

Diversity of Chinese Culture and the Belt and Road Initiative



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At the 2014 Central Work Conference on Ethnic Affairs, President Xi Jinping pointed out that ethnic regions are rich in resources with sources of many river systems originated there. These regions serve as ecological barriers and have unique cultures. These are also regions on the border and are suffering from poverty. Only by acknowledging the basic facts can we truly understand China's national conditions and strategic significance of ethnic affairs so that we can be confident of practicing systems, laws and policies designed to solve ethnic problems.

In the past, we used to know China as a country of sheer size and huge population with abundant resources but stranded in poverty. But cultural uniqueness is an important symbol of ethnic and border regions that are part of the colorful collage of Chinese culture and epitomize China's characteristic diversity. Whether by observing the cultural sector from the culturological point of view or according to China's cultural composition including the linguistic system, the cultural diversity of the regions on our land borders is noticeable. Furthermore, not only do these regions have diverse cultures, but they also have diverse landscapes and biological systems. Certainly, most of these places are under-developed and impoverished, too. Given these basic conditions, especially with China being a unified multinational state, we need to have a good grasp and understanding of the "properties" of this big family.

Today, when pursuing the Belt and Road initiative, a significant change has taken place in western China, especially ethnic regions on the border. That is, they have transformed from places left behind in economic reforms and opening-up to the frontier, which opens both domestically and internationally. This critical change, which possesses historical significance, will have a lasting impact that is profound and meaningful. The diverse cultural resources of western China, especially border regions inhabited by ethnic minority groups, will become an advantage in China's all-directional opening-up. Making good use of this "soft power",

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respecting differences and tolerating diversity, those are the keys to well-managed domestic affairs, which include peace and unity among all ethnic groups as well as harmonious development, and also, the fundamental principles of diplomatic practices such as amicable relationship with neighbors, mutual-benefit and win-win cooperation.

Basically, China's Belt and Road Initiative proposal is to comply with the trend of multi-polarization, economic globalization, diverse cultural development and social informatization, and most importantly, to uphold the principles of harmoniousness and inclusiveness. It has come to our notice that *Vision and Actions* stressed the following ideas in particular: civility, inclusiveness, respecting other nations' choices pertaining to development, enhancing dialogues between different civilizations, seeking common ground while reserving differences, inclusiveness, peaceful co-existence, shared prosperity.

This is in fact a cultural perspective, which means, when understanding culture in the broad sense, we must understand its diversity, and more importantly, how different cultures co-exist and share prosperity. The path and mode of a country's development also fall under the category of political culture and should be respected, accepted, tolerated and understood. The unique socialist path that China has taken isn't necessarily incompatible with western capitalism insofar as the two can't co-exist or share prosperity. China does not and will not inflict our choices upon others, nor will we accept condescending gestures from the US or other western nations, let alone following others in a groveling manner.

From a political-culture point of view, both sides should be capable of seeking common ground while reserving differences and agree to disagree and live in peace with each other. In that sense, the demonstration effect of ethnic regions is an important cultural advantage because opening-up itself is not just limited to economy but it's related to culture as well. Demonstration effect and cultural advantage of ethnic regions on the border are extremely important. Next, I'll address issues in three aspects pertaining to national conditions and two-way opening-up.

Origin and History of Diversity of Chinese Culture

According to documents of the pre-Qin Period, "tribes of the five directions" shared governance of China. The five tribes in a world with "round heaven and square earth" were, respectively, Yi of the east, Man of the south, Rong of the west, Di of the north and Huaxia of the middle. In this political structure centered on the middle region, the Middle-Kingdom's traditional policy on the four "barbarian tribes" could be summarized as "tolerate their beliefs and respect their customs, govern them without changing their traditions." To rule according to their habitude and pursue harmonious co-existence. As President Xi Jinping put it: "This idea of preserving unification while respecting differences is of vital importance to the forming and development of the Chinese nation."

