

REPORTS/OPINIONS

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QUO VADIS CULTURA SINICA?: SOME REMARKS ON THE FIRST WORLD CULTURAL CONFERENCE, SUZHOU, MAY 18 – 19, 2011.

The 1st Conference of the World Cultural Forum (Taihu, PRC) has been prepared from the year 2008. Its first conference was held in Suzhou on Taihu Lake on May 18 – 19, 2011. In 2009 at the 12th EU-China Summit José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission and Wen Jiabao, Premier of the PRC, decided to hold a high level cultural forum every year. The first was organized on October 6 – 7, 2010 in Brussels where 14 European and 11 Chinese scholars, artists and intellectuals led by Umberto Eco, Alain le Pichon, Qiu Xigui (裘锡圭) and Huang Ping (黄平) met to discuss some questions concerned with questions of future collaboration between the EU and PRC.¹ In November the same year the first conference of the World Cultural Forum should have been realized, but was not probably due to organizational difficulties. Originally more than one thousand participants from the whole world including nearly all countries were foreseen, but hardly one third from 30 countries were present at the first conference.

The theme of the conference: “Dialogue and Cooperation for World Harmony and Common Development” put the stress mostly on culture, its historical background, philosophical, religious, ethical problems of earlier ages and the contemporary situation. Economics as a human construct is, of course part of culture, just as politics, but it seems that the Chinese in the PRC are highlighting it more than in other countries. Economics was not a subject of discussion at the High Level Forum in Brussels, although politics was. At the TCF the last sessions were devoted to economics, but no paper was connected with politics. According to the first Call for Papers the invited participants received in summer 2010, politics was mentioned, and VIPs from world politics and governments were asked to participate. At the 1st TCF only one delegation from Pakistan led by the Premier Yousuf Rasa Gilani and his retinue was present on the first day of the forum. He was not invited precisely to attend this forum, but the

¹ GÁLIK, Marián. “Report on the First EU-China High Level Cultural Forum in Brussels: Reflections of a Participant.” In *Asian and African Studies*, New series (Bratislava), Vol. 20, No. 1, 2011, pp. 135 – 141 and its Chinese version “Bulusaier Zhongou shoujie wenhua gaofeng luntan huiyi baodao – yi wei yuhuizhe fansheng 布鲁塞尔中欧首届文化高峰论坛会议报导 – 一位与会者的反省. In *Hanxue yanjiu tongxun* 汉学研究通讯,” Vol. 30, No. 2, 2011, pp. 61 – 65.

organizers used the occasion of his four day visit of the PRC to laud the “all-weather friendship” between two countries a few days after the American raid that led to Usama bin Ladin’s death on May 2 and U.S. lawmakers’ demand for a review of aid to Pakistan to fight against the Taliban insurgency which is not at all enough effective. China is Pakistan’s main arms supplier.² The second foreign high political representative was Mrs. Megawati Sukarnoputri, former President of Indonesia, daughter of President Sukarno. She spoke about the *Pancha Shila* The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, of which Jawaharlal Nehru and Zhou Enlai, were prominent advocates in the 1950s. These presented the regulations of the ideal relationships between the states of the post-World War II era in the field of international politics. The policy of being a good neighbour (and the whole world of *bonae voluntatis*) is also applicable for our present days in the cultural realm.

