



Original Article

The Concept of ‘Community of Common Destiny’ in China’s Diplomacy: Meaning, Motives and Implications

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Abstract

‘Community of common destiny’, a new concept in China’s diplomacy, has been increasingly used by the Chinese government, especially President Xi Jinping, on international occasions. Given the paucity of academic research on the concept, this paper aims to fill the gap and examine three aspects: meaning, motives and implications. Building upon the author’s long observation of China’s foreign policy, the paper argues that this concept of ‘community of common destiny’ is vague in meaning and loosely used by China. While initially proposed by China to mend ties with neighbouring states in the context of escalating territorial disputes, the concept constitutes part of China’s long-term strategy to maintain a peaceful ‘period of strategic opportunity’ in the first two to three decades of the 21st century to further develop itself. However, the ambiguity of the concept poses a main challenge for China to promote the acceptance of this concept by the developing world, let alone developed countries. This process demands more transparency, commitment and concrete actions from China.

Key words: community of common destiny, China’s foreign policy, assertive diplomacy, international cooperation

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1. Introduction

On 14–15 May 2017, the inaugural Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation was hosted by China in Beijing in the presence of leaders from 29 countries. It was a showcase of China’s commitment to this development initiative and also its ambition to reshape global governance. An important concept—community of common destiny (CCD)—was promoted by China during the forum. It was included in President Xi Jinping’s speeches at the forum’s opening and closing ceremonies as well as the communiqué of leaders’ roundtable. For instance, Xi stated at the opening ceremony that ‘moving closer towards a community of shared future for mankind’¹ is the ultimate goal of the Belt and Road initiative (MOFCOM 2017). Back in January 2017, President Xi became the first Chinese President to attend the World Economic Forum in Davos where he highlighted the CCD concept for global governance, noting that ‘Mankind has become a community of common destiny that one is inseparable from the other, and their interest is highly inter-mingled and inter-dependent’ (Xi 2017, p. 3). A month later, the 55th session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development passed a resolution entitled *Social Dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development*, calling upon the international community to support Africa’s

1. Chinese official media translates *minyun gongtongti* into community of common destiny or community of shared future. As destiny is equivalent to *minyun* in Chinese, the term community of common destiny is used in this paper.

development and ‘to create a shared future, based upon our shared humanity’ (CSocD 2017, pp. 12–13). *People’s Daily*, China’s official media, lauded this resolution as the first UN resolution that ‘demonstrates wide recognition of this concept of community of common destiny by UN member states and represents China’s enormous contribution to global governance’ (Li & Yin 2017, p. 3).

The CCD concept has become a main concept in China’s diplomacy in recent years. Although Beijing used the term ‘common destiny’ earlier to label the links between Mainland China and Taiwan (Xin 2010, p. 529), CCD that focuses on China’s relations with other sovereign states first appeared in *China’s White Paper on Peaceful Development* in September 2011 and then in the report of Chinese Communist Party’s 18th national conference in November 2012 (State Council 2011; Xinhua 2012). Since President Xi took office in March 2013, this concept has attracted fast-growing attention from the Chinese leadership and Xi himself. In October 2013, Xi pledged to converge the ‘China Dream’ with neighbouring nations’ development aspirations and arouse the sense of common destiny (Xinhua 2013). He has also promoted CCD as his diplomatic concept numerous times during official visits overseas and highlighted it at the 19th party congress in October 2017 (Mardell 2017).

Questions arise immediately, including (1) what is the meaning of CCD? (2) What are China’s motives behind the concept? And (3) what are the implications of this concept for China’s diplomacy? As the CCD concept is new, existing literature has been insufficient though more scholars have started to pay attention to this concept. Tao Wenzhao from Renmin University argued that CCD is a conceptual innovation and reflects Chinese leadership’s vision of global governance (2016). Xu Jin and Guo Chu from China Academy of Social Sciences investigated China’s CCD with different regions/countries and defined CCD as the bilateral/multilateral arrangement that involves political cooperation and security support (2016). Liu Zongyi, researcher at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies,

argued that the CCD concept covers economic, security and cultural issues, with China aiming to establish a new economic order in Asia (2015). Late Professor Zeng Lingliang from Wuhan University argued that the implications of China’s Belt and Road initiative surpass regional integration and partnership, and China aims to establish a regional CCD (2016). Overseas scholars’ research on CCD is scarcer. Jian Zhang and Timo Kivimaki touched upon CCD briefly in their analyses of Chinese new foreign policy and soft power strategy (Zhang 2015; Kivimaki 2014). However, these researchers failed to provide detailed and comprehensive answers to the above three questions. In particular, CCD is a diplomatic concept, but an in-depth analysis linking the concept to China’s foreign policy is missing.