The history of China is a history created by interaction and amalgamation of “tribes of the five directions”. China will stay a multinational state no matter it’s ruled by which people. In fact, the more powerful a dynasty was, the more peoples it included. Whichever people that succeeded in ruling China saw themselves as the legitimate ruler of a unified multinational state. And that is the main theme under which chronicles and dynastic history of ancient China were written. Our ancestors didn’t stop writing the history or alter it because the ethnic identity of the previous dynasty. Grasping the law of development for Chinese history as well as forming and development of a unified multinational state, acknowledging the fact that China was built by “tribes of the five directions”, those are views of Marxism and attitude of historical materialism.

In terms of cultural diversity, the first thing we must clarify is that mankind is unified but culture is diverse. Homo sapiens migrated out of Africa some 200,000 years ago and scattered themselves all over the world, replacing all previous humans of different evolutionary origins. So, mankind is unified in nature and there is no disparity within this unification. Race is but an anthropobiological feature that has no cultural connotation. Therefore, there is no such thing as a racial culture or language. People are the carriers of culture and cultural diversity is decided by ethnic diversity. Diversity means differences and differences are the most common phenomenon in any human society. Of course, differences also mean conflicts and conflicts are all about how we see differences among individuals, peoples or even countries, all can be summarized as our cultural perspective or, in a larger sense, civilizational perspective.

Biological diversity is the very foundation of ecological balance. This is a basic scientific fact known to all. Then, why can’t cultural diversity become the foundation of a harmonious society? Why must different cultures confront each other to an extent that it becomes civilizational conflicts? Those are some of the problems we must consider and solve when studying culture and diversity.

Evidently, minority cultures are the most prominent features of Chinese culture. China has 38 UNESCO-approved intangible cultural heritages, among which 14 are from minority cultures. The State Department announced three batches of national intangible cultural heritages respectively in 2008 and 2011. Among the 1219 national intangible cultural heritages, 433 are from minority cultures, accounting for 34.9% of the total. Among the 1986 inheritors of national intangible cultural heritages, 524 are ethnic minorities. In 2014, the State Department announced the 4th batch of national intangible cultural heritages and among the 153 subjects, one third are from minority cultures. Those examples give us a glimpse of the sheer proportion of minority culture in China’s cultural diversity as well as relevant preservation and inheritance.

Meanwhile, what we must realize is that, while the data reflects the fact that minority cultures contribute so much to the abundance and colorfulness of Chinese culture, preservation, inheritance and development of minority cultures are imperative. Just as President Xi Jinping pointed out, minority cultures aren’t strong enough to withstand the impact of market economy and some intangible cultural heritages have been lost so we should know better to cherish them before the day

we lose everything. Minority cultures belong to all Chinese people instead of any one ethnic group or area. To show our respect for cultural diversity, the first thing we must do is to protect the cultural diversity of China. Chinese culture is an integration of every ethnic culture. To say that Han culture is Chinese culture or to ignore minority cultures, as well as exclude any ethnic culture from Chinese culture or refuse to identify with Chinese culture are all incorrect thinking that must be overcome.

The long-term goal and fundamental principle of enhancing national solidarity is to reinforce cultural identity and build a shared spiritual home for all ethnic groups as well as promote the awareness of China being a community of shared nationality. Cultural identity is the most profound identity as well as the heart and soul of national solidarity and harmony. So called national solidarity and harmony simply refer to the root of Chinese culture. We should all identify the Chinese nation and its culture. Only by identifying Chinese culture can we identify the state, socialism and the Chinese nation. So, the role of culture is one of profundity and spirituality. Only by establishing cultural identity can we consolidate our identification of this great country, the Chinese nation and the unique socialist path China has taken.

The Identification of Chinese culture is shared by all ethnic groups and includes each group's self-identification. It leads to mutual-identification among different peoples. That is to say, each member of this diverse and unified family is a member of the Chinese nation whilst keeping their own names. If one only knows one's first name but not the family name, or only knows one's own people but not the big family they belong to, there will be misidentification, in which case one would only know oneself but not others or even sees oneself as above others so one would be conservative of self and rejective of others, sinking into the trap of narrow identification.

