

EDITORIAL

HELGA ZEPP-LAROCHE IN ZHUHAI, CHINA

The BRI and the Dialogue of Cultures: The Highest Expression Of Each Culture

Schiller Institute President Helga Zepp-LaRouche gave a keynote address to the Maritime Silk Road conference in Zhuhai, in China's Guangdong Province, on Nov. 29. Her address has been edited.

You, the Chinese people, find yourselves at a very decisive moment in history, and I know that after President Xi Jinping put the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on the agenda a little over four years ago, and the tremendous success of the policy of a New Silk Road since then, that you are completely aware of the extraordinary role China is now playing from the standpoint of the universal history of mankind. But let me share with you the view of a German—or actually, I see myself as an universal citizen, looking at what China is doing from the outside, from an international perspective.

For all the centuries up to now, from the earliest manifestations of human civilization, tribes, ethnic groups, nations or alliances of nations have pursued their self-perceived interests by various means—by negotiations, by diplomacy, and if this did not work out, by armed conflict and war. Geopolitics—the idea that a



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nation or group of nations has the right to pursue their interest against another group of nations—has led to two World Wars in the Twentieth Century.

It should be obvious to anyone, that in the age of thermonuclear weapons, war can no longer be a method of settling conflicts, if we as a human species are not to bring about our own annihilation. Humanity is distinct from all other species known in the universe so far, in that we are capable of creative reason. This means that we, unlike the animal species, can consciously change our mode of our existence, continuously discover new universal principles in science and culture, and develop a deeper and more profound knowledge about the physical universe, of which we are the most important part. So in a certain sense it is lawful that mankind would come up with the idea of how to overcome geopolitics, and establish a system of self-governance, which would guarantee the long-term survivability of humanity.

The concept of a “community of a shared future of mankind” presented by President Xi Jinping, is exactly that idea. By placing the notion of the one single man-

kind, defined from the standpoint of our common future, as the reference point for how to think about political, economic, social and cultural issues, President Xi has established a higher level of reason, a conceptual basis for a peace order throughout the planet. It is no coincidence that the concept for an entirely new paradigm in human history would come from China, as it is coherent with the 2,500 year-old Confucian tradition.

The economic dimension of this idea is expressed in the Belt and Road Initiative, the New Silk Road proposal which Xi presented in September 2013 in Kazakhstan. In the very short period of four years, this initiative for “win-win” cooperation has become the largest infrastructure program in history, developing six large economic corridors, numerous rail lines in Eurasia and Africa, ports, airports, industrial parks, power projects, water management, etc., with more than 70 countries participating. It is now twelve times bigger than the Marshall Plan in Europe in the reconstruction period after World War II, and it is open-ended. In Africa the “New Silk Road Spirit” has completely changed the outlook of the participating countries. For the first time after centuries of suffering from colonial oppression and a lack of financing, now, because of Chinese investments there is the perspective of overcoming poverty and underdevelopment in the near future. This has created an unprecedented sense of optimism.

At the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Xi defined the goal for China to become by the year 2050 “a strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious and beautiful country;” he defined the goal of politics to be creating a better and happier life for the people; he called on the people of all countries to work together to build a community of shared future for mankind—to build an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity. Shortly after this remarkable event, the extremely successful state visit of U.S. President Trump to China signified a historic step in the effort to reach this goal.

With this global perspective for the next 33 years, President Xi Jinping put a vision on the agenda, which has inspired many people in many countries, especially in the developing sector, with an unprecedented spark of optimism. The response by some politicians in some Western countries, and by the mainstream media, has ranged from complete censorship of what President Xi actually said, to the wildest falsehoods concerning the real motives behind China’s BRI policy. Some went so far as to say that China’s policy represents a threat to the

liberal order of the West. Does that mean that the idea of building a harmonious world, in which all nations can work together for the common aims of humanity, is a utopia, a dream, that can never become a reality?

