

Chapter 16

“China’s 70-Year Development and the Building of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind”: A Nigerian Perspective



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Esteemed participants,

It is a great pleasure to come to China’s famous international city of Shanghai to participate in this important event. I take this opportunity to thank the National Institute for Global Strategy of the esteemed Chinese Academy of Social Sciences for inviting me.

The founding of modern China 70 years ago, along with the victory of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917, were among the few events that defined the twentieth century. Before the victory of the Bolshevik revolution and China’s national liberation, the thought that ordinary working men and women could break through the net of history and dare to take their fate in their hands and establish political and social order in which they are masters was mostly in the realm of philosophical musings but the scientific theory of Marxism weaponized both philosophy and history as a tool of popular liberation. The Chinese revolution took her place in history pantheon, as one of humanity’s most magnificent enterprises that, 70 years after it occurred, a fresh chapter in the history of humanity has been opened.

The giant strides of the People’s Republic of China in the 70 years since her founding, bears out the thoroughly scientific world view in the observations of the second congress of the Communist party of China in July 1922 when it defined the nature of the party and outlined its trajectories that must proceed from China’s unique national conditions and social reality. Among other things, the congress affirmed that “our communist party is neither a Marxist academic society organized by intellectuals nor a utopian revolutionary organization of a few Communist who are divorced from the masses, but rather ours is a party fighting for the proletariat...” and “all the party activities should be conducted in the depth of the masses and must never be divorced from the masses.” At the current stage of development, the party, through

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acute interrogations of the historical process and from the experience of governance trajectories, has identified the convergence of human aspirations as the universal trend that would drive humanity forward. The critical structures of the existing global order were mostly post World War II creations and do not currently reflect the broad aspirations of humanity for a shared future and inclusive order. The historical context of the current human conditions and its social realities objectively challenges the post-World War global order to adapt and update itself to the contemporary aspirations of mankind that have evolved through forces unleashed by quantum leaps in science and technology. While territorial integrity and state sovereignty remained the cornerstone of the existing global order and will remain so for the foreseeable future, contemporary states must however accommodate and reconcile to the borderless convergence of human aspirations. While sovereign states and their secure borders guaranteed in their sacred attributes of territorial integrity and sovereign rights to manage their internal affairs are not expected to dissolve and melt, they are however to give proper ventilation to shared human aspirations and the growing tendency to the construction of community of a shared future for humanity.

The trajectories signaling the trend of evolving community of shared interests for all humankind are an objective historical process unfolding at its own independent momentum, not only generating opportunities but also posing challenges.

President Xi Jinping provided vital insight to this evolving trend in a keynote speech he gave at the first Belt and Road Forum of International Cooperation that was held in Beijing in May. According to him, “from the historical perspective, humankind has reached an age of great progress, great transformation, and profound changes. In the increasingly multi-polar, economically globalized, digitalized, and culturally diversified world, the trend toward peace and development becomes stronger, and reform and innovation are gaining momentum. Never have we seen such close interdependence among countries as today, such fervent desire of people for a better life and never have we had so many means to prevail over difficulties; such profuse and effusive characterization of the human prospects and opportunities that objectively exist to advance human happiness, is however juxtaposed by the critical and existential challenges that currently constrain it.”

President Xi in this same speech underscored that “in terms of reality, we find ourselves in a world fraught with challenge. Global growth requires new drivers, development needs to be more inclusive and balanced and the gap between the rich and the poor needs to be narrowed. Hotspots in some regions are causing instability and terrorism is rampant. A deficit in peace, development, and governance poses a daunting challenge to mankind.” And because “these are the issues that have always been on my mind; in the autumn of 2013, respectively in Kazakhstan and Indonesia, I proposed the building of the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which I call the Belt and Road Initiative.”

The Belt and Road framework of international cooperation was not grand political vocabulary to announce the arrival of a new hegemonic power for which the world should be in “shock and awe.” It issued from a rigorous scientific interrogation of the actual facts of existing human conditions, the opportunities it offers, the challenges it poses and the prospective tools available to navigate through it. Despite the evident

inadequacies of the current global order, we seek to make up its deficits through broad participation by giving practical effect to extensive consultations, joint contribution, and shared benefits to all global stakeholders in the construction of physical connectivity and institutional alignments of the world’s communities through the broad engagement of all states.

The China-initiated “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road,” otherwise called the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI), a massive framework of global connectivity through networks of overland, maritime, and digital infrastructures, not only captures the trends of the aspirations of humanity but seeks vigorously to give practical effect to it, by engaging in the building blocks of global integration and the re-humanization of the previously arcane and brash globalization that gave vent exclusively to roaming capital, while excluding the bulk of humanity.