In that sense, multi-nationality is an advantage. And it's reflected not only in culture but also in the "properties" of the family, including advantages such as abundant resources, sources of river systems and ecological barriers. So, we must cherish this unified multinational state or consider ourselves lucky for being a unified multinational state with a long history. Therefore, when dealing with issues of ethnicity or cultural differences, we'd get nowhere if we treat ethnic diversity as a burden or ethnic issues as troubles, or even, treat ethnic minorities as foreigners and try to solve ethnic issues once and for all by abolishing ethnic identities or simply ignoring their existence. There were no successful precedents to follow anywhere in the world, instead, there are plenty of examples of transformation from denial to recognition. For instance, in 2014, the British government officially recognized Cornish people as a national minority group same as the Scottish, the Welsh and the Northern Irish.

We've been stressing the fact that China is a unified multinational state and the term "unified" refers the unification of the Chinese nation. Only with a unified Chinese nation can there be a unified state with territorial integrity. And "multi-national" refers to the historically existed diversity and differences among ethnic groups in language, culture and customs. To recognize and respect the differences is

the attitude of historical materialism and a precondition for a harmonious relationship among all ethnic groups.

China's basic policy on ethnic issues is to respect differences and narrow disparities. It is a principle established from both spiritual and material perspectives. It is also an important reflection of the Chinese ethnic view on ethnic matters. Narrowing disparities means narrow disparities in economic and social development. Respecting differences means to respect cultural differences in the broad sense. Both are the essence of China's ethnic policy. This respect for differences and the sense of inclusiveness are largely based on the ideas of seeing harmony in differences and seeking unification in diversity. We are to enhance the national solidarity and establish a spiritual bond of equality, solidarity, mutual-help and harmonious relationship among all members in our diverse and unified big family, in other words, our shared spiritual home.

Generally speaking, Chinese culture is the co-existence and symphony of all ethnic cultures. It is like in an orchestra where sounds of various instruments and tones, coordinated by the conductor, unite and symphonize to create one beautiful harmony. "Apply the five-tone scale to the eight natural sounds, in coordinating and harmonizing them one shall find the way to rule a country." This is what our ancestors learnt from harmony in music. In that sense, Chinese culture is more like a modern symphony that consists of each and every ethnic group and not one less. Only by performing the cadenza of the Chinese nation in a symphony of diversity can we achieve this diverse unification based on respect for differences.

This modern "symphony" of Chinese culture includes tunes and tones of all ethnic cultures. With the Communist Party as the "conductor" and the core values of Chinese socialism as main theme, the cadenza of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is being performed. This is the identification of Chinese culture, which is based on respect for differences as well as diversity and unification. And this is the spiritual convergence of the Chinese people.

Being Determined and Confident in the International Community

The 18th CPC National Congress put forth the doctrine known as the "Three Confidences", namely confidence in our chosen path, confidence in our guiding theories and confidence in our political system, which are the self-awareness we must reinforce when pursuing socialism with Chinese characteristics and building a moderately prosperous society in all respects.

In recent years, discussion on China's ethnic policy is an important subject for international intellectual community and the general public. And their basic conclusion is that there are problems with China's ethnic policy, so they, in so called "introspection", came up with a series of judgmental labels such as "the Soviet pattern", "a miscellany", "in need of adjustment" or "total failure". Meanwhile,

a series of prescriptions based on their pseudo-proposition of “depoliticization of ethnic issues” were announced: the “cultural melting pot” theory taken from the US, India and Brazil; theories of “culturalization”, “ethnic groups” and “social policies”. “The clan system” of the Republic of China period, as well as the “second-generation ethnic policy” represented by “abolishing the autonomous regions” and “abolishing ethnicities”. Such views have induced fierce disputes in the academic circle and have directly affected the practice of ethnic matters by having a quite negative influence on the relationship among ethnic groups.

