

Columbus' First 'Belt and Road' Inspired by Cusa

by Will Wertz

Sept. 30—As long maintained by Lyndon LaRouche, the seed crystal for today's One Belt, One Road grand design for world peace based on economic development traces itself back to Nicolaus of Cusa and his immediate collaborators: Paolo Toscanelli and Ferdinand Martin, the Canon of Lisbon, Portugal and confessor of King Alfonso V of Portugal. Together, they were responsible for organizing the first attempted maritime belt between Europe and China carried out by Christopher Columbus to complement the already existing Silk Road.

Toscanelli and Martin were among the closest collaborators of Nicolaus of Cusa. In fact, they were the executors of his last will and testament. Toscanelli appears in Nicolaus of Cusa's *Dialogue on the Quadrature of the Circle* and Martin in Cusa's *On the Not-Other*. Nicolaus of Cusa had known Toscanelli since Cusanus studied law in Padua, Italy, graduating in 1424. When Cusanus traveled to Constantinople in 1437 at the behest of Pope Eugene IV, he was accompanied by Antonio Martin, the Bishop of Oporto, the brother of Ferdinand Martin, King Alfonso's confessor. The purpose of Cusanus' trip to Constantinople was to bring Greek and Russian Orthodox Church representatives back to Italy for the ecumenical Council of Florence, Italy, which started in 1439 and concluded in 1445.

Toscanelli, in a letter to Martin on June 25, 1474 (to be relayed to King Alfonso V of Portugal) reported that a Chinese Ambassador had met with Pope Eugene IV in Florence, Italy before the start of the Council of Florence. After meeting with the Pope, the Chinese Ambassador then met with Toscanelli personally.

The Chinese then had an advanced navigational capacity and conducted, under the leadership of Zheng He, seven major voyages. Two of these in 1414, and the



Nicolaus of Cusa
(1401-1464)

last voyage in 1433, sailed up the Red Sea to Jeddah, which is very close to Mecca. It is also reported that they visited Cairo, Egypt. The meeting with Pope Eugene IV in Florence is believed to have occurred soon after the 1433 visit to Cairo.¹ Such diplomatic exchanges between the Roman Catholic Church and Ming China began as early as 1371. During the reign of Yongle (1403-1424) China received a delegation from the papacy.²

Both the letter written by Toscanelli to Ferdinand Martin in

1. There are many sources which report on these two journeys, including: *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*, which reports that in the 1414 voyage "[A Chinese mission visited Mecca and continued to Egypt](http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat2/4sub8/ite_m45.html)," and from http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat2/4sub8/ite_m45.html: "The seventh and final voyage (1431-33) was sent out by the Yongle emperor's successor, his grandson the Xuande emperor. This expedition had more than one hundred large ships and over 27,000 men, and it visited all the important ports in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean as well as Aden and Hormuz. One auxiliary voyage traveled up the Red Sea to Jidda, only a few hundred miles from the holy cities of Mecca and Medina." And, according to [Wang Tai Peng](#), in "Zheng He and his Envoys' Visits to Cairo in 1414 and 1433," this final auxiliary voyage included seven envoys, who spoke a number of languages including Arabic and Latin. One of the purposes of this voyage was to announce "the Ming imperial edict of emperor Xuande to the Majjia Kingdom or Mecca, the Baigeda Kingdom or Baghdad, the Mosili Kingdom or Cairo, the Mulanpi Kingdom or Morocco and the Fulin Kingdom or Florence, that all of them were his subjects. According to Ming History, Egypt and Morocco were among foreign countries that had received the Chinese imperial edict and gifts but failed to send any tribute to Ming China. But Florence and Baghdad belonged to the category of foreign countries which had already paid tribute to Ming China during the reign of emperor Yongle (1403-1424)." The foreign rulers were to be presented with the Xuande astronomical calendar marking his inauguration and with charts and navigational aids to enable foreign rulers to return tribute to China.

2. In *The Papacy and Ancient China* by Tai Peng Wang, the following sources are cited: Yan Conglina: Zhuyi Zhouzi Lu [Comprehensive Record of Foreign Lands] and Zhang Xing Lang: Zhangxi Jiaotong Shiliao Huibian [Collected Historical Sources of the History of Contacts between China and the West], Vol. 1, Chapter 6, p. 315.

1474 and the letter written to Columbus in 1480 appear below.

In the letter to Martin, Toscanelli makes it clear that the Chinese were governed by “astronomers and other men skilled in the natural sciences.” Then in his letter to Columbus, Toscanelli emphasizes “the most copious and good and true information from distinguished men of great learning who have come here in the [Papal] court of Rome [Florence at that time] from the said parts.” These passages, considered together, suggest strongly that the Chinese knowledge of astronomy and navigation contributed to his confidence in the success of the project to reach China and India by sailing west.

Following that visit of the Chinese Ambassador to Florence, the ecumenical Council of Florence was organized with the intention of reuniting the Roman Catholic Church with the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches.

