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China's silk road proposals not Marshall Plan

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Commentators have found parallels between China's funding of a modern version of the Silk Road and the Marshall Plan, indicating that China would use the initiatives to seek influence in Asia as the United States did in post-World War II Europe.

While wide knowledge of history can help us understand current politics, inadequate comparisons of concepts based on their superficial similarities can distort information and mislead politicians in making decisions.

China has declared it is establishing a fund for the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, to promote regional integration, cooperation and common development. The initiatives are similar to the Marshall Plan in reference to the commitment of both China and the United States to support other countries.

But a careful view would show fundamental differences in historical context, motivation and potential impact between China's approach and the postwar plan of the United States to provide economic and military assistance to its allies of western Europe.

The Marshall Plan was part of U.S. attempts to contain the expansion of Soviet Union, excluding all Communist countries.

The Cold War mentality and bipolar structure, however, have found no resonance in China's "One Belt and One Road" initiatives, which are open to all countries and aim to achieve win-win

situations rather than regional hegemony. China is by no means organizing alliances to confront any other country.

Unlike the Marshall Plan, no political conditions have been imposed on participants in the Silk Road frameworks. China has always advocated that countries should respect each other's rights to independently choose their own social system and development path.

The Marshall Plan helped establish the United States as a superpower, but China is not interested in doing the same.

While western European countries had little say in the implementation of the Marshall Plan, China is stepping up policy consultation with its partners.

As Chinese President Xi Jinping said during a speech in Kazakhstan in September 2013, countries should have full discussions on developing strategies and policies, adopting plans and measures for advancing regional cooperation through consultation in the spirit of seeking common ground while setting aside differences.

This is the best way for China and its partners to choose in seeking common development -- the old mode of the Marshall Plan could never be applied to an era of globalization and economic interdependence.

Nevertheless, there remains mistrust in China's strategic motivation behind the Silk Road proposals. It is not surprising, as these are novel initiatives, especially to major powers.

Facts speak louder than words. Based on principles of equality and mutual benefit, China and its partners are picking up speed in road connections, trade and investment facilitation, monetary circulation as well as understanding between the peoples.

There is no guarantee that the modern Silk Road will be an easy success, but time will prove that it is much more than the Marshall Plan and that China's gain is not others' loss.