Against such background, we should reconfirm the “Three Confidences” by comparing China to other countries, including confidence in our ethnic policy. To this day, the west has yet to provide the “perfect solution” for ethnic problems. Historically, when dealing with issues of races, ethnics, natives and immigrants, western nations have, for a long period of time, resorted to measures such as slavery, discrimination, separation, deporting, forced assimilation or even genocide. So, theories and practices of racism, nationalism, colonialism, chauvinism and fascism are all from the west. Even after the abolition of slavery, they still stuck to systems and policies such as “segregated but equal” (USA), “neither equal nor segregated” (Brazil) and “apartheid” (South Africa). The white supremacy ideology is deep-seated.

It was till the 1960s, under the influence of the American civil rights movement, that the western nations, driven by the politics of recognition, finally started to practice the doctrine of cultural diversity with equal-rights policies. These “equal-rights policies”, which favored ethnic minorities like negroes in matters such as education, employment and loans, were in fact very similar to the supportive measures in Chinese ethnic policies. We are not claiming that the western nations learned or borrowed from our ethnic policies but they were indeed behind China in realizing the benefit of such policies or measures when it comes to respecting differences and narrowing disparities. In other words, China is leading the world in solving ethnic problems. There is no need for us to be self-contempt, thinking we’re inferior to the west in everything.

Certainly, as for implementation of these policies and measures, there is room for progress on the effect of our systems, laws and policies designed to solve ethnic issues. It’s directly related to the fact that China is still in the primary stage of socialism. Progressiveness of theories, ideologies and system design are part of the superstructure, which must be built on a decent economic foundation. This is why the Communist Party and the state keep stressing the key role of economic development in solving ethnic issues. That is to say, we should build a firm material foundation if we are to take full advantage of our political system. Deng Xiaoping once pointed out that “poverty is not socialism”. The essential characteristic of socialism is common prosperity, which means, without common prosperity, real equality among all ethnic groups is impossible, ergo, advantages of socialism and its basic political systems like autonomy of ethnic regions won’t pan out, either. Therefore, when comparing China to other countries, we can’t ignore the most prominent of our national conditions: that China is in the primary stage of socialism. Nor can we so optimistically or even blindly believe that developed

countries in the west have already solved ethnic issues in general (races, ethnics, religions, languages, immigrants, etc.).

It's undeniable that China has some intractable ethnic problems at hand, among which separatism is the most imminent. Causes of these problems include both "historical legacies" from when China was divided by imperialist powers and actual influence of shifting international political situation, among which the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the dramatic transformation of Eastern Europe were the most critical. Based on those events, the western nations have made many predictions such as "the triumph of nationalism over communism", or "all multi-national socialist states will disintegrate after the USSR", etc. These predictions, obviously, were targeting China. And it was this very intention of using ethnic issues to tear China apart that, simultaneously (1990), gave rise to "Taiwanese independence", "Tibetan independence" and "East Turkestan".

In fact, western nations have never extricated themselves from the predicament of ethnic issues. When the socialist camp following the "Soviet Pattern" disintegrated, the western world, from a more macroscopic view, put forth the "End of History" theory, arguing that the development of capitalism may signal the endpoint of humanity's social evolution. However, the so-called Third Wave of Nationalization incited by the west had caused conflicts in many countries and regions, among which conflicts of racial, ethnic and religious origins were the most prominent. Plus, these conflicts mostly happened in developing capitalist countries, and some in the developed world, thus giving birth to the theory, which understates ideology and social system, known as the "Clash of Civilizations", a hypothesis that Confucian, Islamic and Christian civilizations will have "fault line" conflicts against each other.

The west tried to transform the Islamic world in the name of eliminating "clash of civilizations" and they carried that strategy out through wars, oppressions, humiliations and contempt. The repercussions, in return, have substantially reshaped the western world. Starting with 911, the terror went on, with the Danish comic incident, burning of the Koran and the attack on Charlie Hebdo. Evidently, the west is facing crisis with issues such as race, ethnic, religion and immigrants. Those problems didn't go away in highly-developed societies. There have been multiple cases of separatism in ethnic regions, too. Federalization of Belgium, Quebec's status as "a nation within Canada", pursuit of independence in Basque and Catalonia, the Scottish Independence referendum, those are hardly new topics. There is institutional crisis in developed countries of the west.