This paper seeks to enrich the debate on the CCD concept and explore these questions. As China’s diplomacy seems increasingly contradictory—China continues to be cooperative on many issues while becoming uncompromising on others such as territorial disputes—the research will also shed some light on understanding China’s posture on cooperation in international affairs. Given the paucity of previous research on CCD, this paper has largely built the analysis upon China’s official discourses on CCD including President Xi’s speeches and over 120 reports from China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and official media. It has also made reference to the literature on China’s foreign policy.

The main analysis is organized as follows. The first section briefly defines the CCD term and analyses its meaning in China’s context. The second section investigates China’s motives behind this concept. The last section considers CCD’s implications on China’s diplomacy and discusses the concept’s feasibility.

2. Meaning

A CCD literally refers to a group of people/nations bonded together by common interests and fate. Scholars of international relations have widely used the term community in such forms as political community, international

community and moral community (Agnew 1994, pp. 62–63; Wendt 1998, p. 113; Boucher 1998, p. 375). Ernest Haas, for example, referred to like-minded scientists as ‘an epistemic community’ and highlighted their role in transferring new knowledge to international organizations (1990, pp. 40–41). Hedley Bull made a distinction between ‘a system of states’ and ‘a society of states’ in his discussion of international order. In ‘a system of states’, states interact with and affect one another while acting on their own interest and values, but in ‘a society of states’, states conceive themselves to be bound by a sense of common interests, rules, values and institutions (2002, pp. 8–15). This definition of ‘a society of states’ is literally close to a CCD.

It is important to examine China’s own definition of CCD. In September 2015, President Xi elaborated upon the components of CCD in his speech delivered at the 70th UN General Assembly. So far, this is the most detailed explanation of this concept from the Chinese government. To Xi, CCD covers five perspectives including political partnership, security, economic development, cultural exchanges and environment:

We should build partnerships in which countries treat each other as equals, engage in mutual consultation and show mutual understanding... We should create a security architecture featuring fairness, justice, joint contribution and shared benefits... We should promote open, innovative and inclusive development that benefits all... We should increase inter-civilization exchanges to promote harmony, inclusiveness and respect for differences... We should build an ecosystem that puts mother nature and green development first. (China Daily 2015)

However, the five points are no more than hollow principles, and their meaning is unclear. How to translate these principles into practice remains to be answered. Similarly, how to tailor plans for different partner countries and sector areas is an outstanding question. Yan Xuetong, Dean of Institute of Modern International Relations at Tsinghua University, even argued that CCD includes military cooperation (2014, p. 169), which apparently is a challenging task for China and many partner countries.

In the absence of a clear definition, CCD has been loosely used in China’s diplomacy. To Chinese leaders and diplomats, the concept is an expression that underlines shared interests and destiny between China and other countries, and the need for them to address common challenges in partnership so that all can develop in tandem. The Chinese side has also sought to find theoretical support for the CCD concept from Chinese traditional culture that values peace and cooperation. CCD, in their eyes, is closely linked to concepts such as ‘harmony being the most precious’ (*he wei gui*), ‘one world’ (*shijie datong*) and ‘harmony between heaven and humanity’ (*tianren heyi*) (Wang 2016, p. 7; Xing 2015, p. 36; Su 2015, p. 18).