The ancient Silk Road from which the contemporary Belt Road framework of new international relations and cooperation took its inspiration was itself the synergy of man’s vigorous entrepreneurial, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual exertions, which gave the ancient Silk Road its outstanding historical essence. Its similar parallel included the Tran-Sahara trade route, through which Sub-Saharan Africa engaged with the Arab North of the continent and Europe. Before it degenerated into slave trade routes in the nineteenth century, resulting from the rise of capitalism in Europe, it was essentially a major artery for trade, culture, intellectual exchange, and religious transmission.

Trans-Saharan trade was essentially the transit route of goods between Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab and European worlds that flourished between the 7th and the fourteenth centuries, with goods traded, including precious metals such as gold. The trans-Saharan trade route expanded and crossed the more established trade route of the Silk Road between Europe and the Middle East.

Among articles traded on the trans-Saharan trade routes, gold was one of the sought after resources from sub-Saharan African countries such as the ancient Kingdom of Ghana, Mali, and regions of Sudan and in return, European nations traded salt. Besides trade in goods, the trans-Saharan trade route facilitated cultural exchange between Africans and Arabs, promoting the spread of Islam.

One of the central African figures of ancient history, who traversed both the trans-Saharan trade routes and the enigmatic Silk Road, was the Moroccan traveler, Ibn Battutah, 1304–1377.

In the emerging international system that would be characterized by broad inclusion, participation, and strands of practical connectivity, the spirit of the ancient Silk Road, trans-Saharan trade route and the monumental figure of Ibn Battutah loom large.

Though the ancient Silk Road, trans-Saharan trade route and other similar historical endeavors at evolving a human community of shared destiny cannot approximate to the contemporary complex international system, their relevance is the undying human spirit to find accommodation to each other, despite vast diversities and geographical spread.

The rediscovery of the ancient Silk Road and its historical contemporary spirit and their re-incarnation in the China-initiated Belt and Road strategy of international

cooperation testifies to the enduring and formidable human spirit to re-enact the finest of its trajectories.

It is, therefore, an ode to incredible thought and the exponential rigor of profound theoretical explorations to connect the extant tapestries of history to the contemporary challenge of future for all mankind.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) stands out as one of the contemporary scientific discoveries to the vexed question of an inclusive roadmap to accommodate the objective strands of global integration but bereft of the critical infrastructure roadmap to bring out a community of shared destiny and future for mankind. Whether it is perceived as a grand strategy of Beijing to accelerate her dominance, as expressed in some minority views, the soundness of the theoretical and scientific ramifications of the Belt and Road process cannot be over-emphasized.

The Belt and Road Initiative is not happenstance, a mere projection of power or a geopolitical calculus of an emerging world police inspector. It is the outcome of the theoretical rigor and exertion of a proletarian party and the government and people it leads, a consummate realization of the scientific interrogation of contemporary social realities and the crystallization of the depth of inquiry of arriving at truth through the intense examination of facts and a confirmation of the endless trajectories of reforms, embodied in the latest theoretical achievement of the CPC, dutifully manifested in the “Xi Jinping thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era.”

The Belt and Road Initiative issued from the objective analytical interrogation of contemporary realities and reflects a profound grasp of the unfolding global trends of common universal aspirations for a shared future and destiny for all mankind. The sheer depth and rigor of thought invested in fleshing out the social achievement of the Belt and Road Initiative, the output of a massive physical road map and the overwhelmingly inclusive global acceptance and ownership testifies to the resourcefulness of the Chinese proletarian party to toil on behalf of humanity despite the simultaneous burden of advancing in particular the well-being and prosperity of the Chinese people. Interestingly, it sees the opportunities of the dialectical relationship between the well-being and prosperity of the Chinese people and the rest of humanity as mutually reinforcing and complementary.

The objective convergence of universal aspirations for peace and development, inclusion and participation, contradicts the existing pockets of isolationism and unilateralism in the international order. The former yearns for practical expression while the later yields to the Cold War ideological fixations of power politics and hegemony.

Meanwhile, as the inimitable spirit of new international cooperation asserts itself, the ideological and intellectual fervor justifying and enabling the conflictual paradigm as the elemental drive of international intercourse persists with seductive scholarly allure. The most recent incarnations though, with less intense appeal as the Mr. Francis Fukuyama ideologically feverish *End of History* in 1992, is *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* by Graham Allison, director of the Harvard Kennedy School's Belter Centre for Science and International affairs.

Referring to the Greek historian Thucydides who observed that the Peloponnesian war that ruined ancient Greece was caused mainly by “the rise of Athens and the fear this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable.” According to the author, similar conditions of when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling one have occurred sixteen times over the past five hundred years and twelve ended in war, with only four ending in peaceful compromise. Professor Allison went on to raise the question whether “in the seventeenth case, an irresistibly rising China is on course to collide with an immovable America.”