Since 1970, the US, Canada and Australia started practicing policies favoring cultural diversity, a trend then affected Europe and many developing capitalist nations. Today, these policies have fallen into the so-called "predicament of recognition." Successively in 2010 and 2011, the German Chancellor and the British PM officially announced the failure of cultural diversity policy. The 2014 European Human Rights Report issued by the European Commission stated that democracy, rule of law and human rights conditions in Europe today are going through an unprecedented crisis that is the worst since the end of Cold War. Europe is faced with human rights conditions including racism and racial discrimination,

corruption, human-trafficking and indulgence of hate speech. Discrimination against minorities existed in 39 European nations, police brutality in 23, exclusion and discrimination against Romani people in 23. In many European countries, poverty and high unemployment rate have aided the growth of conflicts and extremism. Over the past year, the streak of police brutality against black people have induced waves of protests in America, which came as a revelation to Americans that racism is far from being overcome in their country, and that racial issues remain unsolved.

All those examples only prove that unlike the old saying, stones from other hills won't necessarily serve to polish jade in this one. To quote President Xi Jinping: There is no such thing as a divine intervention when it comes to political systems. We can't simply conclude that we are missing something and want to borrow that just because other countries have it and we don't. Or that something must be a burden that we need to get rid of just because we have it but other countries don't. Both are cases of oversimplified and one-side thinking, which are plainly incorrect.

We do need to borrow helpful results from foreign political civilizations, but never shall we abandon the very root of Chinese political system. With a land area of 9.6 million square kilometers and a population consisting of 56 ethnic groups, where on earth will China find an existing model to follow? And who can tell us what to do? Therefore, when tackling or solving ethnic issues, we must do our due diligence even if we did draw on the experience of others, so we can have an accurate comprehension of their national conditions and the basis of their policies.

There have been propositions that, while criticizing and calling for removal of "ethnicity" from the Chinese ID card, suggest we should draw on the "Singaporean experience", which refers to a society where all ethnic groups get along peacefully and blend with each other in a shared pride of their Singaporean identity, especially the "Public Housing Plan" that provides a common residence for all ethnic groups. Now let's try and figure out how this "Singaporean experience" works. Singapore is a multiracial city state. The problems caused by race are not called ethnic issues but racial issues. The "Public Housing Plan", which is part of Singapore's "Ethnic Integration Policy", started with the "race" label on the Singaporean ID card. The communities were built according to respective proportion of the three major races. Now the Singaporean ID card bears symbols of over 90 races. For example, when a Chinese descendant marries a Malay, the parents are entitled to choosing the race for their children when applying for birth certificates. They can be Chinese, Malay Chinese or Chinese Malay. With the population of immigrants grows in Singapore, races are increasing too. And the government simply puts more labels on the ID card. Every citizen is entitled to a once-in-a-lifetime right to change their racial identity decided by their parents. If they chose not to change it the ID will stick with them for the rest of their lives. Whether you want to buy a house or enjoy any sort of race-related policies, your ID is the only proof.

Then, what is wrong with our ID card? Would we feel more Chinese had we remove ethnicity from the card? We must not resort to such reversed thinking, let alone blindly borrowing from others whatever experience we deemed good for solving ethnic issues or enhancing solidarity. We must understand what 's behind

those experiences. Singapore does have these policies and they do put labels on the ID card, in a far more complicated and specific fashion than ours. Of course, the race factor doesn't just exist on the Singapore ID card. The three major races dominate the entire society in all aspects. Road signs are printed in English, Chinese, Hindu and Malay; Food is served according to their preferences and taboos. Companies must hire, by a certain proportion, people of different races. So, the Singaporean identity, of state or nation, is based on recognition of racial diversity.