Emphasizing shared interests and the need for cooperation is one side of the coin. While CCD conveys the message that China wishes to maintain the status quo of the international order and has no intention to introduce fundamental changes, China insists that emerging powers including China should be treated as equal to the developed countries in global governance. Put it another way, China is keen to increase its role in global affairs in accordance with its growing strength. As Professor Zhang Yongjin put it, China prefers to bring peaceful changes and sustain a ‘resilient status quo’ (2016a, p. 798). The CCD concept carries this meaning. It implies CCD member states, whether developed or developing nations, belong to the same group and therefore should have equal rights in participating and determining global affairs. As then Chinese President Hu Jintao stressed at the 18th Party conference, ‘Countries should establish a new type of global development partnership that is more equitable and balanced, stick together in times of difficulty, both share rights and shoulder obligations, and boost the common interests of mankind’ (Xinhua 2012).

President Xi continued to highlight this point at the Bo’ao Forum for Asia in March 2015, suggesting that ‘on matters that involve us all, we should discuss and look for a solution together. Being a big country means shouldering greater responsibilities for regional and world peace and development, as opposed to seeking greater monopoly over regional and

world affairs' (Xi 2015). This double-edged remark implies both China's desire to play a greater role in international affairs and its criticism of some other great powers' monopoly.

Chinese diplomats and leaders have echoed this desire for equity in global affairs. At the international colloquium commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in May 2014, China's Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin highlighted that nations' need to engage on the basis of equality to achieve win-win cooperation and promote CCD building (Liu 2014, pp. 477–480). Former Chinese ambassador to Cuba Liu Yuqin argued that China proposed the CCD concept to establish a new international political and economic order of equity and justice (Zeng & Shu 2014). As the word 'new' in Chinese is frequently used to denote changes, what ambassador Liu meant here is to improve rather than overturn the existing international system.

As Chinese leaders use CCD to talk about the world as a joint unit, this presumably includes both developing and developed countries. In reality, however, something a bit more complicated is going on. China is seemingly targeting the CCD concept primarily at the developing world and multilateral organizations. President Xi has frequently used this term during his visits to the developing countries, calling for the establishment of CCD between China and these countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Even during his first presidential visit to the Pacific region in November 2014, Xi pointed out that China is ready to promote common development and prosperity with small island countries (Du & Yan 2014, p. 1; Hannan & Firth 2015, p. 871). Xi has also promoted CCD at multilateral occasions such as the G20 and APEC summits. A reasonable explanation for China's focus on developing countries and multilateral organizations is that China regards itself as a member of the developing world and multilateral organizations. In Beijing's view, it could be easier for China to find common ground with developing rather than developed countries, which, however, is open to debate on many occasions.

By contrast, President Xi has seldom used CCD to label China's bilateral relations with developed nations. Being aware of the deep-rooted political and strategic mistrust between China and developed nations, the Chinese government has chosen to emphasize their common economic interests and describe this partnership as a 'community of common interests' (*liyi gongtongti*). In October 2015, President Xi remarked to the British Parliament that 'China and UK are becoming an increasingly interdependent community of common interests' (MFA 2015b). In a similar vein, Xi called on China and Germany/France to forge close links as a 'community of common interests' (MFA 2014, 2015a). China's differentiated treatment of the developing and developed countries with regards to the CCD concept is a miniature of its long-held diplomatic practice of siding with the developing world as default partners while developing economic ties with developed countries as economic partners.

3. Motives

The immediate trigger for the CCD concept is the escalating territorial disputes between China and ASEAN states in the South China Sea, which makes it urgent for Beijing to mend ties with these countries (see also Wang & Zhai 2016). This impasse has obstructed China's neighbourhood diplomacy that aims to maintain regional peace and stability to facilitate China's own development. China has defined its diplomacy to maintain good partnership with neighbouring countries as a task of priority (*zhoubian shi shouyao*) (Chen 2009; see also Wesley-Smith 2013, p. 358). However the deteriorating relations with ASEAN countries, especially Vietnam and Philippines,² have posed a serious threat to the realization of this objective. Some neighbouring countries are becoming fearful of China's rise as hegemony to dominate regional affairs. Based on a survey report

2. The bilateral relationship between China and Philippines has improved since President Duterte assumed office in June 2016.

released by the Pew Research Center, an American polling organization, 93 per cent of the respondents in Philippines and 84 per cent in Vietnam were concerned about the possibility of conflicts with China in the South China Sea (Banyan Asia 2014). Anti-China sentiment flared up in Vietnam and resulted in the deadly riot targeting Chinese nationals in May 2014. The United States' pivot (rebalancing) to Asia-Pacific has fuelled Beijing's concern for strategic security, interpreting this as a move by Washington to curb China's rise, which in turn exacerbates the territorial disputes between China and neighbouring countries in the South and East China Seas.

