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Diplomacy, Three Global Initiatives and The Common Destiny of Humankind

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1.0 Introduction

UNESCO and the Government of Malaysia signed an agreement in 2008 to establish the International Science, Technology and Innovation Centre for South-South Cooperation (ISTIC) in Kuala Lumpur as an UNESCO Category 2 Centre. I was appointed as the founding Chairman of ISTIC Governing Board. ISTIC is Malaysia's contribution to help South countries uplift themselves through science, technology and innovation. By 2016, more than 2500 scientists, engineers and technologists from South countries had participated in ISTIC programs in Malaysia and throughout the developing countries. I called them ISTIC Alumni. I then gathered together about 200 of the most eminent ISTIC Alumni in G77+China to set up the Academy of Engineering and Technology of the Developing World (ATEDEW) as an NGO registered in Malaysia to help developing countries achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals through the Belt and Road Initiative BRI, the three Global Initiatives and the Common Destiny of Humankind.

2.0 Diplomacy

2025 is the 80th Anniversary of the Founding of the United Nations. The UN is the greatest achievement of global diplomacy in human history. The UN was established by the signing of her Charter on 26 June 1945 by her founding members. The Preamble of the UN Charter states that "We, the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small…." In my opinion, This encapsulates the ultimate objective of Diplomacy as peace on earth for all humankind. The oft-quoted saying of Winston Churchill " To jaw jaw is always better than war war" must embody the desired practice of diplomacy in seeking peace and avoiding war through negotiation.

2025 is also the 80th Anniversary of the Surrender of Japan that ended the Second World War. This reminds me of the greatest contribution to the ending of the war against Japan by hundreds of famous scientists working together to create the atomic bomb in the Manhattan Project. However whether this was a positive science diplomacy in ending the Second World War by dropping two atomic bombs on Japan in the short terms and stopping major wars between big powers by mutual nuclear deterrence in the medium term or is the dark side of science diplomacy in unleashing this horrendous weapon of mass destruction with more and more countries possessing the nuclear weapon in the long term remains a question of dispute.

Ironically June 2025 witnessed the unprovoked bombing of Iran by Israel and USA in total violation of the UN Charter. Genocide continues unabated in Gaza. I do not find science diplomacy having any effect against such crime against humanity. I contrast this with what was done by the West in almost universal condemnation against the slaughter of 600 million Jews by Nazi Germany.

The use of brute force is but an important facet of the self-centered and selfish isolationism by USA and some of her Western allies that threatens to destroy the multilateral rule-based order with the United Nations as its core. USA cannot accept the truth that it no longer dominates the world. In particular, it must by hook and crook endeavour to stop the inevitable rise of China by demonizing China with lies and falsehood repeatedly through its government agencies and its media. USA also willfully applies economic sanctions and tariffs to all nations on earth, threatening to damage the social, economic and environmental well-being of the world and to keep developing countries firmly in the poverty trap.

Under the present circumstance, I cannot see how science diplomacy can play any role in influencing world events that threaten peace on earth. Perhaps, scientists can teach diplomats to seek truth from facts and to base their statements on evidence as per scientific pursuit. If achieved, this will at least reduce the rising temperature and tension of potential conflicts, generated by loud and false accusations hurled at one another. Perhaps IISDS will take the lead with ASEAN diplomats.

3.0 The Global Development Initiative

Fortunately, despite all sanctions and tariffs, China continues her spectacular rise from poverty in the 1980s to becoming the 2nd largest economy in the world. China will become the largest economy of the world in the next decade. China is leading the Global South to defend the rule-based multilateralism of the world against the isolationism of USA and some of her allies. China is opening up her vast market to the Global South; has reduced tariffs on all imports from Africa to zero and has led in reducing tariffs among RCEP (ASEAN+5) member countries.

3.1 UN Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations General Assembly in 2016 unanimously adopted the UN Post-2015 Development Agenda with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals for all member nations to achieve by 2030.

In my opinion, the 17 SDGs are too comprehensive and all-embracing for most developing countries with limited resources and human capital to achieve by 2030.

For high income developing countries like Malaysia, they should concentrate on achieving the first five important SDGs, namely:

SDG No.1 No Poverty;
SDG No.2 Zero
Hunger;
SDG No.3 Good Health and Well Being;
SDG No.4 Quality Education;
SDG No.5 Gender Equality.

However, I am afraid even the above five SDGs are beyond the reach of most developing countries. They must then devote all their resources to achieve SDG No.1 "No Poverty". Poverty is the root cause of all the social, economic and environmental ills in any nation, region and the world.