Similar “all-weather friendship” has been awaited from all the participants in the TCF. If no other representatives of the political world were present at this meeting, some, but not many speakers spoke on behalf of the NGO organizations or on the problems of intercultural communication. It was in the fourth and last Concurrent Session of the Forum entitled: Building a Harmonious World Together – the Role of Governments and NGOs. Among 26 papers in this section only 3 were concerned with the role of governments in culture, and from them Marc Scheuer’s paper spoke about both. Mr. Scheuer, Director of the Secretariat of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, in his contribution: “Building a Harmonious World Together – The Role of Governments and NGOs” where he stressed that “building of bridges between societies is the mandate of the UN Alliance of Civilizations” and this is not merely an “intergovernmental undertaking”. Civil society associations, cities, corporations, religions, youth, media, are also involved, as living in harmony cannot simply be dictated from the top; it requires multi-faceted efforts dialogue, cooperation and co-ownership.” According to him China is taking part in these efforts.³ Jusuf Wanandi, from the Indonesia Centre of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), was one of a few who was against Sam Huntington’s idea of the “clash of civilizations” and stressed that dialogues among civilizations are useful and may help to create mutual understanding, if the extreme groups, mainly the terrorists, create conflicts between the religions and even the states. Professor Wen Jun 文军, Director of the Institute of Sociology, East China Normal University, in his contribution “The Plight of NGOs’ Role and its Operational Strategies: a Case of the Development of Chinese NGOs” admits that the Chinese “society is becoming stagnant and even retrogressive”. In fact, the role of Non-Governmental Organization (sic!) in China is in a dilemma now. On the one hand, the government wants to actively promote the development of the NGOs in order to reduce the pressure on itself. On the other hand, the rapid development of NGOs is concerned that it will affect the authority of the government (p. 242). Here one may observe a certain degree

² STUMME, Susan. “China’s Hu Calls Pakistan PM an ‘Old Friend’.” In *The China Post*, May 21, 2011, p. 11.

³ *World Cultural Forum (Taihu, China). The First Conference. A Collection of Paper Abstracts by Experts and Scholars from China and Abroad.* Suzhou, May 2011, p. 212. Henceforth the pages from this collection will be given after the citations in parentheses only.

of criticism of the government. In one dialogue with a representative of one important Chinese political organization I was informed that there are problems and clashes between the governmental and non-governmental organizations. How is it possible to build up a relatively harmonious society without good cooperation between them? Another speaker Xiang Deping 向德平, also a sociologist from the Central China Normal University, claimed that the Chinese government “must now spare no efforts to encourage the development of such organizations through making laws, including financial policies, friendly and favourable to them, providing legal support for their participation in global communication, and offering them advice on how to improve their competence” (pp. 244 – 245).

Four concurrent sessions were the main themes of the conference:

Concurrent Session I: Historical Revelation and the Practical Values of Different Civilizations

Concurrent Session II: Chinese Civilization and World Civilizations

Concurrent Session III: Diversity of Cultures and Improvement of Human Civilization

Concurrent Session IV: Building a Harmonious World Together – The Role of Governments and NGOs

I have briefly analysed some contributions to the Concurrent Session IV in the preceding text.

In the Concurrent Session I the well-known Russian scholar Professor Marietta Stepaniants, Director of the Center for Oriental Philosophies’ Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences and Vice-President of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP), pointed to the disillusion that “globalization will lead in the long run to the worldwide triumph of the values and institutions of liberal democracy” (p. 39). She supposes that the future world will probably emerge according to the “Asian scenario” where China and India will have a particular place in the foreseeable future. These two countries have the areal chance to become world powers. But economic or military supremacy are not enough. Ethical and other values are equally important. These values should be presented and later followed by those who will achieve this particular place in future history. The Chinese ideas of harmony and Indian *soft power* should be among them. Marietta Stepaniants’ colleague in the function of the Vice-President of the FISP and the Chair of the Organizing Committee of the 22nd World Congress of Philosophy, held in Seoul, 2008, Yersu Kim 金丽寿 presented a contribution concerned with the development of civilizations and cultural synthesis. He discussed the question of the overall culture that “in order to survive and prosper, must constantly adapt its ideas, values and practices to the changing circumstances” (p. 29). Among the twenty three civilizations as identified by Arnold Toynbee, Kim pointed to the four most prominent: Chinese, Indian, Islamic and Western European. He, of course, did not forget the importance of the whole Eastern Asian civilization, where the Chinese share was prevalent. Similarly to Stepaniants he pointed, although using other words, to the importance of the Asian countries in our

