'pro-active,'" said Robert Kuhn, a leading U.S. expert on China.

China's engaged diplomacy has been the hallmark of Xi's governance, said Kuhn, who has been paying close attention to every foreign trip made by the Chinese president.

There is now an "inflection point" in China's diplomacy, catalyzed by Xi's championing of multilateralism, as the country changes from reactive to pro-active in its international relations, said the expert, also chairman of the Kuhn Foundation.

In the eyes of former French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, who has met Xi about a dozen times, the Chinese leader is full of passion.

Raffarin particularly referred to a meeting on global governance Xi attended during his visit to France in March along with French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker.

At the meeting, Xi pledged to uphold multilateralism and pointed out that China and Europe are two major forces in the world, and are important participants in and builders of the economic globalization process.

That gathering, Raffarin said, was the first step towards building "a new type of multilateralism in the 21st Century."

As transformations are taking place in global governance, the current more than seven-decade-old multilateral system needs fresh impetus, he said.

In terms of strength, Asia and Africa are now very different from what they were after World War II, and they should be properly represented in the multilateral system, added the French statesman.

"SWISS ARMY KNIFE"

Expounding on his vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind at the UN Office at Geneva in early 2017, Xi recalled the first time he got a Swiss army knife.

He said he was amazed that it has so many functions and could not help thinking "how wonderful it would be if an exquisite Swiss army knife could be made for our world affairs. When there is a problem, we can use the knife to fix it."

In the eyes of many, such a multi-functional kit for world cooperation is already unfolding. Ahead of a trip to Beijing in April, Guterres told the press that through the BRI, China has created development opportunities.

There are more investments, trade and growth, which not only contribute to poverty reduction, employment and improvement of infrastructure in developing countries, but also promote environmental construction and social stability and development, said the UN chief.

The secret of the BRI's success is partly attributable to the fact that it is based upon China's understanding of multilateralism.

The essence of multilateralism, said Xi at the BRICS summit in Brasilia, is that international affairs should be addressed through extensive consultation rather than decided by one country or a few.

Upholding the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, Xi put forward the BRI in 2013, the same year he assumed office as Chinese president. The initiative has now become the most popular platform for international cooperation in the world.

"Dominance by a single party is not allowed in the BRI," Xi said in a tour of the Piraeus Port, a flagship project of BRI cooperation between China and Greece, during his recent visit to the European country.

"Instead, all participants would share responsibilities and benefits in BRI cooperation," he said.

The BRI offers grand principles to support its grand visions such as building a community with a shared future for mankind, Kuhn said, adding that it expands links between Asia, Africa and Europe and thus reduces imbalances in national development and promotes economic growth.

"There are different kinds of flowers with different colors in our gardens and we can make beautiful garland by joining the flowers together," said Nepali President Bidhya Devi Bhandari in an interview with Xinhua earlier this year. "The BRI can make a beautiful garland."

Raffarin, a frequent visitor to China since his first trip in 1970, observed that China's diplomatic vision is deeply rooted in and inspired by its traditional culture, which believes that cooperation is better than confrontation.

The BRI is a great initiative to promote global cooperation, he told Xinhua in an interview in September.

"In this world of interdependence, we must expand our thinking beyond all forms of nationalism to assume our common destiny. For all this, China will remain useful to the world," he said.

(Xinhua reporters Du Jian in Beijing, Ying Qiang and Xu Yongchun in Paris, Yang Shilong in New York and Zhou Shengping in Kathmandu also contributed to the story.)

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