Against this backdrop, all the seven members of China's Politburo Standing Committee attended the domestic workshop on China's diplomacy with neighbouring nations in October 2013. The task for this conference, as Beijing articulated, was to formulate strategic objectives for China's neighbourhood diplomacy in the next 5 to 10 years and propose measures to address the main challenges (Xinhua 2013). President Xi stated that 'a good neighbourhood diplomacy is needed for achieving the "two centenary goals" and the China dream of rejuvenating the Chinese nation' (Xinhua 2013).³ He emphasized the need to arouse the CCD sense in neighbouring countries to reduce the strategic tensions in the South China Sea (Xinhua 2013). However, China's capacity to shape the regional environment is debated (Zhang 2016b; Zhang 2015), and whether China could mitigate regional tension by proposing CCD will be tested in the future.

A closer observation of China's foreign policy reveals a deep-rooted motive for Beijing to propose the CCD concept. In essence, it could be a continuation of China's strategy to ease

other countries', and especially developed countries', concern of China's rise and maintain a favourable international environment for China's economic development to rejuvenate the Chinese nation. Sustaining rapid domestic economic growth has been one of the few sources of legitimacy for the Chinese government (Kang 2007, p. 85). It is also a hard lesson learned by Chinese elites from China's 'century of humiliation' that China needs to fully develop itself to avoid invasion by great powers (Waley-Cohen 1999, p. 209; Gries 2004, pp. 43–53). As early as in November 2002, then Chinese President Jiang Zemin stated at the 16th party conference, 'the first two decades of the 21st century are a period of important strategic opportunities, which we must seize tightly and which offers bright prospects' (Xinhua 2002).

Since then, sustaining this 'period of strategic opportunities' (*Zhanlue jiyuqi*) has been a primary task for the Chinese government and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was recognized at the following 17th and 18th party conferences (Xinhua 2007, 2012). The Chinese leadership is fully aware that China's rapid economic development since the late 1970s is inseparable from the favourable international environment, and China needs to use the first two decades of the 21st century to further develop itself. This is why President Xi reiterated the concept of 'period of strategic opportunities' at China's Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs in November 2014, 'China is still in the period of strategic opportunities which it can use to make greater achievement...China has reached the crucial stage of rejuvenating the Chinese nation' (Xinhua 2014). Some senior Chinese scholars including Professor Zhang Yunling, Director of International Studies at China Academy of Social Sciences, argue that this period of strategic opportunities could even be extended to the first three decades of the 21st century (2016b, p. 845).

Chinese leaders and diplomats have been pursuing this strategy relentlessly and attempting to persuade the international community, especially the developed nations, that China has no intention to alter the international

3. The two centenary goals are to build a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the time the Communist Party of China celebrates its centenary in 2021 and to turn China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by the time the People's Republic of China celebrates its centenary in 2049.

structure. At the Bo'ao Forum for Asia in November 2003, Zheng Bijian, former senior Chinese official and long-time advisor to the Chinese leadership, proposed the concept of China's 'peaceful rise' (*heping jueqi*) (Xinhua 2003). The term later morphed into 'peaceful development'⁴ (*heping fazhan*) and has been used widely by Chinese leaders including President Hu Jintao. By proposing this 'peaceful development' concept, China aims to mute the growing 'China threatens' discourses associated with its rise and fast-growing military spending. Likewise, the 'CCD' concept bears the same objective: to dismiss external strategic suspicion of China's peaceful development path and sustain a favourable external environment for China's economic development.

