

China's achievements shape its role

Senior officials, academicians look at the nation's 40 years of tremendous change, contributions to the global economy

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In 1978, China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping rolled out 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' with the goal of boosting the country's economy and improving people's lives.

Forty years later, China has not only risen as the world's second-biggest economy but has also become a major player on the global economic and political stage.

This was the consensus among the senior officials, diplomats and academicians who attended a forum on Oct 29 titled China's 40 Years of Reform and Opening-up: Implications for the World and Role of Hong Kong.

"China's commitment to open its market has led to remarkable expansion and growth of its economy, and through its economic muscularity it (managed to build its) geopolitical heft," said former US trade representative Charlene Barshefsky.

Barshefsky made this statement in her keynote speech at the forum hosted by the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and The Better Hong Kong Foundation. The forum was held at the Asia Society Hong Kong Center.

Barshefsky, who was key to China joining the World Trade Organization (WTO), said 40 years of reform and opening-up has allowed China to lift "one of every 10 people in the planet out of poverty". This, she said, is one of the world's "greatest historic achievements".

Martin Jacques, senior fellow at Cambridge University's Department of Politics and International Studies, said China underwent the "most remarkable economic transformation in human history".

Jacques, author of *When China Rules the World*, said China's economic influence "went beyond its border" as it offered the world an alternative model of economic development.

For Harry Harding, professor of public policy at the University of Virginia, China's economic reforms are due to Chinese leaders' willingness to implement pragmatic and sound economic policies that enabled the country to escape the poverty trap.

Former French prime minister Dominique de Villepin said China's reform and opening-up brought "tremendous change" to the Chinese economy, society and leadership. He said it also showcased China's ambition to become a global economic power in the 21st century.

China launched economic reforms in 1978 and in the next four decades



Xie Feng, Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Hong Kong SAR, delivers a speech during the forum China's 40 Years of Reform and Opening-up — Implications for the World and Role of Hong Kong, on Oct 29. PARKER ZHENG / CHINA DAILY ASIA WEEKLY

implemented four key policies that boosted foreign investments and encouraged entrepreneurship. These key policies are: establishment of special economic zones in several provinces; the introduction of the household responsibility system which allowed households to contract land, machinery and other facilities from collective organizations; the consolidation of State-owned enterprises; and accession to the WTO in 2001.

Rapid growth

The policies were instrumental in making China the world's second-biggest economy, with GDP expanding at an average annual rate of 9.5 percent, according to International Monetary Fund (IMF) data.

The IMF said that China has lifted more than 800 million of its people out of poverty and has achieved upper middle-income status.

China's rapid growth has also benefited the international community. China is the world's third-biggest source of foreign direct investment, with outflows hitting \$125 billion in 2017, according to the UN Conference on Trade and Development. China also holds the world's biggest foreign exchange reserves — over \$3 trillion, according to the IMF.

"Reform and opening-up has benefited the whole world and promoted global peace and prosperity," said Xie Feng, Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the HKSAR.

He said China, which now accounts for over 30 percent of global GDP, had mitigated the impact of

the 1997 Asian financial crisis and the 2008-09 global financial crisis. China is also the largest trading partner of over 120 countries and its big consumer market generates huge profits for foreign companies, he added.

And China has not only made its mark in the global economy, it has also helped in promoting global peace.

Commissioner Xie said China is "a staunch force for world peace" and has settled international disputes through peaceful means.

He added that China is the second-largest financial contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations and the largest contributor of peacekeeping personnel among the permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Ronnie Chan, chairman of the executive committee of The Better Hong Kong Foundation, said reform and opening-up has also allowed the Chinese people to contribute to the world. "It unleashed the creativity and imagination of 1.3 billion people," Chan said.

Cambridge University's Jacques offered the same insight, noting that 40 years of reforms have led to the "transformation of the Chinese people", making them more ambitious, open-minded, and with a great appetite for learning. This, he said, has made China the "most interesting and innovative country in the world".

Former Chinese foreign minister Li Zhaoxing said China will continue to deepen reforms and promote inclusiveness, and promote global development and balance.

Citing a poem by American writer Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Li urged forum participants to "let each tomorrow be better than today".

Former French prime minister De Villepin said China "offers a model of balance and stability". He expects China to continue making progress with its Belt and Road Initiative.

He said the BRI is a game changer that can help developing economies. It also enables China to introduce "a new age of economic globalization".

The BRI, unveiled by President Xi Jinping in 2013, seeks to connect China with Asia, Europe and Africa via land- and sea-based infrastructure development.

Former Japanese prime minister Yukio Hatoyama welcomed China's progress in reform and opening-up and its launching of the BRI. He also hoped that Japan will be more engaged in the initiative.

Sharing prosperity

Pointing out that this year also marks the 40th anniversary of the signing of the China-Japan Treaty of Peace and Friendship, Hatoyama called for the establishment of the East Asian Community — the vision he first proposed in 2009 — that will integrate Japan and the Republic of Korea, among others, with China. He projected peace accomplished through prosperity, "with the region never engaging in hostilities again".

Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor said the special administrative region will continue to use its strength "to serve the country's needs, with a goal to attain growth jointly with

the country and sharing prosperity with all people".

"We are proud of our contribution, and are even more proud to witness the achievements of our country in the past 40 years," she said.

Lam said Hong Kong supports free trade and the rule-based multilateral system. As such, the city will continue to serve as a "testing ground for the further opening-up of the mainland economy, whether in terms of trade and investment or financial services".

She said the HKSAR government will host a major exhibition later in the year to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the country's reform and opening-up.

Joseph Yam Chi-kyong, HKSAR Executive Council member and former chief executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, said that as a regional financial hub Hong Kong can encourage the use of yuan in international transactions. He also pushed for greater mobility of capital in the Greater Bay Area.

The HKSAR's Chief Secretary for Administration Matthew Cheung Kin-chung said Hong Kong will continue to be "a super conductor, super facilitator and super promoter between China and the world as our country continues to open up to the rest of the world".

"Let me reassure our international and local audiences," Cheung said, "Hong Kong will continue to contribute to the reform and opening-up of our motherland by playing a key and constructive role for the long-term development and prosperity of the country."