Even as he laid premises by which the “clash” may be averted through strategic recognition of each other’s vital interests, the emerging international trends, that is subordinating geopolitical calculations to the contemporary integrative mechanism objectively accelerating the convergence of human aspirations, did not particularly appeal to the author, who appeared obsessed with strategic conflict management of aggressive competitors.

Though couched in the contemporary rise of China and perceptions of America’s existential dilemma, allegedly arising from it, Professor Allison’s “Thucydides’ trap” largely echoes the “clash of civilizations” by Professor Samuel Huntington.

Yet, Henry Kissinger, doyen of U.S. diplomacy with whom former U.S. President Richard Nixon pioneered modern Sino-US relations in the early 1970s, has in insightful work asked “will the rapidity and scope of communication break down barriers between societies and individuals and provide transparency of such magnitude that age-old dreams of human community will come into being? Or will the opposite happen?” Will mankind, networked into transparency and the absence of privacy, propel itself into a world without limits or order, careening through crises without comprehending them?

However, while intellectual speculation is welcomed to flourish on the intervening complexities of the current human conditions, it will take a bolder act of theoretical rigor to apprehend the evolving trajectories and navigate through an inclusive and participatory process, enabling a considerable global consensus on the framework and the roadmap of its physical and institutional architecture.

In a strong and powerful affirmation that China and Africa are a community of shared future, leaders of the two sides met in Beijing in the September of 2018 for the 3rd summit of the heads of state and government of the Forum On China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and called “on all countries to work in concert toward a community with a shared future for mankind, an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity, and a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation, with a view to upholding and advancing world peace and development.”

The successful convocation of the Beijing Summit of FOCAC clarified and laid out the fundamental architecture of an integrated global system whose functional dynamics would be underpinned by active collaboration and participation in nurturing and sustaining an inclusive international order.

In offering themselves as a model of a community of shared future, China and African countries through the mechanism of FOCAC demonstrated what is possible in genuine, practical, and mutually respectful partnership despite the

vagaries of geographical divides and even differences in social systems and political organizations.

The China-Africa relations as a trend of contemporary international cooperation defined by the principles of sincerity, real results, amity, and good faith is a powerful current and a rare opportunity to redefine international relations beyond the Cold War and its characteristics of zero sum game, power politics, and the practice of hegemonism.

While pockets of entrenched, powerful, and vicious special interests, nestled at vintage corners of some national political arenas would not be easily persuaded of the historical imperative and the obvious viability of international cooperation and partnership against the outdated paradigm of conflict and alliance, the trajectories of the historical course and especially in its current manifestations bear out a stronger push to the construction of a community of shared future for all mankind.

As a powerful impetus driving the emergence of an inclusive and cooperative international order, China is neither a “superpower” nor a “hyperpower” and to my understanding would never aspire to be.

The then Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping dispelled any notion of there ever being a hegemonic China. In a landmark speech at a special session of the United Nations General Assembly on the 10th of April, 1974, he defined “a superpower as an imperialist country which everywhere subjects other countries to its aggression, interference, and control or plunders and strives for world hegemony,” vowing that “China is not a superpower, nor will she ever seek to be one.”

Deng Xiaoping plainly told the world that “if one day China should change her color and turn into a superpower, if she too, should play the tyrant of the world, and everywhere subject others to her bullying, aggression, and exploitation, the people of the world should identify her as a social imperialist, expose it, and oppose and work together with the Chinese people to overthrow it.”

Nearly five decades after the Deng Xiaoping, the core of the Chinese second-generation leadership, well regarded for the profound insight in pioneering China’s reforms and opening up, spoke up to the world on the historic trajectory to international cooperation and inclusive participation, President Xi Jinping, the contemporary core of China’s fifth-generation leadership from the rostrum of the 3rd FOCAC Summit in Beijing in September of 2018 announced that “to respond to the call of the times, China will get actively involved in global governance and stay committed to the vision of consultation, cooperation, and benefit for all in global governance.”

President Xi Jinping said that “China is ready to jointly promote Belt and Road initiative with international partners,” vowing that “China take its mission to make new and even greater contributions to mankind, and work with other countries to build a community with a shared future for mankind.”

With development footprints and partnership across all regions of the world, China definitely means what it says and has remained true to her historic vision of inclusive and equitable global order.

The paradigm of the Belt and Road Initiative of international cooperation and the vision of community of a shared future for mankind are two important questions of our time and how they are reckoned with will inevitably shape the fate of humanity.