global age. East Asian solutions should be taken into account, if mankind is going to survive and prosper. One of these efforts was the “Asian values” debate of the 1990s. In spite of the conflicts that are raging in Iran and Afghanistan and in the Islamic countries (he did not mention these last in the material the participants got into their hands), it is possible to see that “humanity is now ready to engage in this dialogue of civilizations with a view to establishing a common base on which to build the future. In recent years, a number of studies have drawn attention to the need to articulate universal common values and principles that could serve as the bases for peaceful and productive interaction among nations and societies” (p. 31). The paper by John Hiang Chea Chew 周贤正, Primate of the Province of Anglican Church in South East Asia and Bishop of Singapore, was interesting for me as a student of the Bible and its historical role in different branches of world culture. He saw in the happenings of 1989 “the epochal and watershed events” that drew Cold War politics nearly to the end. Still September 11, 2001 is a *caveat* for the world. Global peace and harmony are still elusive (and will certainly be for many generations to come, M.G.). It is necessary and may be fruitful to seek examples of searching for renewal of the living force in the history of humankind. Bishop Chew sees such in the Exilic period of the Hebrews in Babylonia after 576 B.C. They remained faithful to the voices of their prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, but also under new circumstances in the captivity they partly changed their worldview and transformed their civilization which became friendlier and more open to the world around them. Professor Ding Yifan 丁一凡, Vice-Director of the Institute of World Development and Vice-Chairman of the China Society of World Economics, pointed to the problem of misunderstandings and borrowings from other civilizations in the times of the Enlightenment during the Ming (1368 – 1644) and Qing (1644 – 1911) Dynasties and the May Fourth Movement after 1919. The misunderstandings and borrowings after 1949 brought disasters to China after the building up of the people’s communes, Anti-Rightist Campaign, and during the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976). Often they are useful in the course of historical development, but often not. I agree with the opinion that both China and the West need reforms. But I do not agree that the West is still immersed in the Cold War period and its understanding of China sticks between the categories of “dictatorship” and “democracy.” I am a sufficiently old and experienced Sinologist and I know, at least from the difficult period of the Anti-Rightist Campaign and Great Leap Forward that the Chinese had difficulty acknowledging properly the current situation (or do not dare to acknowledge it!) because of fear, or because of other reasons to do it. In any case it would be better, notwithstanding the achievements of the last twenty years that more democracy, probably not just the same as in the greatest part of the Western world, would be very beneficial for China. The One-Party system and the Tiananmen Incident are and will remain the thorns in the eyes for the inhabitants of the West.

In the Concurrent Session II I was one of the 4 moderators. My colleague in one of the two subsections was well-known PRC philosopher Professor Fang Keli 方克立, former Director of the Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. We had with us as “guest” moderators: one Chinese leader Xu Jialu 徐嘉璐, former Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, whom I know from the World Sinological Congresses held in 2007 and 2010 in Peking, and two