3.2 China and Poverty Eradication

In my opinion, China's spectacular rise in the last three decades has been anchored by first eradicating poverty. China has been able to lift 800 million of her population in the most remote regions out of poverty by 2021. This is a feat unparalleled in the history of the world. What is even more amazing is that the 800 million people have joined China's society of moderate prosperity (小康社会). China has thus been able to take care of all the basic needs of her population, like clothing, food, housing, and transport (衣食住行) as well as access to education, basic medical services, and gainful employment even in her remotest rural regions. In the process, China has been improving her environment, turning desert into grassland, forest and farmland, cleaning up her rivers and lakes, and conserving her wetland, thus protecting its flora and fauna.

China's poverty eradication success has been anchored by the building of physical and virtual infrastructure throughout the length and breadth of China. There is an old Chinese saying often quoted by President Xi Jinping: "To get rich, build roads first" (要想富先修路).

As the Chinese people have become more prosperous, they are able to devote resources to improving their quality of living, as per Chinese saying (琴棋书画) or "music, chess, book, painting".

The G20 Summit Meeting in Rio, Brazil November 2024 established the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty. This emphasizes the lack of progress in global poverty eradication just 6 years before the SDG deadline of 2030. This vindicates China's priority in poverty eradication. In my opinion, the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty would need the committed support of China to get off the ground!

The World Bank Report Four Decades of Poverty Reduction in China: Drivers, Insights for the World, and the Way Ahead dated 2022 also vindicates China's success in poverty eradication. The Report urges the developing world to learn from China. In fact, China is sharing her spectacular development success with the rest of the world through her visionary Belt and Road Initiative BRI.

In China's spectacular poverty eradication success, villages in remote regions have been the main beneficiary. They have become prosperous and many of their cottage industries have become integral parts of China's domestic supply chain and through broadband internet, have even become part of China's global supply chain. Through poverty eradication, China has achieved not only the first five SDGs, but also most of the other twelve SDGs.

In my opinion, one of the most important factors in the uplift of social, economic, and environmental conditions of villages in China has been the return of university-trained youth to their home villages. They have applied their knowledge, their urban commercial and financial skills, and their urban work experience to revive agriculture, horticulture and traditional cuisine and set up profitable downstream production chain with modern branding and packaging. They have also beautified their villages, emphasized their custom and culture, their song and dance to make them thriving tourist destinations.

In contrast, villages in most developing countries are in sharp decline due to lack of education and job opportunities for their youth, forcing them to go to cities in search of work. Their villages are ageing and their social, economic and environmental conditions are worsening day by day. Governments in Belt and Road countries are conscious of the urgent challenge of arresting rural-urban migration and have devoted much attention and effort to try to meet the challenge without much success.

I believe a solution will be for villages and villagers from Belt and Road countries to learn directly from their counterparts in China.

3.3 Proposal for Belt and Road Friendship Villages Forum

I led a Malaysian delegation to Ningxia 6-9 June 2025 to explore the possibility of establishing a Friendship Villages Forum of Belt and Road countries along the lines of Ningxia International Friendship Cities Forum. The visit was during the Ningxia Muslim Holiday of Korban. The nine-member Malaysian delegation comprise representatives from AETDEW, the Malaysia-China Friendship Association (PPMC), University Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) and villages from Perak State.

The main objective of the Belt and Road Friendship Villages Forum will be for villages in Belt and Road countries to learn about the successful experiences of Chinese villages in poverty eradication and apply them to uplift their own villages.

In hectic 3 days, we visited Runfeng and Haoyuan Villages in Yichuan; Ningxia University; Goji Farm and Goji Product Research and Development Centre. We advanced with positive response from Ningxia the concept of collaboration between Ningxia and Perak State, Malaysia; Yinchuan and Ipoh, capital city of Perak; Ningxia University and UTAR; and Runfeng/HaoyuanVillages in Ningxia and Labu Kubong/ Tanjung Tualang Villages in Perak.

The Friendship Villages Forum of Belt and Road countries will have Ningxia and Malaysia as the twin hubs. Ningxia has thousands of years of close relations with the Land Silk Road through Central Asia since the Han Dynasty and the Tang Dynasty. Malacca in Malaysia was the most important port associated with the seven epic voyages of Muslim Admiral Zheng He to S.E. Asia, Indian Ocean, Arabia and East Africa in the Ming Dynasty.

A return visit of Ningxia delegation to Malaysia is planned in September-October 2025 to firm up the Belt and Road Friendship Villages Forum with Ningxia, China and Perak, Malaysia as the twin hubs.

3.4 The Belt and Road Initiative

The consciousness in the Global South about the shared values of mutually beneficial social, economic and environmental development has been awakened by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that was announced by President Xi Jinping in Kazakhstan and Indonesia in 2013 on the Land Silk Road Economic Belt in the former and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in the latter.

Spanning thousands of miles starting from the Han Dynasty, the ancient Land and Maritime Silk Roads

embodied the spirit of cooperation, mutual learning, and mutual benefit among the peoples of China, the Indian Subcontinent, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe in the Land Silk Road; and among the peoples of China, Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and East Africa through the Maritime Silk Road.