In that sense, China's ethnic policies are made out of respect for the history and are in accordance with our national conditions, as well as complying to the public opinion and reflecting the fundamental principle of unification. Back when the People's Republic was newly founded, we began to identify each ethnic group in an effort to show recognition and respect for the multinational status of our country. This was way before the Singaporean policies, which came out after violent racial conflicts. Some may believe that by removing ethnicity from the ID card we can somehow consolidate identification of the Chinese nation or even eliminate ethnic issues for good as in the "Singaporean experience". Not only is that a naïve self-fooling illusion but it's far from the actual situation of Singaporean. Moreover, by simply removing ethnicity from the ID card, can we really get rid of discriminative regulations, which have been repeatedly criticized by the central government, such as special security check or inspection upon check-in against individuals of certain ethnic groups? Or, had we remove ethnicity from the ID card, is it still necessary for us to promote exchange, communication, intermingling and shared living space among all ethnic groups? What path and pattern a country follows in solving ethnic issues are the result of the combined influence of factors such as national conditions, history, economic/social situation and cultural traditions. As we stress the importance of the Three Confidences, the first task is to insist on solving ethnic issues on our own terms.

Stay firmly on the correct path of tackling ethnic issues with solutions of Chinese characteristics. Explore and innovate. Those are significant political principles elucidated by Xi Jinping himself at the 2014 Central Ethnic Work Conference. This path, which is based on respect for history and is in accordance with our national conditions as well as complying to the public opinion, is a great achievement made by generations of CPC members through their practice of tackling ethnic issues. It is an achievement that we must cherish. Even if our goal isn't fully achieved in anyway, it is only because the economic foundation supporting the advantages of our political system hasn't reached an ideal level. So, we must have a proper view of our national conditions. We shall not feel complacent because of our achievements, nor shall we think we're inferior and feel self-contempt or even blindly follow others because the advantages of our political system haven't panned out due to inadequate support from economical/social development.

Domestic Ethnic Policy Is an Advantage When Pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative can be summarized as a master plan for China's all-directional opening-up, which includes "the Road, the Belt, the Corridors and the Bridge." The Corridors refer to three corridors, namely China-India-Bangladesh, China-Pakistan and China-Mongolia-Russia. And the Bridge is the continental bridge connecting Europe and Asia. This master plan of opening-up is rooted in China's neighboring areas and, by establishing a free trade zone among countries along the Belt and Road, aims to accelerate construction of infrastructure and realize connectivity. The ultimate goal is to achieve a development of mutual-benefit and shared success with tighter cooperation, more convenient exchanges and more integrated interests.

In 2010, the China-ASEAN Free Trade Zone was officially established. It is the most populous free trade zone in the world, with a population of nearly two billion, a total trade volume of six trillion and a total GDP of 9 trillion USD. On top of that, China has signed free trade agreements with Singapore, Pakistan, New Zealand, Chile, Peru and Costa Rica. Another five free trade zones are under negotiation respectively with the Gulf Cooperation Council, Australia, Norway, Iceland and Switzerland. Substantive talks on China-Australia and China-South Korea free trade zones have ended and await official signing.

Accelerating implementation of the free trade zone strategy is an important part in a new round of China's opening-up, which aims to build a new system of open economy and to gain the upper hand in economic development and international competition by opening up actively. Supported by neighboring areas, a high-standard global network of free trade zones is to be formed. Entering the new century, world oil gas resources have been shifting gradually to Middle East, Central Asia, Russia and the Americas in terms of supply and export, with the US, Europe and Asia-Pacific being the largest consumers. Those countries and regions, such as Middle East, Central Asia, Russia, Asia-Pacific and Europe, overlap with some of those along the Energy Silk Road, which is part of the Belt and Road.

As is known to all, energy is both the driving force and the bottleneck for development. China has the third largest energy production in the world but its per-capita amount is far below the world average. China's per-capita proven reserves are only as 33% of the world average. Since 1992, the gap between production and consumption in China has been growing increasingly. The imbalance between energy consumption and supply is becoming more and more obvious. According a projection by the IEA, 68% of China's total oil demand will rely on export by 2020. China is the world's largest importer of coals. And as shown by EIA's data, in 2012 China had overtaken the US as the largest net importer of oil in the world. Currently, over 60% of China's oil import comes from turbulent Middle East and North Africa. And most of that oil comes to China through centralized transportation at sea. Four fifth of all crude oil transportation goes through the Strait of Malacca so China is faced with the Malacca Dilemma, which hampers China's

energy security. The open development of the Belt and Road Initiative aims to achieve “barrier-free” mutually-beneficial cooperation and shared prosperity between China and the world.

