

VIEWS

Cui Tiankai

Try to make a better life for the people

Two questions have always popped up when I do interviews with the US media. In what way has Communist rule in China over the past 70 years been a success? And, strategically what is China's intention?

To put it simple, the economic prosperity and social stability in China is good proof that what the Communist Party is doing in China works well for the country, and the nation's foremost strategic intention is for its people to have a better life.

But it takes an understanding of Chinese history to get a full appreciation of the answers. The five millennia of Chinese civilization have endowed today's China with the cultural DNA tracing as far back as the teachings and the values developed and disseminated by Confucius and other wise men.

This proud ancient civilization, however, had been invaded, exploited and oppressed by foreign powers in the last two centuries or so, especially since the Opium War in 1840, which has left a deep impact on the mindset of the Chinese nation.

So for more than 100 years, generation after generation of Chinese people have toiled hard to modernize their country, and to rejuvenate an ancient civilization. In other words, we are contriving to have

an ancient civilization modernized while still keeping some of its essential elements and its own tradition.

It was against this backdrop that the Communist Party of China was founded in 1921. It was born in China, grew out of Chinese soil, but with "imports" from Marxism, which originated in the developed world.

From the very beginning, this party has not just tried to copy all those specific conclusions of Karl Marx, but endeavored to adapt them to the Chinese reality. It has thus always been invested with Chinese characteristics, and inherited the essence of Chinese culture and tradition.

It is fair to say that historically and from the perspective of its performance, the Communist Party of China is way different from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or of some other countries. It is very Chinese.

Throughout history people have always been pursuing happiness, equality and freedom and other good things, and they do so by following different paths, in different ways, while choosing to believe in different ideologies or philosophies.

I think trial and error should be encouraged when it comes for people in different countries to exploring their own ways of running their country, achieving modernization, economic development,

freedom for the people and building their country strong, prosperous.

It is possible that some countries may fail while others are more successful. China has, in the long course, withstood many setbacks, including the tumultuous "cultural revolution" between 1966 and 1976. But on the whole, it has gradually found a system, a path for its development that has worked well for the country.

Over the last 70 years, especially over the last four decades since China launched reform and opening-up, China has grown into the world's second-largest economy, lifted 800 million people out of poverty, and in recent years, contributed about one-third to the global economic growth.

So the success in China is solid proof that what the Communist Party is doing in China works well for China.

And its progress will never stall. In his speech at a grand rally to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China on Oct 1, President Xi Jinping called for continued efforts to achieve the "two centenary goals" and national rejuvenation.

The first centenary goal is to build a moderately prosperous society in all aspects on the eve of the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party of China in 2021. The second goal is for a strong socialist modernized country by 2050.

As President Xi has announced to the world, "the aspirations of the people to live a better life must always be the focus of our efforts." China's strategic intention is very simple: we want our people to have a better life.

I have long appreciated the famous saying of President Abraham Lincoln that "a government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

I believe that in serving the fundamental and common interests of the two peoples, both governments have more to gain in cooperation, and even more to lose in conflict.

All in all, we are not here to challenge or try to replace any other country, let alone seeking global dominance or hegemony.

After all, China's intention and efforts to make its people have a better life would be in no way against US interests.

Instead, a prosperous and stable China, while benefiting itself, has also served other countries well, including the United States. This has been proven right time and again in the past four decades of engagement between the two countries and will continue to be the case in the future.

The author is Chinese ambassador to the United States. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



Chen Weihua

The author is chief of China Daily EU Bureau based in Brussels. chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

EU's focus on cooperation not conflict

Many European politicians have long been skeptical about the Belt and Road Initiative, but they might be more willing to change their minds after reading a report released on Tuesday that urges the European Union to copy China's Belt and Road Initiative to better channel the billions of euros it sends as aid each year to Africa.

The report by a group led by former senior EU official and economist Thomas Wieser calls for the establishment of a "European Climate and Sustainable Development Bank" to consolidate the EU's development funding activities.

Major Western news media have described it as emulating China's Belt and Road Initiative rather than countering it as they usually do when covering major moves by the EU relating to China.

For example, when European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker proposed a new alliance with Africa in September last year to deepen their economic ties, the BBC News' headline read: "Juncker unveils EU's Africa plan to counter China".