I repeat, the foundation of China's success in eradicating poverty is its extensive and inclusive physical and virtual infrastructure. Ultra-modern highways, high speed rail, ports, airports and 5G broadband internet assure that the most remote villages are becoming part of China's global supply chain.

China's physical and virtual infrastructure development is anchored by China's world-leading scientific, engineering, and technology achievements and innovations such as:

(i) High- speed rail networks;
(ii) Cross- sea bridges;
(iii) Multi- purpose water resource dams and reservoirs;
(iv) South- to- North Water Diversion Project;
(v) Tunnelling;
(vi) Broadband 5.5G network;
(vii) Supercomputers;
(viii) Aerospace development of rocket, spacecraft, Mars rover and space station;
(ix) Modern airports;
(x) Modern and Smart Ports;
(xi) Shipbuilding and transportation;
(xii) Rare earth and new materials industry;
(xiii) Aircraft development;
(xiv) Solar photovoltaics,wind turbines,nuclear power and thorium 4th generation reactors;
(xv) Robotics and humanoid robots (Unitree);
(xvi) Drones;
(xvii) Electric vehicles and energy storage batteries;
(xviii) Short messaging systems, (Tiktok, Rednote) ;
(xix)Open-source AI platform, (Deepseek) .

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) "Critical Tech Tracker" found China is beating the United States in 37 of 44 technologies which are likely to propel innovation, growth and military power in coming decades, including artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology, advanced manufacturing, and quantum technology.

Technology	Lead country	Technology monopoly risk
Advanced materials and manufacturing		
1. Nanoscale materials and manufacturing	China	high
2. Coatings	China	high
3. Smart materials	China	medium
4. Advanced composite materials	China	medium
5. Novel metamaterials	China	medium
6. High-specification machining processes	China	medium
7. Advanced explosives and energetic materials	China	medium
8. Critical minerals extraction and processing	China	low
9. Advanced magnets and superconductors	China	low
10. Advanced protection	China	low
11. Continuous flow chemical synthesis	China	low
12. Additive manufacturing (incl. 3D printing)	China	low
Artificial intelligence, computing and communications		
13. Advanced radiofrequency communications (incl. 5G and 6G)	China	high
14. Advanced optical communications	China	medium
15. Artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms and hardware accelerators	China	medium
16. Distributed ledgers	China	medium
17. Advanced data analytics	China	medium
18. Machine learning (incl. neural networks and deep learning)	China	low
19. Protective cybersecurity technologies	China	low
20. High performance computing	USA	low
21. Advanced integrated circuit design and fabrication	USA	low
22. Natural language processing (incl. speech and text recognition and analysis)	USA	low
Energy and environment		
23. Hydrogen and ammonia for power	China	high
24. Supercapacitors	China	high
25. Electric batteries	China	high
26. Photovoltaics	China	medium
27. Nuclear waste management and recycling	China	medium
28. Directed energy technologies	China	medium
29. Biofuels	China	low
30. Nuclear energy	China	low
Quantum		
31. Quantum computing	USA	medium
32. Post-quantum cryptography	China	low
33. Quantum communications (incl. quantum key distribution)	China	low
34. Quantum sensors	China	low
Biotechnology, gene technology and vaccines		
35. Synthetic biology	China	high
36. Biological manufacturing	China	medium
37. Vaccines and medical countermeasures	USA	medium
Sensing, timing and navigation		
38. Photonic sensors	China	high
Defence, space, robotics and transportation		
39. Advanced aircraft engines (incl. hypersonics)	China	medium
40. Drones, swarming and collaborative robots	China	medium
41. Small satellites	USA	low
42. Autonomous systems operation technology	China	low
43. Advanced robotics	China	low
44. Space launch systems	USA	low

It is China's well-functioning infrastructure and smart design, manufacturing and construction that are the foundation of China's economic, social and environmental achievements, supporting China to become "world factory with Chinese characteristics" and "world market with Chinese characteristics."

Nothing symbolizes the Land Silk Road Economic Belt more than the China-Europe freight rail service, replacing camels with trains. The first China-Europe freight train was launched in Chongqing in southwest China in March 2011. By the end of February 2024, this China-Europe freight train service had connected 120 Chinese cities with 219 cities in 25 European countries. The China-Europe freight train service has completed 90,000 train trips, transporting more than 8.7 million containers of goods worth more than US$380.0 billion. It is truly a lifeline for landlocked countries in Central Asia, Eastern Europe and even Western Europe.

Nothing symbolizes the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road more than the fleet of Chinese container ships that is the world's largest fleet, plying the seven seas and making landfalls into ports in the developing world that are equipped with intelligent loading, unloading and port management systems supplied by Chinese companies.