Some 2000 years ago, industrious and brave people of Eurasia had explored and discovered multiple routes of trade and cultural exchange among civilizations in Asia, Europe and African. The routes were then called by a joint name, the Silk Road. For thousands of years, the Silk Road spirits, of peaceful cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual-interest and shared prosperity, have been passed on for generations and greatly propelled the progress of human civilization. It was a significant connection that facilitated prosperity and development of countries along the routes as well as a symbol of exchange and cooperation between east and west. It is a historical and cultural legacy shared by the entire world.

As stated in *Vision and Action*, the initiative will enhance people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and mutual learning among the peoples of the relevant countries, and enable them to understand, trust and respect each other and live in harmony, peace and prosperity. The Initiative is harmonious and inclusive. It advocates tolerance among civilizations, respects the paths and modes of development chosen by different countries, and supports dialogues among different civilizations on the principles of seeking common ground while shelving differences and drawing on each other’s strengths, so that all countries can coexist in peace for common prosperity.

People-to-people bond provides the public support for implementing the Initiative. We should carry forward the spirit of friendly cooperation of the Silk Road by promoting extensive cultural and academic exchanges, personnel exchanges and cooperation, media cooperation, youth and women exchanges and volunteer services, so as to win public support for deepening bilateral and multi-lateral cooperation. All efforts to enhance people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and mutual learning among the peoples of the relevant countries, and enable them to understand, trust and respect each other and live in harmony, peace and prosperity are important cultural measures demonstrating a country’s soft power. We can negotiate and build roads and reach agreements but what really matters is the people to people bond.

People to people bond is one of many crucial propellers for the building of the Belt and Road as well as the domestic and diplomatic condition for two-way opening-up. The most powerful and effective bond between peoples is culture and culture includes language. How can we establish a people to people bond if we can’t even speak the same language? President Xi Jinping stressed at last year’s Central Ethnic Work Conference that the most critical measure for solving ethnic problems and handling ethnic affairs is solidarity and the most useful one is having support of the people. Will of the people is the ultimate politics. Solidarity is all about sincere and honest communication. Language is a crucial link in people to people bond. Without speaking the same language people can’t communicate so they can’t understand and therefore can’t reach agreements. This is a very important and practical issue for ethnic regions in two-way opening-up.

People to people bond is the principle of practice for solving ethnic problems with Chinese solutions. It reflects characteristic of those solutions such as respect for history, compliance with national conditions and public opinion. We must devise the opening-up of the Belt and Road and the Corridors in accordance with our ethnic policies. Ethnic minorities on the border have, for historical reasons, a traditional relationship with neighboring countries and regions. And that relationship is consisted of bonds through language, culture, customs and religion.

For example, owing to its diversity in ethnicity, culture, language and religion, Xinjiang is well-connected with nations in central and west Asia, even with others in the Muslim world. Is this an advantage or disadvantage for China? Ethnic minorities who inherit those cultures should play a bigger role in establishing people to people bond during the opening-up process in the building of the Belt and Road.



Xinjiang abounds with fruits

Opening-up of the Belt and Road will induce unprecedented transformation of position for ethnic minorities on the border. Meanwhile, we're faced with challenges in regional economic and social development, especially development and progress of all ethnic groups. As the core area of two-way opening-up, we need to reach out to the world and invite them in whilst dealing with infiltration and impact of hostile forces and the Three Evils. This requires us to stay firmly on the right path of solving ethnic problems with Chinese solutions and at first fully implement, domestically, the advanced ideas of China's ethnic policies.