others: Zheng Keyang 郑科扬, former Deputy Director of the Policy Research Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and Xiong Guangkai 熊光楷, former Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army and now the Honorary Chairman of the China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies. Mr. Xu is a good expert on Chinese culture, but I ask why General Xiong, expert on strategic studies and Mr. Zheng, expert on Party construction and policy should be present at a conference promoting the Chinese culture in the world and vice versa? Is it necessary to politicize culture as was the case in this conference? My contribution to this session: "On the Inter-philosophical Sino-Western Dialogue in the Age of Globalization" was concerned with the philosophy which in the present age of worldwide globalization may contribute to sustainable world harmony and development. It is necessary to persuade philosophers of the East and West to construct the future philosophical teachings helping to produce a new quality of human relations and their mutual communication and understanding. In order to form the teachings compatible for our global age more attention should be devoted to Comparative Philosophy in order to know what has been done in the fields of ontology, epistemology, ethical and political philosophy, aesthetics and religion. Fang Keli's and Lin Cunguang's 林存光 contribution concerning the essence of Chinese culture was concerned with the basic aspects summarized as follows: *yu shi xie xing* 与时谐行 keeping pace with the times, *he er bu tong* 和而不同 harmony but not uniformity, *yi ren wei ben* 以人为本 taking the human beings as the centre, *min wei bang ben* 民为邦本 taking people as the centre of the state, *Tianxia wei gong* 天下为公 taking the whole world as one community, *Tian ren he yi* 天人和议 unifying Nature and man and *wen ming yi zhi* 文明以止 civilization evolves in restraint. These are very idealistic views which rarely found realizations in the long Chinese history, but in order to preserve the civilizations of the world, it would be good to take them into account in the history of future mankind. They could be appropriate advice for the World Ethos now under construction headed by Professor Hans Küng and with the assistance of Professor Liu Shu-hsien 刘述先 from Academia Sinica, Taipei. I enjoyed the contribution of Mohamed Noman Galal, Advisor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Bahrain, who on the basis of his 45 years experience as a diplomat and scholar pointed to the need to forget about our historical claims, the past is the past. It is not possible to imprison ourselves in the historical myths. Many dangers are lying ahead connected with carbon emission, overall pollution, climate change, natural calamities, arms race, nuclearization, militarization, etc. Finally, Zhao Guojun 赵国钧, Lieutenant General and Special Member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the former Commander of the East China Sea Fleet of Chinese Navy, spoke about the necessity "to cultivate the soldiers' core values" and "adhere to the absolute leadership of the Party, develop its professional capability of a high grade" (p. 87). It was only a few days before the problems with the presence of the Chinese Navy deep in the Pacific Ocean and the America worries concerned with it.⁴

⁴ Cf. Singapore, AFP: "China Seeks to placate Neighbours." In *The China Post*, June 6, 2011, p. 1 and two articles by the correspondents of the *China Daily/Asia New Network*:

Two other moderators of this session were Professor Zhuo Xinping 卓新平, Director of the Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Augustino Giovagnoli, Director of the Department of History, Sacred Heart Catholic University of Milan, who both spoke about the contribution of Jesuit Fathers of the 17th – 18th centuries to Chinese science and to spreading of Christianity and knowledge about China in the West. Another speaker Yan Kejia 宴可佳, Director of the Institute of Religious Studies of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, put the stress on the greatest among these missionaries and scientists: Matteo Ricci (1552 – 1610). Michael Welker devoted his attention to the Protestant Reformation and proclaimed it as a movement for renewal of the church in spite of which it “caused split still effective in Christianity today” (p. 108).

In the Concurrent Session III Professor Miikka Ruokanen, University of Helsinki, exalted the religious dialogue as a successful means of intercultural communication. Using it we may better understand the faiths and beliefs of others. It will not lead us to any unified views, but it may diminish misunderstanding and help to foster mutual respect. Phillip L. Wickery, an expert on Chinese religions from Hong Kong, pointed to another important aspect concerning the inter-religious dialogue and and craved-for harmony: this is to be done within a secular framework promoting “justice, human capabilities and democracy” (pp. 164 – 165). One contribution concerned with Buddhism was presented at the First Plenary Session by Master Xing Yun 星云 (*1927), one of the most prominent Buddhist teachers of our age, founder of Foguang University, Jiaoxi, and of Foguangshan Monastery, Gaoxiong, Taiwan, and probably the oldest participant in the conference. As far as I know, Xing Yun was the only representative of Taiwan at this conference.

The so-called Special Conference was divided into 2 sessions of which Special Section I was devoted to the reflections on the global financial crisis from the visual angle of culture and the second one to the construction of the ecological civilization, with the stress on the global equity, justice and the healthy development of human civilizations. Probably a contribution by Professor Yu Xintian 俞新天, Shanghai Institute of International Studies and President of Shanghai Institute of Taiwan Studies was comprehensible even for those who do not understand the present international economic situation. In her paper “Rethinking the Financial Crisis from a Cultural Perspective” she found guilty the American system of values and life style as responsible for the state of world affairs after 2007. The global financial crisis was caused mostly by the US policy, emphasizing too much freedom but neglecting responsibility. The belief in American “universal values” violate cultural diversity and the “consumption-oriented American lifestyle is unsustainable, inadaptable and inimitable” (p. 283). Another woman scholar Chen Wenling 陈文玲, Director of the Research Office of State Council, stressed the idea that in the “market economy, credit culture plays a great role in the determining the relations between persons, between a