The BRI has delivered fruitful outcomes and won widespread support and participation by the developing world. It has created jobs, improved physical and virtual infrastructure, and promoted common development, social and economic uplift in developing countries. The BRI has also brought many direct and tangible benefits to the peoples of participating countries by improving agriculture and horticulture by scientific methods, building hospitals, clinics, houses, stadiums, schools and colleges etc. BRI has enhanced people-to-people exchange and interaction by China offering thousands of scholarships to Belt and Road developing countries.

BRI has truly laid the solid foundation of the Global Development Initiative, announced by President Xi in 2021.

3.5 Proposal for South-South Institute for Infrastructure Maintenance (SSIIM)

Infrastructure projects abound in all developing countries that are designed, manufactured and constructed according to Chinese engineering and technology.

Chinese construction corporations complete infrastructure projects in developing countries typically in three to five years. Indigenous engineers and technicians in developing countries have to operate and maintain these costly infrastructure assets typically in twenty to forty years. It is thus urgent that China must help to train these indigenous engineers and technicians in the operation and maintenance of infrastructure assets and help set up training centres in developing countries as an integral part of BRI.

ISTIC under my chairmanship conducted many training workshops in Malaysia, India, Nairobi, Khartoum, and Abuja on the maintenance of infrastructure. Malaysia is fortunate to have good physical infrastructure assets that are in good operation and maintenance. These training workshops were very popular. ISTIC was supported by all engineering institutions and engineering boards and construction associations.

I have therefore proposed SSIIM registered as a program of AETDEW in Malaysia to continue the maintenance of infrastructure program.

As China leads the world in engineering standards, project design, equipment manufacture, project construction and project operation and maintenance through the application of artificial intelligence and related digital technologies, SSIIM must have China's participation in the provision of trainers, training manuals and training kits etc in order for engineers and technicians in Belt and Road countries to keep abreast of engineering and technological progress.

Through the voluntary participation of Chinese AETDEW Fellows and their organisations, AETDEW/IEM training workshops in operation and maintenance of railway systems and big data centres have been held in Malaysia in 2024 and 2025. More training workshops on operation and maintenance of highrise building facilities and other engineering sectors are being planned. Preliminary approach has been made on the feasibility of conducting sustainable railway engineering training workshop in Nigeria.

The most encouraging development is with the Xiaomi-led Next Generation Intelligent Hardware Technology Industry-Education Integration Community in China. I led an AETDEW delegation to witness the launch of the Community in Guiyang May 2024. AETDEW will be helping the Community to set up AI Internet of Things Training Institutes in Indonesia and Malaysia in 2025. Eight other training institutes will be set up in Asia and Africa in the next five years.

In this AI era, I believe employment and wealth creation opportunities will increasingly be for TVET graduates in Belt and Road countries. It is most important that AI is taught from primary and secondary schools, through tertiary education institutions to life-long professional training courses in professional institutions. AETDEW has started AI Literacy training workshop for ASEAN school teachers in Malaysia with AETDEW Fellows from China as expert trainers. AETDEW Malaysia-China AI School Teacher Exchange program will be inaugurated in 2026.

4.0 The Global Security Initiative

The Global Security Initiative was announced by President Xi Jinping in 2022.

4.1 The Needham Dilemma

At the start of the eighteenth century, China was the leading civilization on earth and seemed set to continue in this role. China had the largest population, an advanced system of administration, the largest trade and the greatest wealth. China in 1820 represented one third of the whole world economy. China had used her great inventions of paper, printing, the compass and gunpowder to great effect. No nation could seriously rival China's armed services, including navy. And yet, Europe quickly caught up and overtook China. The question as to why China did not remain pre-eminent is called the "Needham Dilemma". Professor Joseph Needham was the greatest scholar of the history of science and technology in China and initiated the massive multi-volume "Science and Civilization in China".

There are many scholastic answers to the Needham Dilemma. In my opinion, China's culture was steeped in Confucian belief of absolute obedience to the Emperor, however brutal and corruption.

The Song dynasty of China (960-1279AD) witnessed huge scientific developments, a flourishing of the arts and a rise in trade guilds, using paper currency; public education; and social welfare. The Song Dynasty, along with its predecessor, the Tang Dynasty (618-906AD), is considered a defining cultural epoch in the history of China. During the Song dynasty, China witnessed the advent of countless new inventions as well as the popularisation and refinement of existing technologies. The eight outstanding innovations were:

1 Movable Type Printing
2. Paper Money
3. Gunpowder
4. The Compass
5. Water Driven Astronomical Clock Tower
6. The Armillary Sphere
7. The Star Chart
8. Solar Terms Calendar

The Song Dynasty with its government-owned ship building industry laid the foundation of China's oceanic trade and diplomacy through the Yuan Dynasty to the apex of Admiral Zheng He (1371-1433 AD) with his seven epic voyages with some 120 ships and 20000 officers, sailors and soldiers to S.E.Asia, Indian Ocean, Arabia and East Africa in the Ming Dynasty. By comparison, Christopher Columbus voyage to the New World consisted of 3 ships with his flagship Santa Maria about one-fifth the size of Zheng He's flagship.