China's management of its relations with the United States is another example of China's intention to secure a sound environment for domestic development. In recognition of Washington's strategic concern about China's rise and challenge to the United States's global status, Chinese officials in Beijing have proposed to establish a 'new type of great power relations' (*xinxing daguo guanxi*) characterized by non-conflict or confrontation, mutual respect, cooperation and win-win (Zeng & Breslin 2016; Xinhua 2016). In contrast to the perceptions of some western officials and scholars that the international system is a zero-sum game and a rising power will inevitably challenge entrenched hegemony, by proposing this new partnership of great powers and the CCD concept, Beijing hopes to convey the message that nations can co-exist and achieve common prosperity. Therefore, to them, the United States should accept rather than panic about China's rise. As Jinghan Zeng and Shaun Breslin argue, the proposal to establish this new relationship between China and the United States means that China as no. 2 tried to persuade the United States as no. 1 to

4. Some Chinese scholars expressed concerns that the word 'rise' could indicate China's challenge to the existing international structure. Similarly, for the fear of inviting suspicion of China's ambition, the Chinese government did not accept terms such as 'the Beijing Consensus' and 'G2' (referring to global governance dominated by the United States and China).

accept China's legitimate interest and goals as a rising great power (Zeng & Breslin 2016, p. 794). Late Professor Zeng Lingliang echoed this view, arguing that China's CCD proposal represents its intention to promote win-win cooperation as a replacement of the old zero-sum theory in international relations (2016, pp. 534–536).

Conforming to Chinese political culture, the CCD concept could also be interpreted as a diplomatic legacy for President Xi and his administration. This is similar to the 'peaceful development' concept that is seen as the legacy of former President Hu Jintao. As China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi commented, 'The CCD concept is a core achievement of China's diplomatic innovation [under the leadership of President Xi Jinping]. To implement CCD and rejuvenate the Chinese nation have become the objectives of the diplomacy with Chinese characteristics' (2016, p. 7). Recently, the Chinese government included CCD as an important component of the newly coined concept of 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era', or 'Xi Jinping Thought' for short. For example, Professor Chen Shuguan from China's Party School argued that with the CCD concept, 'Xi Jinping Thought' makes a new contribution to global governance in the area of values (2017, p. 11).

It merits attention that there is a major difference between the 'peaceful development' concept and CCD. While China kept a low profile when then President Hu Jintao promoted 'peaceful development', as Chinese current government including President Xi's statements show, China is ready to play the coordinating and leading role in establishing the CCD (Liu 2015). This is an apparent departure from the 'low profile' diplomacy and reflects China's desire to play a more active role in global governance (Poh & Li 2017). This position also mirrors China's proactive diplomacy under Xi Jinping's leadership. There are increasing signs that China's foreign policy is moving from 'hiding the capacity and keeping a low profile' (*taoguang yanghui*) to 'making greater achievements' (*yousuo zuowei*). The CCD concept is but one of the new terms

initiated by President Xi and represents his ambition for a more proactive foreign policy. Some of the other terms include diplomacy with 'Chinese features' (*zhongguo tese*), 'Chinese style' (*zhongguo fengge*) and 'Chinese confidence' (*zhongguo qipai*) and 'the Chinese dream' (*zhongguo meng*) (Yang 2014; Xinhua 2014). The Chinese government has also emphasized 'two guides' (*liangge yindao*) in their future diplomacy: 'China needs to guide the international community to jointly build a more just and equitable new world order' and 'China needs to guide the international community to jointly safeguard international security' (China Party School 2017). Some scholars argue that China's more assertive diplomacy is a reflection of 'triumphalist' mentality among China's elites and the preference of the president as the dominant leader (Liao 2016, pp. 828–830). William Callahan argues that 'the Chinese dream' is more than a propaganda campaign but involves individual and collective aspiration and anxieties about the nation's future, or 'patriotic worrying' (2017). In other words, as Chinese intellectuals are worried about the value crisis in China's current money-worship society, Xi Jinping's 'the Chinese dream' slogan aims to provide the correct formula resulting in China's perfection (Ibid).