I believe that the universal history of mankind can provide the answer to that question, because it shows that there are some profound characteristics, involving the ideal of the highest humanity, which are shared by the most noble expressions of different cultures. There is an amazing similarity among some of the most outstanding thinkers, who, coming from completely different cultural backgrounds, nevertheless come to the same insights into the nature of man and the purpose of mankind’s existence. These philosophers, poets, and scientists have in common a fundamental optimism about the role of human beings in the universe, realizing that human creativity is itself a power in the further development of the physical universe, and that there is a cohesion between the harmonic development of all human mental and spiritual capacities, with the harmonious development of the state, as well as of states with each other, and also with the laws of the Cosmos.

In China, this image of man and harmony in the state and among states is associated foremost with Confucius and his 2,500 year-old tradition in Chinese culture, which accounts, in my view, for the gist of what is generally called “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Confucius has an image of man that perceives man as fundamentally good, with the obligation to tirelessly improve himself intellectually and morally, which he can do by exerting his inner will-power, and in aesthetical education through poetry, classical music and certain other arts. If the individuals develop themselves to become “*junzi*,” there can be harmonious development in the family. If the government is run by *junzi*, the common good prospers.

The German “poet of freedom,” as he is called, Friedrich Schiller, after whom the Schiller Institute is named, has an amazing affinity with Confucius, despite the fact that he lived and worked more than 2,000 years later. He, too, likewise develops the concept of the aesthetical education of man, as the only method for political progress, with a special emphasis on poetry and beautiful art. His notion of the “beautiful soul” is very similar to Confucius’s idea of the “*junzi*.” The beautiful soul, Schiller says, is someone who finds his freedom in necessity, does his duty with passion, and who has educated his emotions up to the degree that he can blindly follow his impulses, since they would never command him to do something which would be opposed to

Reason. Wilhelm von Humboldt, who created the best education system in the West, said about Schiller that he created a very special category, uniting philosophy and poetry on a higher level, as no one else had done.

Probably the closest almost-contemporary philosopher of Confucius in European culture is Plato, who likewise established a school of thought, which continued, albeit with many interruptions in terms of influence, through the centuries into the present. He also has the idea of a harmoniously ordered universe, in which development is embedded in the creation of the universe in such a way that it evolves from chaos to harmony, and where not only can man recognize that harmony, but can tune his own action in accordance with the laws of the universe for the sake of everyone. In his famous work *Timaeus*, he writes:

For God, desiring that all things should be good, and that, so far as this might be, there should be nought evil, having received all that is moving not in a state of rest, but moving without harmony or measure, brought it from its disorder into order, thinking that this was in all ways better than the other. Now it neither has been nor is permitted to the most perfect to do aught but what is most fair. Therefore he took thought and perceived that of all things which are by nature visible, no work that is without reason will ever be fairer than that which has reason, setting whole against whole, and that without soul reason cannot dwell in anything. Because then he argued thus, in forming the universe he created reason in soul and soul in body, that he might be the maker of a work that was by nature most fair and perfect. In this way then, we ought to affirm according to the probable account that this universe is a living creature in very truth possessing soul and reason by the providence of God.

This beautiful idea, that God created the best of all possible worlds, was explicitly elaborated by Gottfried Leibniz. In it each human being represents a monad, which has enclosed in it, in the small, all the characteristics of the universe at large—and there is an inclusive,



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Participants at the Zhuhai conference.

pre-established harmony in that universe. The world is the best of all possible worlds, because it is constructed in such a way that every evil has the potential of generating an even greater good, which the human being can choose, because he or she has a free will. In that way, the degrees of freedom for the good increase, despite the existence of evil. From that follows the obligation of man to continuously ennoble himself in order to contribute to the progress of all of humanity and even the development of the entire cosmos.

To further this goal Leibniz created academies and scholarly societies, in order to gather the entire intellectual, scientific and cultural knowledge of all the people and put it to the service of all the nations. His conception was essentially the same as reflected in the new Center for the International Knowledge Development (CIKD), which will serve as a platform for nations to share ideas, so that their development is not delayed by the lack of access to new knowledge. That spirit influenced many scientists in history to give the fruits of their inventive power to that country which would make the best use of the discovery. One good example of that, is the collaboration of German scientists with China in the field of nuclear technology. Leibniz wrote to Czar Peter the Great, “I aim at the benefit of the entire human species, and I would rather accomplish a great good for the Russians, than a little for the Germans or the other Europeans, because my inclination and passion is the general best.”