Unfortunately, the Song Dynasty overemphasized civilian administration and neglected its military. The Song Dynasty was subjected to frequent attacks and defeats by the nomadic tribes from the North. It was ultimately conquered by the Mongolian Kublai Khan, who set up the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1364AD). After Zheng He's last voyage (1433AD), the Ming Emperor ordered the total destruction of all his ships and closed the coast of China from oceanic trade!

In Scotland, James Watt improved the steam engine in 1760AD and ushered in the first industrial revolution with his steam engines powering factories, mills and locomotives. By powering ships and putting guns on ships, Britain overtook Portugal, Spain and Holland in colonizing the developing world for raw materials and human slaves. Britain led the West including Japan to reduce many developing countries, including China to colonial or semi-colonial status for more than two centuries. In the case of China, it lasted from the first opium war (1839-1842AD) to the end of the Second World War in 1945.

4.2 China Looking Seawards

After the hundred years of humiliation, China has realised that military power is essential for her national security and well-being of her people. China has built a blue ocean navy equipped with fighters, rockets and missiles. It is more than adequate to assure her territorial integrity and counter any military challenge from abroad.

China has land border with 14 countries. China has agreed on the delineation of border by treaty with all her land neighbors with the exception of India. Land security is also assured collectively by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The Global Security Initiative is widely regarded as a military and defence initiative. However, energy security and food security are also very important. In China's case, the continued supply is dependent on freedom of navigation of the high seas for global commerce and trade.

China's foreign trade hit a record high in total value in 2024. According to China's General Administration of Customs, the nation's total goods imports and exports in yuan reached 43.85 trillion yuan (about 6.1 trillion U.S. dollars) in 2024. The ocean carries about 60% of China's foreign merchandise trade.

China is today one of the world's dominant forces in the global maritime industry. In terms of fleet size, China commands one of the largest merchant fleets globally, encompassing bulk carriers, container ships, LNG tankers, oil tankers and cruise ships. Key shipping routes like the Asia-Europe and Asia-North America sea lanes are critical to China's economy. Container shipping is particularly significant, as China is the world's largest exporter of goods. Ports like Shanghai, Ningbo, and Shenzhen are consistently ranked among the busiest container ports globally. China is also a world leader in shipbuilding. China has heavily invested in developing state-of-the-art port facilities, with 7 of the top 10 busiest ports in the world located in China. Chinese ports are at the forefront of technological innovation, with increasing levels of automation and digitalization.

China's port development strategy is closely linked to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to enhance connectivity between Asia, Europe, and Africa. Chinese port operators have extended their influence globally, acquiring stakes in foreign ports such as Piraeus, Greece; Gwadar, Pakistan; Cancay, Peru; Hambantota, Sri Lanka; Darwin, Australia; Kyaukphyu, Myanmar; Doraleh, Djibouti; and Kuantan, Malaysia.

China's rising naval might and her dominance of global maritime trade has been much maligned by the West. They raise alarm and fear at China's so-called imperialist ambition to colonize Belt and Road countries militarily and economically.

In my opinion, China's Global Security Initiative must be explained to the common people of the Global South as China's contribution to their social, economic and environmental uplift. It is underpinned by Chinese values in her relations with Belt and Road countries, such as righteousness (义), trustworthiness (信), sincerity (诚), fraternal duty (悌), wisdom (智), and propriety (礼).

4.3 Proposal for an Alliance of Port Cities in 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

US President Trump has repeatedly declared he will re-occupy the Panama Canal militarily and the Pentagon has hinted that US Navy is planning to stop and board cargo ships in the Straits of Malacca. These measures are obviously aimed at preventing China from receiving vital supplies by sea.

I suggest that China seriously considers forming an alliance of port cities in the countries along the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to counter the above threats against freedom of navigation in important sea lanes for commerce and trade. As in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization for the Land Silk Road Economic Belt, security of the sea lanes is the collective responsibility of the countries along the 21st Century Maritime Silk Roads, especially their important port cities.

Ports in the ancient Maritime Silk Road associated with the two most famous Belt and Road travellers, Zheng He and Ibn Batutta are: Nanjing, China; Quanzhou, China; Guangzhou, China; Samarang, Indonesia; Malacca, Malaysia; Hormuz, Iran; Dhofar, Oman; Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; Lamu, Kenya; Tangier, Morocco; Algiers, Algeria; Carthage, Tunisia; Alexandria, Egypt; Istanbul, Turkey; Basra, Iraq; Calicut, India; and Mali, Maldives.