It seemed to suggest that EU is using Africa as a geopolitical tool and battleground, which is totally untrue. After I checked the EU strategy, I found that it includes facilitating African students to study at European universities and help for Africa improve the climate for business and increased financial assistance as well as a \$46 billion in grants over the seven years from 2021.

The statement by the EU-China Summit in Brussels in April said that the two sides will continue to forge synergies between the EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia as well as the EU Trans-European Transport Networks and China's Belt and Road Initiative.

I had my fingers crossed for the Juncker plan. But instead of calling it a move to counter China, a more apt description would be that the plan complements the Belt and Road Initiative.

China and the EU could therefore join hands to help African development.

Europe has its strength in helping Africa with its close historical, cultural and geographical ties to the continent. China has seen the great potential of African development based on its own economic development achieved over the past four decades.

The Chinese optimism and commitment in Africa is well reflected in the Ernst and Young Africa Attractiveness study released last month. It showed that China invested \$72 billion in foreign direct investment in Africa between 2014 and 2018, followed by France (\$34.17 billion), the United States (\$30.85 billion), United Arab Emirates (\$25.27 billion) and the United Kingdom (\$17.68 billion).

China also leads in creating a total of 137,028 jobs in Africa during the period, compared with 57,970 by France and 62,004 by the US.

Indeed, the more nations that can catch up with China in FDI and job creation, the better for Africa. And if any country, or countries, can set a better example in helping African development, China should be happy to learn from it/ them.

Yet for many journalists, depicting everything as conflict is genetic. A Reuters headline on Sept 27 reads: "In counterweight to China, EU, Japan sign deal to link Asia".

But when I read the EU document, it was just about their cooperation to build connectivity in Asia, things that China has been doing with both the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), of which European nations are major stakeholders.

While Japan is not a member of AIIB, the Asian Development Bank, of which Japan is a major shareholder, has many co-financing projects with AIIB.

The statement by the EU-China Summit in Brussels in April said that the two sides will continue to forge synergies between the EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia as well as the EU Trans-European Transport Networks and China's Belt and Road Initiative. The EU-China Connectivity Platform, in its fourth meeting this year, is the framework to address concrete cooperation.

Pitching China and the EU against each other may make spicy headlines, but it often distorts the real picture and misleads readers, contrary to journalists' mission.

Robert Lawrence Kuhn

China and India can fight poverty together

In light of the white paper, China and the World in the New Era, published by the Chinese government to respond to the world's questions about China, and in anticipation of the upcoming summit between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it is appropriate to reflect on the nature of Sino-Indian relations.

As the 21st century unfolds, bilateral relations between China and India, the two most populous countries and two ancient civilizations, will become increasingly axial, for the global community as well as for the two nations themselves. As the first half of the century is defined by Sino-US relations, the second half may be defined by Sino-Indian relations. Global prosperity, even global peace, will grow progressively dependent on China and India and on how well they cooperate.

It betrays no state secrets to acknowledge sharp differences between China and India, especially on long-standing border issues, trade issues and the complex geopolitics of the region. But the focus should be on how China and India can cooperate, leveraging each other's strengths and experiences. To begin, both have strikingly similar strategic visions, short-term for the 2020s and long-term for mid-century.

For China, it is the "two centenary goals": realizing a "moderately prosperous society" by 2020, at the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (2021); and a fully modernized socialist country by 2050, at the 100th anniversary of New China (2049), a country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful.

For India, it is "New India 2022", at the 75th anniversary of India's Independence, an inclusive society that is clean, healthy, educated, wealthy, capable and safe; and "Grand India 2047" (Sarvashrestha Bharat 2047), at the 100th anniversary, a fully developed nation and a world power.

In both grand national visions, a core driver is poverty alleviation, and it is this explicit commonality that can catalyze China and India working together for the common good.

First, how does poverty alleviation work in each country?

In India's anti-poverty campaign, I find three big ideas: inclusive growth, rapid economic development and agricultural transformation. Initiatives aimed at individuals include health and nutrition, education and skill development, and gender equality. Initiatives for the common good stress infrastructure and connectivity and growth enablers (housing, energy and financial inclusion).

Infrastructure is important in Modi's vision: high-speed railways, inland waterways, connecting all villages (habitations over 500) with all-weather roads, broadband in 250,000 villages (every local self-governing unit in India).

A fundamental facilitator of China's remarkable poverty alleviation success has been infrastructure: the largest construction of public works in human history. The Chinese saying, "If you want to get rich, first build a road" is much repeated.

