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## Global Civilization Initiative: replacing estrangement and conflict with mutual learning

On March 15, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Chinese president, attended the opening ceremony of the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting via video link and delivered a keynote address titled "Join Hands on the Path Towards Modernization." During the meeting, Xi proposed the Global Civilization Initiative, which, together with the Global Development Initiative in September 2021 and the Global Security Initiative in April 2022, represents yet another important international public good that China has proposed to the world. It injects fresh and strong energy into advancing humanity's modernization process and the building of a human community with a shared future. Upon its proposal, the initiative resonated positively with the international community.

### Promoting mutual learning

The Global Civilization Initiative advocates the respect for the diversity of civilizations, the common values of humanity, the importance of inheritance and innovation of civilizations, and robust international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation. The overall content of

this initiative covers the guidelines and policies consistently advocated by the Chinese government on exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations since the 18th CPC National Congress.

In December 2017, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and The General Office of the State Council issued Several Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Exchanges and Communication with Foreign Countries. In May 2019, China hosted the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations. A series of high-level mechanisms of exchange have also been established. All these efforts show the unremitting pursuit by the Chinese government in promoting mutual learning among civilizations.

### No universal benchmark

As Xi pointed out in his keynote speech at the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations, "All civilizations are rooted in their unique cultural environment. Each embodies the wisdom and vision of a country or nation, and each is valuable for being uniquely its own. Civilizations only vary from each other, just as human beings are different only in terms of skin color and the language used. No civilization is

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superior to others." Although civilizations are different, they are not "egoistic," but coexist on an equal basis. Different civilizations convey different ways of thinking and styles of living, and all have their own rationality in terms of existence.

There is no universal benchmark for evaluating a civilization, and one type of civilization should neither be measured by its own yardstick nor impose itself on others. Any action that tries to erase differences between civilizations by coercive means is tantamount to cutting one's feet to fit one's shoes, and will bring disastrous consequences to civilizations around the world.

The law of civilizational evolution

tells us that each civilization should keep pace with the times and absorb the essence of the times. The architecture of ancient Greek temples was inspired by the civilizations of ancient Babylonians, Egyptians and others. The Centennial Translation Movement, which began in the eighth century AD in Arabia, fused the cultures of Ancient Greece, Rome and India, thus laying a solid foundation for the Renaissance in Western Europe. Zhang Qian, an official and diplomat of the Han Dynasty (202BC-220AD), who was dispatched on a mission to seek an alliance with the Western Regions, became an example which largely fostered East-West cultural communication. His experience also offered historical reference for the building of today's Belt and Road Initiative.

### Important guiding role

Interpersonal exchanges act as the bridge over which people communicate their emotions with each other and bind their hearts. It is also the tie by which countries deepen their mutual understandings and trust. Compared with political, security, economic and trade cooperation, it is of more fundamental, extensive, pioneering and lasting

effects. In the face of great changes unseen in a century, disharmonious voices of terms such as "conflicts between civilizations" and "superiority of civilization" frequently arise. Multiple challenges and crises interweave and overlap with each other. Various schools of cultural thought are surging, and ideological conflicts keep flaring up.

Samuel Huntington, a famous American scholar, proposed the theory of "the clash of civilizations." But he also pointed out that the constructive way in a world of multiple civilizations is to reject universalism, accept diversity and seek commonality. Robert W. Cox, a scholar of international relations, believes that humanity faces numerous choices going forward. When different civilizations need to coexist, the way in which they understand each other will become the primary issue in maintaining world order. The Global Civilization Initiative calls for replacing estrangement and conflict among civilizations with exchanges and mutual learning. Adapting to the development trend of world history and conforming with the aspiration of humans for peaceful development, the initiative will play an important guiding role in maintaining the global governance order and realizing the progress of human civilization.

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## New law provides legal guarantee for Yellow River protection

Following the Yangtze River Protection Law of the People's Republic of China, the Yellow River Protection Law of the People's Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as the Yellow River Protection Law), came into effect on April 1, 2023. This is China's second piece of legislation concerning a river's basin. Exclusively targeting the Yellow River Basin, it is a comprehensive law of fundamental and guiding significance which will provide strong legal guarantees for its ecological protection for the benefit of harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

### Flood prevention has been difficult

A basin is a natural unit of water concentration and collection tank. A particular natural geographic unit, it is an entire area through which the main streams and tributaries of a water system flow. Within a basin there exist many geographical elements including land, soil, vegetation, landform, rocks, etc. Human economic and social activities, such as development and utilization of water resources, land use, etc. are also present in basins.



Part of Yellow River basin which flows through Aba Prefecture, Sichuan Province. Photo: Zhang Lang/CNSphoto

Therefore, it is quite necessary to exercise management over the basins of particular rivers.

The Yellow River flows through nine provinces and regions, and the soil on both banks is loose and porous. Aggravated by soil and water loss, disastrous floods can occur easily. Flood prevention and management has always been difficult with regards to the water governance of the Yellow River. For many years, ecological protection pertinent to the Yellow River basin has been discussed in Chinese laws and regulations, but has not been highly targeted and has had only a

weak connection between the legal systems. Given this, it is urgent to formulate effective laws to enhance the governance of the Yellow River basin in a more systematic way.

### New mechanism of coordination

Sustainable development around and within the basin should not come at the expense of high pollution, consumption and emission. Instead, it needs to be realized by respecting and conforming with nature in a resource-conservative and environmentally friendly way. The Fourth Article of the Yellow River Protection Law clearly stipu-

lates that a planning and coordination mechanism for the ecological protection and development of the Yellow River on the national level will be established. For the first time, such a mechanism has been set up in the institutional sense. It is also stipulated that provinces and autonomous regions within the basin can establish their own coordination mechanisms and corresponding organizations to implement them according to their own needs. Institutionally, this has formed a new mechanism of river basin governance—coordinating major matters on the national level and other related matters through inter-provincial cooperation.

From the perspective of regional governance, the new mechanism adheres to the principle of considering the basin in its entirety. It makes detailed plans and arrangements about the conservation, development and utilization of water resources as well as the prevention and control of water disasters in accordance with the law. In addition, the Yellow River Protection Law stipulates greater coordination in sectors of water supply in both

cities and villages, flood control and silt reduction, hydropower generation, discharge of water and sediment in reservoirs. The aim is to fully utilize the benefits of water resources by establishing a comprehensive discharge system.

In addition, the Yellow River Protection Law stipulates that a system of joint meetings of inter-provincial river and lake chiefs (government officials are hired as river chiefs at provincial, city, county, and township levels) will be established. River and lake chiefs at all levels shall be responsible for the management, protection and other work of river courses and lakes. Judicial, procuratorial organs and other functional departments that are responsible for the Yellow River management can help form a normative mode of ecological protection on a regular basis through information sharing, professional consultation and early emergency warnings.

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