Important ports in the 21st Maritime Silk Road are: Gwadar, Pakistan; Piraeus, Greece; Cancay, Peru; Hambantota, Sri Lanka; Kuantan, Malaysia; Kuwait, Kuwait; Dubai, UAE; Doha, Qatar, Bahrain, Bahrain; Lagos; Nigeria. Dolerah, Djibouti; Kyaukphyu, Myanmar; Shanghai, China; Ningbo, China; and Shenzhen, China.

Some of these port cities can form the initial members of the Alliance of Port Cities in the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

5.0 The Global Civilization Initiative

Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Civilization Initiative in 2023. This is the third global initiative of President Xi after the Global Development Initiative in 2021 and the Global Security Initiative in 2022. President Xi called for respecting the diversity of civilizations, advocating the common values of humanity, valuing the inheritance and innovation of civilizations, and strengthening international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation. In spite of differences in histories, cultures, political systems and development phases, countries around the world share the common aspiration for peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom.

5.1 Fusion of One Belt One Road Civilisations Education Curriculum Project

To assure the achievement of the Global Civilization Initiative, it is most important for the common people, children, and youth of all countries, including China, to appreciate the contributions of other civilizations to their own. Chinese civilization has been an amalgamation of indigenous Confucianism and Taoism with inputs from foreign Buddhist, Christian and Islam religions; Greek, Roman, Persian and Turkish philosophies; and Western capitalism and socialism.

There is no better place to start than to know, understand, and appreciate the civilizations in Belt and Road countries.

The **"**Fusion of One Belt One Road Civilisations Education Curriculum**"** Handbook for school teachers and students in Belt and Road countries was one such effort. The Fusion of One Belt One Road Civilisations Education Curriculum Project was initiated by me when I was the chairman of the Global Council of the Inter-Academy Partnership Science Education Program (IAP SEP). This Project took four years. It was essentially a Malaysia-China project.

The Fusion of One Belt One Road Civilisations Education Curriculum Handbook is divided into two Parts. The first Part covers the Land Silk Road, telling the story of the great Muslim Moroccan traveller and philosopher Ibn Battuta (1304-1369AD). This Part was carried out by the Southeast University, Nanjing, China.

The second Part covers the Maritime Silk Road, telling the story of the seven epic voyages of the famous Chinese Muslim Admiral Zheng He (1371-1435AD) from China to Southeast Asia, Arabia, and East Africa. This Part was undertaken out by curriculum experts from the Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

As The Handbook is a project of IAP SEP, it emphasizes the scientific, engineering and technological achievements in Belt and Road civilizations. Its lessons cover water resource installations for irrigation in the desert like water wheel and the karez underground irrigation system; water clock and astronomical instruments; Chinese and Islamic building systems; navigation aids for land and sea travel; Chinese and Arab sailing ships, monsoon wind, and the spices. Simple classroom experiments illustrating the above devices and installations are included in the Handbook.

One Belt One Road Fusion of Civilisations Education Curriculum English version

One Belt One Road Fusion of Civilisations Education Curriculum Chinese version

The 170-page Handbook in English and Chinese can be downloaded from the links above.

5.2 Shortcomings in Belt and Road Civilizations Narratives

In telling the stories of the Land Silk Road Economic Belt from the Chinese perspective, main focus has been on China's westward ventures from her heart land, such as the diplomatic mission of Zhang Qian (195-114 BC) in the Han Dynasty to Tajikistan, and Xuanzang (602-664 BC) in the Tang Dynasty seeking Buddhist scriptures from India. In fact, no Chinese merchants ventured out of Central Asia to Europe until the Mongol invasion of Eastern Europe in the 13th century. If it were not for the business-savvy Sogdians in Central Asia trading between China and Europe, the Land Silk Road would not have become a reality. The Sogdians have a long history of ties with China. The most famous Sogdian in Chinese history was An Lushan (703-757 AD), whose rebellion led to the fall of the Tang Dynasty.

Of more relevant to the Belt and Road narrative was the Great Liao (大遼) empire established by by Yelü Dashi, who led the remnants of the Liao dynasty from Manchuria, through Ningxia to Central Asia in 1124AD after fleeing from the Jurchen-led Jin dynasty conquest of northern China. The empire lasted until the Mongol conquest in 1218. The territories covered by Great Liao included parts of modern-day China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

I recommend that the narrative for the Land Silk Road Economic Belt should cover the epic campaign of Alexander the Great (356-323BC) from Macedonia, Greece to India. Besides bringing death and destruction, he left behind in Central Asia enduring elements of Greek and Persian cultures and philosophies. After all, he was the pupil of the greatest Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322BC). It was also the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1517AD) originating from Central Asia that ushered in the Golden Age of Islam. Through the great Translation Movement, it preserved classical Greek, Roman, Hebrew, Persian, Indian, and Chinese texts and translated them into Arabic. The success of the Translation Movement was also due to the acquisition of paper making and printing technology from China by the Abbasid Caliphate. This subsequently sparked the European Renaissance. The contributions of the Ottoman Empire (1300-1922AD) of Turkey to the culture and civilization of the Land Silk Road Economic Belt must also be acknowledged.