4. Implications

China's initiation of the CCD concept reveals at least two main features of its foreign policy. The first feature is that Chinese diplomacy is multifaceted. While China calls for cooperation among nations to promote shared interests on some occasions, it is acting more proactively and even assertively on other occasions. For instance, China initiated the establishment of the New Development Bank of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which are perceived by some analysts as a challenge to the Bretton Woods system and the Asian Development Bank (Godbole 2015). China is flexing its muscles in territorial disputes with Japan and some ASEAN nations including establishing air defence identification zones in

the East China Sea and deploying anti-missile systems on the islands in the South China Sea.

The second main feature is that the co-existence of these two trends in China's current diplomacy, though seemingly contradictory, reflects the different strategies China is adopting to tackle issues of non-core interests and core interests. In September 2011, China State Council articulated China's 'core interests' which include state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development (State Council 2011). China is acting assertively on issues of its core interests. As the territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas fall into the category of China's core interests, China has been uncompromising on these issues. The Taiwan issue is another example of China's non-negotiable posture on core interests. China has long insisted that recognizing the 'One China' policy is the prerequisite for other countries to establish diplomatic relations with China. When President-elect Donald Trump suggested in January 2017 that he might use the 'One China' policy as leverage to negotiate with China on other issues such as trade and security, China pushed back strongly and reiterated, 'The "One China" principle is the political foundation of China-US relations and is non-negotiable' (MFA 2017). To China's relief, Trump reaffirmed the 'One China' policy in his call with Chinese President Xi in February (Wong et al. 2017).

In contrast to China's firm position on 'core interests', it is showing readiness to cooperate with other countries on issues of 'non-core interests'. Such cooperation could boost China's bilateral relations with partner countries and reduce the tension in sensitive areas. As an example, China is softening its stance on aid cooperation with traditional donors (most of them are developed western nations) in developing countries. Foreign aid is an integral part of China's foreign policy, and China has increasingly used aid to serve its strategic interest such as wooing support from Cambodia and Laos for China's position on the South China

Sea disputes. During the Asia–Europe Meeting summit in July 2016, China committed additional grant aid of US\$600 million to Prime Minister Hun Sen’s government in Cambodia (Sokha 2016). However, as foreign aid is less sensitive compared to other issues such as security, China is demonstrating willingness to pilot trilateral aid cooperation with western donors. It is even committed to increasing trilateral aid partnership with the United States, its largest strategic rival, in countries such as Afghanistan and Timor-Leste (Zhang 2017). One main motive for China’s policy shift towards aid cooperation is to build a benign image as a responsible stakeholder in the eyes of the United States and facilitate the broad China–United States relationship (Zhang 2017).

The prospect of CCD in China’s diplomacy depends on whether it will be accepted by China’s partner countries. To rally support from them, China needs to forge a strong bond of shared interests with these countries. With its strong economic might, China’s advantage lies in the potential economic opportunities it could provide to partner countries. The Chinese government has been experienced in playing the economic diplomacy card in the past four decades, placing great emphasis on the strategic thinking of ‘using economics to promote politics’ (*yi jing cu zheng*) in managing China’s foreign relations (Gong 2004, p. 2). Different tactics have been deployed by China towards the developed and developing countries. China has used its massive market to strengthen bilateral relations with developed nations. It has become the largest trading partner of western nations such as the United States (since 2015), Australia (since 2009) and New Zealand (since 2013). As for the developing countries, China has bolstered bilateral relations by importing raw materials and energy from them, increasing Chinese investment and providing substantial aid to these countries. Africa is an excellent example. China–Africa economic cooperation has increased at an unprecedented rate since the early 2000s, and their political relationship has also strengthened. China–Africa bilateral trade volume exceeded US\$220 billion in 2014, an increase of more than 22 times

compared to 2000 (Wang 2015). Africa has remained the largest recipient of Chinese aid, receiving US\$6.65 billion (RMB46.2 billion)⁵ in the period of 2010–2012 which accounted for 51.8 per cent of China’s total aid spend (State Council 2014, p. 22). It is important to note that as CCD is a new concept, it will take time for developing and developed countries to respond to it.

