

## CHINA'S PEACEFUL DEVELOPMENT

# Fostering Friendship Through Mutual Learning Among Cultures

*Xiong Chengyu*

Cultures of the world have been enriched through communication and become more diverse through mutual learning. This tradition of communication and mutual learning has been one of the major driving forces behind human progress and peaceful development. History tells us that a wide range of factors, including geographic conditions, climate, tradition, modes of production, and ways of living, have contributed to the formation of distinctive cultures in different parts of the world. From nomadism to crop farming and then to the advent of machines and the birth of the electronic age, and from manual printing to mobile Internet, many of the advances that we have seen over the millennia reflect a process of communication and mutual learning among cultures.

In the context of the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road ("the Belt and Road Initiative" or the B&R Initiative), communication and mutual learning among cultures are manifested in the following four aspects.

### **1. The preservation of historical heritage**

The Silk Road is officially recognized as a world heritage site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In 1988, UNESCO launched a project entitled "Integral Study of the Silk Roads: Roads of Dialogue" to dig deeper into the world value of the Silk Road and its legacy. In 2014, in the first fruitful example of transnational cooperation, "Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor," jointly nominated by China, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, was added to the World Heritage List, setting in motion the recognition of the Silk Road as a world heritage site.

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Starting more than 2,000 years ago, the diligent and courageous peoples of the Eurasian continent pioneered a network of trade and cultural transmission routes that linked together the major civilizations of Asia, Europe, and Africa. According to the goals of "highlighting the complex cultural interactions which arose from the encounters between East and West and helped to shape the multiple identity and the rich common heritage of Eurasia," set forth by UNESCO, countries located along the route of the Silk Road still have a great deal of work to do, including both the immediate task of seeking world heritage status for additional sites, and the long-term endeavor of preserving this joint historical heritage.

## **2. Open and inclusive cultural exchanges**

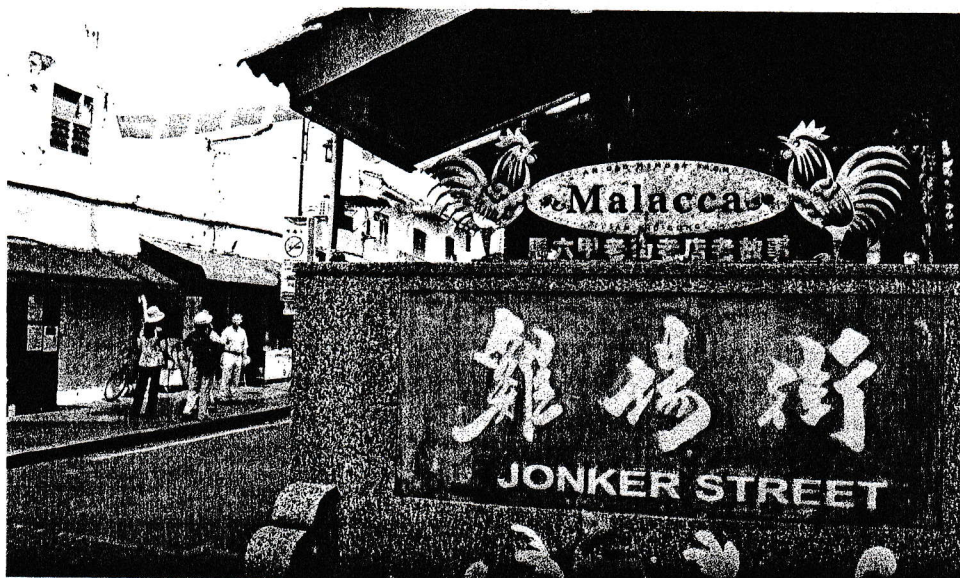
The expanse of land covered by the Silk Road witnessed the birth of the world's four great ancient civilizations, the meeting of the three main religions, and the emergence of numerous different cultures. The Nile Basin, Tigris-Euphrates Basin, Indus and Ganges River Basins, and Yellow River and Yangtze River Basins represent the cradle of human civilization. Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, national religions of many Asian and European countries, represent the three major religions in the world. In fact, the roots of almost all ways of thinking and forms of culture, both Eastern and Western, can be traced back to the civilizations and religions associated with the Silk Road. Owing to the coexistence and common prosperity of Chinese culture and the many other cultures located along the route of the

Silk Road, the region has been designated as a UNESCO biosphere reserve under the Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB).