“China, US Must Work to Build Trust” and “Sea Dispute Will Be a Real Test for China,” both *China Post*, June 10, 2011, p. 4. Also the editorial published in the same issue under the title “China’s Carrier Signals Its Growing Regional Ambitions.”

person and the society and between economic units in a society. It affects the way people behave, as a fundamental belief, moral restraint, and institutional norms...” (p. 270). The core of the culture of credit is *xinyong zhi shang* 信用至上 good faith first. Her exposition was similar to that by Professor Piotr Stompka, a sociologist from Poland, read on the occasion of the 13th EU-China Summit the last year. According to him the collapse of trust was also the main reason for the recent financial crisis⁵ caused by the subprime mortgage market and was the most serious since the Great Depression in the 1930s. Professor Zhang Zhuoyuan 张卓元, former Director of the Institute of Economics of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, sees quite a few causes of the recent financial crisis: low-saving and high-consuming patterns, neglecting of risks and seeking improbable growth, lack of self-discipline. Never-resting greed, cheating in the name of innovation, too high consumption, spending by borrowing, all this triggered the crisis. In contrast to some countries in the EU, Greece chose to live in leisure (no other country of EU was mentioned) and this led to the bankruptcy (pp. 284 – 287). In Special Session II Professor Andrew Brennan, Vice-Chancellor of La Trobe University, Melbourne, in his contribution “Civilization in Crisis? The Lessons of the Global Ecological and Financial Crises” analysed both aspects together. The first one consisted of the problems connected with climate change where responses by governments and economical and political companies were criticized by scientists, but rising sea levels, water scarcity, storms, typhoons are the outcome of climate change. The second one is concerned with economic collapse or at least financial crisis. For the second the means how to treat it have been found or at least they are being searched for. As to the first one “confusion and denial still limit effective agreement on how best to tackle climate change” (p. 286). Both crises brought more suffering for income-poor countries. Professor Lu Feng 卢风, Department of Philosophy and Deputy Director of the Centre of Morality and Religion Studies, Qinghua University, Peking, pondered over the two conceptions of eco-civilization: one which consists of human efforts and practice of protecting the environment and it is a part of the modern industrial civilization. The second claims that the eco-civilization is a new civilization contrary to the industrial one, which was guided by the “logic of capital” that permanently encouraged “people to be greedy to get material wealth” (p. 297). According to him the old mode of the production should be changed, with recycling production and clean energy introduced to a larger extent.

The Special Plenary Session: Dialogue between Culture and Economy was meant to be the climax of the conference. Two speakers had the privilege to use 30 or 40 minutes for their presentations (for others in the sessions 10 minutes were the limit). Professor Robert A. Mundell, Laureate of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1999, Columbia University, spoke about the role of culture in economic development. His speech was rather short and he has not prepared an abstract for the publication. Professor Li Yining’s 厉以宁 paper on the issue of social harmony in economic development of China was longer. As a Director-General of the Social Sciences Division of Peking University of Peking University he has shown in his speech Laozi-like briefness, economical and political wisdom going back to Sun Yat Senian principles of the

⁵ Cf. GÁLIK M., op. cit., English version, pp. 139 – 140 and Chinese version, p. 64.

people's livelihood, renewing ideology and regarding the ecological construction as the most important aim together with cultural construction – “cultivating correct beliefs and spiritual motivations” (p. 307).

The afternoon of the second day of the conference was devoted to visiting some of the beautiful places of Suzhou highlighted in old times as one of the “of the paradises on earth.” Its classical gardens are inscribed in the World Cultural Heritage List.