Leibniz was completely enthusiastic about China, about which he tried to learn as much as possible from the Jesuit missionaries. He was fascinated by the fact that the Kangxi Emperor had come to the same mathe-

matical conclusions as Leibniz himself, and concluded from that, that there are universal principles accessible to all human beings and cultures. He even believed in the moral superiority of the Chinese, and wrote: “In light of the growing moral decay, it seems to be almost necessary, that Chinese missionaries be sent to us, who could teach us the application and practice of a natural theology. I therefore believe: that if a wise man were chosen to judge not the beauty of goddesses, but the excellence of peoples, he would give the golden apple to the Chinese.” It is not surprising that Leibniz had a conception of the more advanced countries helping the less-developed, very similar to the New Silk Road idea.

In 1697 he published his book *Novissima Sinica*, about how Europe and China should cooperate to develop all countries located between them. He wrote: “Maybe it is the aim of the highest providence, that those nations which are highly civilized, but are located at the greatest distance, also uplift the peoples of the regions in between to a life more in accordance with reason.”

Out of his optimistic idea of the best of all possible worlds, follows for Leibniz the right of the individual to the pursuit of happiness, a notion which has nothing to do with the hedonistic idea of “having a good time,” but means the right to have a fulfilled life by developing the fullest creative potential for the benefit of the whole society. It was explicitly this Leibnizian notion which is included in the American Declaration of Independence, that all people have the inalienable right to “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

But it was not only Leibniz who influenced the conceptions of the U.S. Constitution, the preface of which explicitly mentions the commitment to the common good—Confucius did as well. The intellectual father of the United States, Benjamin Franklin, was a convinced Confucian scholar. He published a treatise on the morals of Confucius in 1737 in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and he based his own moral philosophy, which he summarized in an outline of thirteen virtues, entirely on the morals of Confucius. So maybe the “good chemistry” which President Trump emphasized between himself and President Xi, given Xi’s deep Confucian spirit, has something to do with the fact that President Trump has indicated repeatedly that he wants to revive the “American System,” which is associated with the philosophy of the young American Republic.

To sum up the argument as to why—despite some present opposition in the West to the conception of a “community of a shared destiny of mankind”—there is

nonetheless great reason for optimism that the beautiful vision will indeed become a reality, let me conclude with this. In all great cultures there have been thinkers who understood the deep connections between an optimistic image of the limitless moral and intellectual self-perfectibility of man, with the pursuit of the common good as the precondition for the long-term survival of society, and the cohesion between human creativity and the laws of the physical universe.

For a very long time these philosophers influenced their cultures independently from one another, sometimes living during the same period, but knowing nothing of each other, since it took years to travel from one country to the other. Sometimes they influenced one another over the centuries and beyond national boundaries. There was Plato, who influenced the Arab philosophers Al Kindi, Al Farabi and Ibn Sina, as well as the Christian thinkers Augustine, Nicholas of Cusa and Leibniz.

But one can also find an affinity of their ideas in the Indian Vedic writings or the scholars of Timbuktu. Without the exchanges between the Caliph Harun Al Rashid and Charlemagne, much of the cultural and scientific heritage of ancient Greece, Egypt, Spain, and Italy might not have been saved after the collapse of the Roman Empire.

As the ancient Silk Road led to an exchange not only of goods and technologies, but also of ideas and cultures, so will the New Silk Road lead to a sharing of the best expressions of human creativity for the benefit of the one humanity. Communication, travel and knowledge about each other have sped up tremendously and will continue to do so. What earlier was only stated by the greatest philosophers with metaphysical arguments about man and the physical universe, can now be proven by modern science.

And there is no better proof of the cohesion of the microcosm of the human mind and the macrocosm of the universe at large, than space research and travel. The fact that man can travel in space is the ultimate proof of the fact that an immaterial idea, an invention, a scientific breakthrough, has an effect in the physical universe, and can elevate the human species beyond any barriers of sense-perception. All the astronauts who have been to space report the same thing: that looking at the Earth from outer space, one does not see national borders, one only perceives the one human species.

So there is profound reason for optimism, despite the reluctance of some people in the West, that the beautiful vision of the One Dream of Mankind will come true.