The Xi Jinping administration has increasingly practised economic diplomacy. In addition to the BRICS New Development Bank and AIIB, China has set up the Belt and Road Fund that is designed to link China further with Asia, Africa and Europe, and integrate China into the world economy. At the first Belt and Road Forum in May 2017, China pledged to provide an additional US\$14.4 billion (RMB100 billion) to the Silk Road Fund and US\$8.64 billion (RMB60 billion) worth aid as a reward to developing countries and international organizations participating in the Belt and Road initiative. In addition, the China Development Bank and China Export–Import Bank will set up special funds worth US\$36 billion (RMB250 billion) and US\$18.7 billion (RMB 130 billion) to support the Belt and Road initiative in sectors including infrastructure, industrial capacity and financing (Xinhua 2017). We can expect that China will intensify its efforts to roll out these initiatives and expand China’s influence in these regions in the near future. If this process is smooth, China could establish closer economic ties with partner countries and increase the appeal of CCD to them, though the degree may be debated.

On the other hand, China faces a main challenge to realize the CCD concept. It has not defined the concept clearly with regards to its meaning, targeted countries and concrete actions, and the concept is loosely used as a slogan. It is equally difficult for other nations to assess the concept’s potential impact on their national interests before they react to it. Even some Chinese scholars have acknowledged that the blurred meaning of CCD is contributing to other nations’ anxiety rather than trust

5. One US dollar bought 6.94 RMB in December 2016. This exchange rate is used in the paper.

(Xu & Guo 2016, p. 12). It might be easier for China to establish closer economic relations with partner nations, but providing them with political and strategic assurance remains an enormous challenge.

Although the CCD concept was largely designed by China to pacify neighbouring nations in the context of escalating territorial disputes, their longstanding mistrust of China, coupled with complex historical, ethnic and cultural factors, needs to be addressed before they might accept the China-initiated CCD concept. For instance, despite China's opposition to the United States's pivot to Asia-Pacific, many ASEAN nations have welcomed the United States's increased presence in the region, and 8 of the 11 Asian countries surveyed by the aforementioned Pew Research Center see the United States as their greatest ally (Banyan Asia 2014). Due to their different political systems and bilateral strategic mistrust, it would be more challenging for China to assure developed nations, although they are not the focus of China's CCD concept yet. Also, it is difficult for nations to enter into a coalition, let alone a community. As Christian Brutsch and Mihaela Papa argued in their case study of BRICS, while the pursuit of compatible revisionist goals could inspire coalitional cohesion for BRICS member states, it remains elusive for them to build a community (2013, p. 327). Therefore, the construction of a CCD could be difficult and take time.

5. Conclusion

Community of common destiny has risen to be a main diplomatic concept for President Xi Jinping's government. As the concept is new and under-researched, this paper has examined three aspects: meaning, motives and implications. It argues that CCD is vague in meaning. Its emergence reflects two motives of the Chinese government. In the short term, China aims to use this concept to ease the growing tension with neighbouring countries on territorial disputes in the South China Sea. A deep-rooted motive is to implement China's diplomatic strategy of sustaining a favourable external environment for China's economic

development in the first two to three decades of the 21st century, or a 'period of strategic opportunities'.

The paper suggests that China's proposal of CCD and its assertive behaviours in tackling territorial disputes are two sides of the coin. While China is acting assertively on issues of core interests, it is showing readiness for cooperation on issues of non-core interests. In the foreseeable future, we can expect to see China make greater efforts to promote other countries' acceptance of CCD, whether in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Caribbean or even the Pacific region. This process has already started as China is rolling out new initiatives including Belt and Road and AIIB to promote shared economic interests with partner countries.

However, as CCD remains unclear in meaning, a number of questions remain outstanding and deserve attention in future research, such as how will China and other states address political and strategic mistrust between them? Is CCD a politically or economically oriented concept? To what extent is China committed to its implementation? Will organizations such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization develop into a CCD? Also, what will China's ambition be after it successfully seizes the 'period of strategic opportunities' and fully develops itself calls for similar attention. The final acceptance of the CCD concept by other states will be at the hands of these countries. It requires Beijing to become more transparent about the motives behind the concept, to put more effort into trust building and to solve disputes with other countries in a frank and equal spirit. Perhaps, a good step might start from addressing the territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

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