For reasons unknown to me *I was the only one among the participants in this conference who was also present at the High Level Forum on the occasion of the 13th EU-China Summit in Brussels last year.* Therefore I think that I can make some comparisons that may be useful for the organizers of the next forums and also for the planned bi-annual TCF conferences. The High Level Forum in Brussels was organized by the French-Italian International Transcultural Institute, well-known in China and abroad for its long 20 years of collaboration with the Chinese intellectuals around Professors Yue Daiyun 乐黛云 and Huang Ping, the second of whom is a Director of the Institute of American Studies of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, one of the most important institutes of this highest organization of science and scholarship of the PRC. None of them participated in this meeting. The American presence was absolutely inadequate. If we leave aside Gregory D’Elia, First Secretary of the Embassy of the United States of America and Marc Scheuer, mentioned at the beginning of this report, who as a Belgian national, represented more the UN than US, then Professor Robert A. Mundell *was the only American speaker*, who was present there during not even two hours of the last but one session and then after meeting with journalists he disappeared. Professor Joseph S. Nye, Harvard University, an American supporter of “soft power” in international relations, did not come, although his speech was announced in the program.⁶ No other great master of culture, no other Sinologist of this political, economic and cultural superpower! American Sinology is the best in the world! Cuba and Pakistan were better represented than the US. There were no French, Dutch, Swedish, or even Russian Sinologists, although there were some Russian guests. If the foreign “delegates” from Cuba and Pakistan are as few as coming from the US, then we need to put an answer a question: where the Chinese initiative in cultural dialogue and cooperation with the world tends toward? Why there was only one representative of Taiwanese culture? According to my humble opinion, Chinese philosophers and writers outside of PRC and from Taiwan are at least so good, if not better than those on the Mainland. No country, except Cuba, was represented from Latin America, not even Brazil, which is now loyal to China and its greatest economic partner in the region. No one delegate from the Sub-Saharan Africa was at the conference with the exception of South Africa represented by Professor Johan Hattingh from Stellenbosh University and her former colleague Hannah Eddinger, now Senior Manager and Head of Research trying to find the ways to overcome the barriers to greater business cooperation between the two countries. Why was no one foreign writer, artist, filmmaker or architect at the

⁶ *Conference Handbook 2011. Program*, p. 3. See also its Chinese version, p. 2. See his recent article: “The War on Soft Power.” In *Foreign Policy*, April 12, 2011.

conference? Why was there only one Chinese writer Su Shuyang 苏叔阳, but not Wang Meng 王蒙, Mo Yan 莫言 or Han Shaogong 韩少功, who are better known outside of China? No artists comparable to Xu Bing 徐冰, Zhang Xiaogang 张晓刚 and others now highly appreciated in the world were present, although for the time being they are highly appreciated in the auctions abroad and at exhibitions. Relatively many cadres of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles were present. Should they represent the Chinese writers and artists in front of and in the world culture in this call for dialogue and fruitful cooperation?

I have the impression that the conference was “over-politicized.” Four Chinese contemporary leaders of the PRC, eight guest moderators consisting of high cadres from the Ministries and other PRC institutions, four special guests usually with long CVs full of the political functions from the National People’s Congress and other high positions.

On the top of all of that: Suzhou City, Wuzhou District and Jiangsu province were represented by 62 delegates not including those who had relations to culture (scholars, teachers, journalists) and the sponsors from economy and finances. **More than one fifth of the participants in this First Conference of the World Cultural Forum were from Suzhou and its surroundings.** This is not an attractive and certainly not a specimen worthy of following, but typical of Chinese *guanxi* 关系 (personal relationships) misuse, network building, political “nepotism” and impolite attitude to the foreign participants and foreign culture. Then what is it? How much better would it be if more experts from the foreign countries could participate? Why invite the representatives of the Security Bureau, Suzhou Railway Station and Militia Headquarters! Do they have something in common with the spreading of Chinese culture to the world? More and even better experts and makers on both sides are needed.

On the other hand it is necessary to appreciate positively the Taihu World Forum in spite of the shortcomings just mentioned. The organizers should be careful when inviting those who are in the different positions without any relations with the objectives of the conference. Not the position but the professional knowledge should be decisive.

Without eliminating the shortcoming just mentioned, the TCF will never become a cultural Davos.