The Chines preoccupation with the Land Silk Road Economic Belt is perfectly understandable as throughout history, China has been a land-based empire with her centres of political, economic and cultural gravity in inland cities.

5.3 More Needed to be Told about the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

South East Asia was associated with China through the Maritime Silk Road. The most outstanding historic and historical events were the seven epic voyages of Chinese Muslim Admiral Zheng He to Southeast Asia, Indian Ocean, Arabia and East Africa in the Ming Dynasty.

Though his exploits are repeatedly told in China through books, movies and TV dramas etc, they are told from the Chinese perspective with little or no consideration of the cultures and civilizations of the countries he visited. His impacts on the fusion of Chinese culture and civilization with those of Maritime Silk Road countries have not been adequately covered from the perspective of the countries he visited.

Youth today are no longer interested in books, movies and TV dramas about the BRI. Youth today very much prefer to interact with virtual reality and AI enabled digital displays which with smart goggles, they can participate actively in the displays.

In China's current national preoccupation with the learning, understanding and research into her rich civilization which is the only uninterrupted civilization of more than 5000 years in the world, the role of virtual reality and AI-enabled digital displays in education and story telling is very important. This is being pioneered throughout China by museums. It is important to note that a majority of the technologies currently in use in museum displays in China are enabled by a robust 5G infrastructure. This has enabled museum displays also being accessible from schools and from homes in China.

The booming development of Chinese museums after the reform and opening up has been amazing. According to the statistics of the National Cultural Heritage Administration, 5,535 museums had been registered on the Chinese mainland by the end of 2019. The actual total number could be around 7,000 if it includes the museums affiliated to universities and other institutions. 76 percent of China's county-level administrative regions had at least one museum. According to Administration statistics, over the past five years, minors accounted for 260 million visits annually to Chinese museums on average. The importance of museums as tourist attractions is evident in the great increase in visitors during national holidays in China.

It bears emphasizing that the popularity of museums in China for education, culture, civilization, and as tourist attraction is due to their displays being increasingly more interactive, attractive and immersive.

5.4 The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

Zheng He (Sambao)

The most significant role of Admiral Zheng He must be highlighted. Zheng He's seven epic voyages were a series of maritime expeditions during the Yongle and Xuande years of the Ming Dynasty. The first voyage began in the third year of the Yongle reign (1405AD) and the last voyage ended in the eighth year of the Xuande reign (1433AD). During the seven voyages, Zheng He led the fleet from Nanjing, assembled at Liujia Port in Taicang, Jiangsu, and anchored at Taiping Port in Changle, Fuzhou, Fujian to wait for the wind to set sail. He sailed to the western Pacific and Indian Oceans and visited more than 30 countries and regions, including Java, Sumatra, Sulu, Malacca, Chenla, Calicut, Siam, Bengal, Aden, Mecca, Zofar, and Hormuz. The farthest known locations reached were East Africa and the Red Sea. Zheng He's voyages were the largest, most numerous, and longest maritime voyages in ancient China. They were also the largest series of maritime expeditions in world history.

In the early Ming Dynasty, there was great development in the handicraft industry, mining, textiles, ceramics, papermaking, and printing. In addition, there was already a considerable scale of shipbuilding in the Jiangnan region; and large-scale official shipbuilding industry was established. The development of China's overseas trade since the Song and Yuan Dynasties, and the increase in foreign immigration laid a solid economic foundation and material conditions for Zheng He's voyages. The development of the shipbuilding industry, the use of the compass, the accumulation of navigation experience, the training of a large number of sailors, and the increase of navigation knowledge provided the necessary conditions for Zheng He's voyages.

Zheng He promoted the establishment of peaceful situation between countries by spreading education, helping weak nations, and curbing violence. During his voyages, Zheng He made unremitting efforts to resolve conflicts among Southeast Asian countries and to establish peace among Asian and African countries. The sea routes became peaceful and the foreigners relied on them to live, trade, and work in peace. Trade exchanges and cultural exchanges between Asian and African countries, especially trade

exchanges between China and countries along the route, and the spread of Chinese culture also developed further under this peaceful situation. Zheng He never occupied one square inch of all the countries he visited. He was truly a diplomat.

Jiangsu

Putting more emphasis on the importance of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road must be the responsibility of coastal provinces in Southern China, like Jiangsu, Fujian and Guangdong. In this respective, Jiangsu Province must rank the top as it was most intimately connected with the 7 epic voyages of Zheng He. It is little known among 21st Century Maritime Silk Road countries that Zheng He is widely commemorated in Jiangsu Province.

In Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu, there is the Zheng He Park commemorating the seven epic voyages of Zheng He whose tomb is also in Nanjing. In Baochuanchang Ruins Park, there are the ruins of the docks where Zheng He's ships were built.

In Taicang, the assembly port of Zheng He's voyages, there is the Zheng He Theme Park with Zheng He Memorial Hall, which displays Zheng He's maritime culture from different perspectives, and highlights the characteristics of Taicang as the assembly port of Zheng He's seven epic voyages. It uses leading sound and light technology. With the perfect combination of display effect and interactive practicality, everyone can experience Zheng He's 7 epic voyages.

Malacca, Malaysia

The most important port city associated with Zheng He's seven epic voyages was without doubt Malacca. Zheng He visited Malacca five times during his seven epic voyages, demonstrating the friendly exchanges between China and Southeast Asia. Zheng He could have easily occupied Malacca, but he chose to communicate peacefully, which had a profound impact on the subsequent historical development. In 1511, Portugal occupied Malacca, followed by the Netherlands, Britain and Japan!

There are many sites and facilities commemorating Zheng He in Malacca. The most famous of these is the Zhenghe Cultural Museum. The Museum houses the Ming Palace, Malacca Hall, Mazu Palace, Scientific Navigation Hall, Lijia Teahouse, Zheng He's treasure ships, official factory models, Yuan and Ming porcelain collections, and Zheng He's life puppet show, fully demonstrating the mutual integration of Chinese and Malay cultures over the past 600 years. Other important sites are the Sambao Temple and the Sam Bao Well.

Samarang, Indonesia

Semarang (三宝垄) in Central Java, Indonesia is the only foreign city in the world named after Admiral Zheng He ("Sambao"). Zheng He landed here five times during his seven epic voyages, carried out trade and cultural exchanges, and promoted the formation of overseas Chinese settlements. The Sambao Temple (Sam Bao Kong) in Samarang is a historical site built to commemorate Admiral Zheng He. It is one of the most representative Chinese cultural landmarks in Southeast Asia. It includes the Mbah Kyai Tumpeng, a prayer site used by people wishing for their well-being. Thus Sam Bao Kong is now shared as a common place of worship by Indonesians of multiple religious denominations, including Muslims and Buddhists, and by ethnicities like Chinese and Javanese.

5.5 Proposal for 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

I have communicated to the Tourism and Culture Department of Jiangsu Province to make the 21st Maritime Silk Road much better known to common people and the youth in China and in Belt and Road countries by carrying out a pilot project of virtual reality and AI-enabled displays featuring Admiral Zheng He.

The first display in this pilot project should be Jiangsu and Zheng He, focusing on Nanjing and Taicang. Display material is already available in the Taicang Zheng He Memorial Hall, which displays Zheng He's maritime culture from different perspectives and highlights the characteristics of Taicang in Zheng He's seven epic voyages. It uses leading sound and light technology.

Then the pilot series can be extended to Zheng He and Malacca with the cooperation of Malaysia and Zheng He and Samarang with the cooperation of Indonesia. After that, we can consider extending the series to:

Batutta and Guangzhou and Quanzhou;
Zheng He and the Arab World;
Zheng He and Africa;
21st Century Maritime Silk Road and Pacific Islands;
21st Century Maritime Silk Road and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The national museums in Belt and Road countries are increasingly employing virtual reality and AI technology in their displays. I appeal to them to research on the stories of Ibn Batutta and Zheng He in their own countries with the objective of making them integral parts of the Belt and Road virtual reality and AI enabled displays.

I am particularly impressed by the unique living museum of the Ibn Batutta Mall of Dubai. I am confident we can obtain all the information about the life and travels of Ibn Batutta from the Ibn Battutta Mall, Dubai.

I am confident that when this series on the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is widely shown in these museums, it will make common people and youth in Belt and Road countries realize that we are all members of the global village.

The great majority of countries along the Land Silk Road Economic Belt and along the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road are Muslim Countries. It is therefore fitting that projects and programs under the Global Civilization Initiative should be the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region as the Hub for the Land Silk Road Economic Belt. Ningxia throughout its history has been a cauldron for fusing Confucianism, Taoism, Han, Tibetan, Mongolian and Manchurian cultures and Central Asian, Greco-Persian cultures and Islam religion through conquest of Central Asia. ASEAN, particularly Malaysia and Indonesia, with its close association with Zheng He's seven epic voyages should be the hub for the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

Together Ningxia, China and Malaysia and Indonesia in ASEAN will then expedite the realization of the Global Civilization Initiative, leading to the achievement of the Common Destiny of Humankind of World Peace and Prosperity.