Meanwhile, we'll cultivate a team of industrial workers and other talents from ethnic groups on the border, especially minorities so they can become developers and builders, as well as practitioners of two-way opening-up. This is a critical advantage of people to people bond. China's ethnic policies are highlighted

by the respect for differences and efforts to narrow disparities. Implementation of the party's ethnic policies is the fundamental guarantee for accelerating economic and social development of ethnic regions on the border and the foundation for the advanced ideas of China's ethnic policies to spread outward through the building of the Belt and Road.

We often say that diplomacy is the extension of domestic affairs. Ideas and principles of China's ethnic policies, which are part of our domestic affairs, can be extended to the practice of opening-up as well. A good example would be the practice of Chinese petroleum companies in Central Asia. For instance, in Turkmenistan, Chinese petroleum companies operated in a highly localized fashion with a 3–7 ratio of Chinese and local employees. They also made a great effort training managers and workers. Not only do Chinese companies show great respect for local culture, customs and habits, but they also learn the language and make contributions to public welfare such as livelihood issues. And that's how people to people bond can generate economic and social benefits. These practices are the very essence of China's ethnic policies, which are part of our domestic affairs. And these successful examples go to prove the effectiveness and validity of China's ethnic policies. Meanwhile, this requires our ethnic policies to be better and more thoroughly implemented domestically, especially in border regions inhabited by ethnic minorities so that the success of our domestic policies will have a positive influence on the Belt and Road endeavors. In retrospect, we must ask ourselves the following questions. How localized were our state-owned enterprises when exploring resources in ethnic regions on the border? Have they encouraged employees to learn the language or respect the culture of ethnic minorities? Have they spent time and money to train and recruit local peasants and herders as employees of state-owned enterprises? If diplomacy is the extension of domestic affairs then ethnic policies, which are part of our domestic affairs, shouldn't be another case of "export rejects".

In response to a question raised by a certain Islamic country when Chinese authorities were introducing the Belt and Road vision to foreign ambassadors and corporations, one of them said, as we tried to explain the ideas of partnership and mutual-learning, that "China will obtain some experience in associating with Muslim people from this cooperation." That sounded unbelievable. In China, there are ten ethnic groups who have Islamic faith and the total Muslim population is over 20 million, which is not a small figure. The ten ethnic minority groups are members of the Chinese nation. Out intertwined destiny has stood the test of time in a course of millenniums. Couldn't that have given us "some experience in associating with Muslim people"? Ethnic diversity is an advantage in our development just as diversity in religion is also an advantage in China's opening-up. Grasp of ethnic and religious policies is of great importance in the opening-up of the Belt and Road. It's not that we lack experience in this field but we should extend our experience in ethnic solidarity and harmonious co-existence of religions to our opening-up practice.

President Xi Jinping once pointed out, by quoting Sima Qian's comment on the history of Pre-Qin, Qin and Han dynasties, that "Uprisings were normally started in the Southeast but fruits were gained by those in the Northwest." and as for building

the Belt and Road, that “it is great news for ethnic regions, especially those on the border. We must thoroughly carry out the western development strategy and accelerate the pace of opening-up and development of border regions so as to explore new space for our country’s development.” This “new space” includes the advantage of cultural diversity of ethnic regions on the border as well as the advantage of people to people bond in people-oriented development pursued by all ethnic groups who inherit that cultural diversity. In that sense, the basic principles of respecting differences and narrowing disparities in China’s ethnic policies are completely compatible with the humanism and spirit of mutual benefit advocated by the Belt and Road Initiative.

In conclusion, by building the Belt and Road, China aims to build a community of shared-interest that is interconnected, open and inclusive. The core spirits of this community are wide consultation, joint contribution and shared benefit instead of seeking dominance in regional affairs or geopolitics. Countries along the routes are not pieces but chess players. Diplomacy is the extension of domestic affairs, effectiveness of which will determine success or failure of the opening-up. We will firmly and persistently implement decisions made by the Central Ethnic Work Conference, and carry forward building of the Belt and Road, as part of the “Four Comprehensives” strategy. Cultural diversity is the most important soft power for border regions and basic principles of China’s ethnic policies are crucial advantages in the opening-up.



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