Modi focuses on the poor: "A new India where the poor do not want anything by way of charity, but seek opportunity to chart out their own course ... Indians today are not waiting for governmental sops. They only want opportunities to be created for them, so that they can work

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for their livelihood and prosperity"

As for China's anti-poverty campaign, I know it first-hand. For several years I have been traveling the country, embedded in poverty alleviation programs.

In the early decades of reform, Chinese leaders focused on economic growth, which, as a natural consequence, lifted hundreds of millions of Chinese out of poverty. But in recent years, intensifying after 2012 when Xi Jinping became top leader, the realization set in that there were about 100 million Chinese who were intractably poor. Whether because of geographic isolation in remote mountain villages or because they didn't have adequate healthcare or education, or because they were old or infirm, economic development alone would never be sufficient: no matter how much China's economy would grow, no matter how large China's GDP per capita would become, these intractably poor would remain intractably poor.

In 2013 President Xi proposed the concept of "targeted" or "precision" poverty alleviation. "Targeted" means individualized attention, customized plans and programs to bring each poor family out of poverty. "We should mobilize the energies of our whole Party, our whole country, and our whole society," Xi said.

The success of China's targeted poverty alleviation campaign, bringing 10 to 14 million people per year out of absolute poverty, depends on strict, quantitative and transparent procedures. It starts by defining absolute poverty with standardized methods, using annual income, but

also including tests of adequate healthcare, education, and even sanitation, like flush toilets.

Five methods of poverty alleviation are employed: industry, creating sustainable micro-businesses; relocation, moving people from remote areas; education and training; ecological compensation for those living in environmentally vulnerable areas; and social security, medical subsidies and direct payments to those who cannot work. Every impoverished household is guaranteed help and every village has designated officials to carry out targeted measures.

Five levels of local Party secretaries coordinate their responsibilities — provincial, municipal, county, township, village. Third-party evaluations are conducted regularly and randomly to assure accuracy and honesty.

Over the years, I have visited all parts of China, including the poorest — which is why, as much as I thought I knew China, I was surprised by what I found.

I found that every poor family has its own file, a literal notebook, each with its own targeted plan to lift each above the line of absolute poverty — that's millions of poor families with customized plans, each monitored regularly and reported centrally. I witnessed a "democratic evaluation" in a remote village, where villagers voted into poverty status one young man whose father had cancer, and cheered when another was raised out of poverty status.

Equally startling, Party cadres are dispatched to impoverished villages to manage poverty alleviation full time, often for two years. Party officials fighting poverty cannot be promoted unless and until they fulfill their specific, numeric poverty alleviation goals. Officials know that their careers prosper or falter based on results. I watched local officials being held accountable.

With career stakes high and funding vast, cheating and stealing should be no surprise. Of the 122,100 cases of corruption China reported in 2017, 48,700 — more than one-third — related to poverty alleviation. Credit the government for releasing such unflattering statistics. China will not allow the falsifying of data, or



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the misappropriating of funds, to undermine its poverty alleviation goals.

When 2019 began, the number of those still living in absolute poverty was down to 16.6 million; though lifting the last will be the hardest, China is on track to eliminate all absolute poverty by 2020.

So, what would it take for China and India, working together, sharing experiences, to unite to fight poverty, surely a global priority?

It would take mutual commitment between President Xi and Prime Minister Modi. To catalyze it, how about proposing parallel "Poverty Alleviation Institutes" in Beijing and New Delhi? Each would have three synergistic purposes:

First, facilitating reciprocal exchanges of poverty alleviation procedures, programs and experiences between China and India in both directions.

Second, prioritizing digitization in poverty alleviation, such as telemedicine and education over the Internet.

Third, enabling China and India to cooperate in poverty alleviation in other developing countries, synthesizing their mutual procedures, programs and experiences.

Institute outputs would include white papers, research reports, case studies, manuals, conferences, and expert exchanges (short and long term).

President Xi says, "China is moving to center stage of the world."

Prime Minister Modi says, "If we are successful, no one can stop India from becoming a world power."

China states that Chinese wisdom and Chinese experience can provide a new way for developing countries to achieve modernization and for solving problems facing mankind.

India states that its unique development experience — economic, political and social transitions — can become a model for the world.

Conventional wisdom has China and India as natural competitors. Fighting poverty has them as natural allies.

The author is a China Reform Friendship Medal winner and the author of How China's Leaders Think. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.