The history of the Silk Road offers ample proof of how cultures can thrive through openness and integration, how religions can become more enlightened amidst inclusiveness and dialogue, and how different peoples can coexist by communicating and interacting with one another. The clashes of civilizations, environmental degradation, tragedies of war, and rich-poor gap that we see today are all obstacles to the common development of human society. An important means of addressing these challenges will be to acknowledge cultural diversity, advocating mutual learning among cultures on the basis of inclusiveness.

In "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road," the Chinese government explicitly states that it will advocate tolerance among cultures, respect the paths and modes of development chosen by different countries, and support dialogue among various cultures. In order to realize effective communication and mutual learning among cultures, we will need to establish various channels and modes of dialogue, including multilateral talks between international organizations, bilateral talks between government agencies, people-to-people interactions between non-governmental organizations, academic interactions between think tanks, and dialogue in the sphere of religion. The precondition of dialogue should be openness, while the outcome should be inclusiveness. This openness and inclusiveness will undoubtedly facilitate





*Jonker Walk – the center street of Chinatown in Malacca, Malaysia, pictured on April 24, 2015. Malacca is a famous historical city in Malaysia which once served as an important hub on the ancient maritime Silk Road. Blending the old with the new, Malacca is a popular tourist destination attracting scores of visitors from all over the world each year.*

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the coexistence, mutually complementary interaction, and common prosperity of different cultures.

### **3. Open and mutually complementary economic and trade cooperation**

Historically, the commodities traded via the Silk Road included silk, tea, porcelain, spices, handicrafts, and gold and silver wares, all of which boasted rich cultural connotations. Prior to the Song and Yuan dynasties (960-1368), Eastern culture spread to the West mainly through the trading of commodities. This contrasted with the transmission of Western culture to the East, which was mainly achieved in the form of the three major religions.

Mutually complementary trade between East and West allowed for the mutual exchange and convergence of

both ideas and modes of behavior. The Silk Road not only saw the passage of silk and porcelain to Europe, it also brought Western spices, jewelry, and gold and silver wares to China, in addition to introducing new crop species such as the walnut, pepper, and carrot. If we say that trade on the ancient Silk Road presented us with scenes of exotic lands and cultures, then it is also true that the advent of modern trade introduced China to Western commodities such as clocks, automobiles, warships, and cannons. Today, the economic and trade cooperation that China is promoting under the B&R Initiative constitutes a response to the trends of multi-polarity, economic globalization, and cultural diversification, as well as the transformation of society by information technology. Through the course of economic and trade co-

operation, we hope to establish a new interpretation of communication and mutual learning among cultures that revolves around fair trade rules and an equitable international order.

#### **4. Mutual benefit for tomorrow**

The B&R Initiative is a path for the preservation of a legacy, for cultural communication and interaction, and for economic and trade cooperation. Most importantly, it is a path for the future. With its sights set on the future and on the world, the B&R Initiative truly is a path for a new future.

All cultures share a common goal of satisfying the material and non-material needs and ensuring the happiness of their people. Mutual learning among cultures encompasses a wide range of areas, including the development of infrastructure, cooperation in trade and commerce, and the building of financial platforms. At its core, mutually beneficial cooperation is not just about the development of the economy, but

also the building of societies. The path for a new tomorrow is one of mutual understanding and trust, mutual connectivity, mutual learning, and mutual benefit and prosperity. It is about satisfying people's desire to live and work in contentment.

With its long history and vast territory, China has sustained rapid economic growth over the past decades. The Chinese people hope that countries along the route of the Silk Road can seize on the opportunities brought about by China's development, joining hands with people around the globe to create a peaceful and prosperous world. Our goal is to establish a new framework for governance on the basis of friendship, coexistence, and mutually complementary interaction, thereby ushering in a new order for the cultures of the world that is more prosperous and harmonious. This represents the meeting point of mutual learning, friendship among cultures and the B&R Initiative. 求是