At that moment, the possibility of realizing a common destiny among key nations and cultures of the world, centered on Europe, Russia, and China was coming into existence. This is the concept later developed by Gottfried Leibniz—and advocated today by Lyndon and Helga LaRouche, as embodied in the One Belt, One Road conception.

The reunification achieved at the Council of Florence, however, was short-lived. After the death of Zheng He, during his last voyage in 1433, the Chinese discontinued their ambitious navigational project. In 1453, with the help of the Venetians, the Ottoman Turks took over Constantinople.

Nicolaus of Cusa responded with his dialogue *On the Peace of Faith*, in



Zheng He statue in the Quanzhou Maritime Museum.
wikipedia/jonjanego

which he argued for unity in diversity among all humanity, based on the fact that all human beings are created in the living image of the Creator,—what the Chinese today call a *win-win approach*. The characters in the dialogue include representatives of European, Indian, Arab, Persian, Tatar, and other cultures. As Toscanelli’s letter to Ferdinand Martin indicates, the ruler of Cathay or China at the time of Marco Polo was the Great Khan, who was a Tatar.

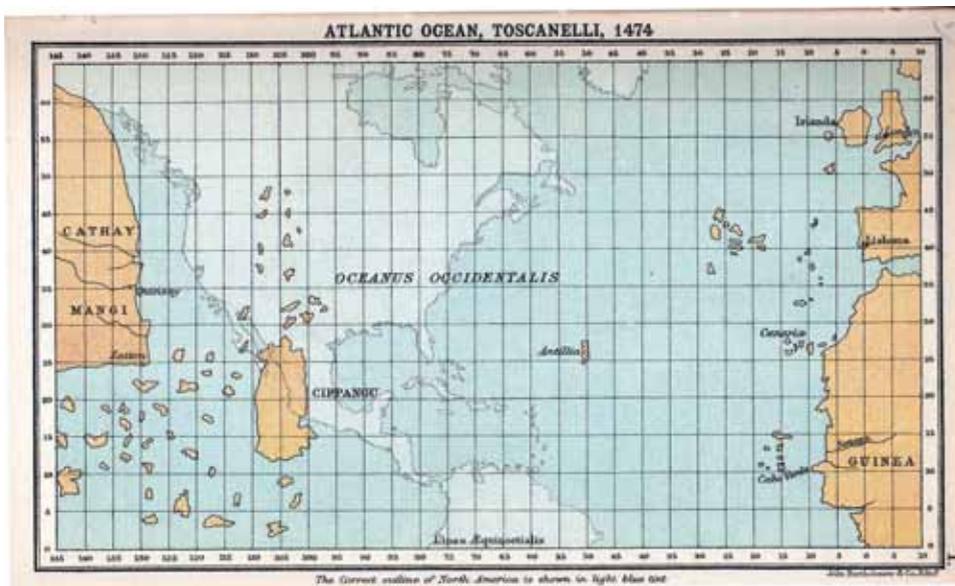
Before Cusanus’ death, he convened a synod to reform the Catholic Church, from his position as Vicar General of the Papal States. Unfortunately, Cusanus’ reform effort failed at that time because of the oligarchical corruption in Europe, reflected in the Curia.

Cusanus died in 1464: It was left to his immediate associates Toscanelli and Ferdinand Martin to continue his vision and to outflank the Venetian corruption then dominating Europe.

In 1476 Christopher Columbus was shipwrecked in



Zheng He's fleet, 1405, artist's rendition.



Toscanelli's map of 1474, with actual outline of North America shown in light blue.

Portugal, where he was befriended by Ferdinand Martin. Guided by his correspondence with Martin's collaborator Toscanelli, Christopher Columbus became the indispensable instrument for furthering the grand design, which, through the rediscovery of the Western Hemisphere and the creation of the United States of America, is now once again on the agenda. This time we must win!

Toscanelli's Letter to Ferdinand Martin (1474)

To Fernan Martinez, Canon of Lisbon,
Paulus the Physician sends greetings.

It pleased me to hear of your intimacy and friendship with your great and powerful King [Afonso V]. Often before have I spoken of a sea route from here to India, the land of spices; a route that is shorter than that via Guinea. You tell me that His Highness wishes me to explain this in greater detail so that it will be easier to understand, and to take this route. Although I could show this on a globe representing the earth, I have decided to do it more simply and clearly by demonstrating the way on a nautical chart. I therefore send His Majesty a chart drawn by my own hand, on which I have indicated the western coastline from Ireland in the north

to the end of Guinea, and the islands that lie along this path. Opposite them, directly to the west, I have indicated the beginning of India, together with the islands and places you will come to; how far you should keep from the Arctic Pole and the Equator; and how many leagues you must cover before you come to these places, which are most rich in all kinds of spices, gems, and precious stones. Do not be amazed when I say that spices grow in lands to the west, even though we usually say the east; for he who sails west will always find these lands

in the west, and he who travels east by land will always find the same lands in the east.

The upright lines on this chart show the distance from east to west, whereas the cross lines show the distance from north to south. The chart also indicates various places in India that may be reached if one meets with a storm or head-wind, or any other misfortune.

That you may know as much about these places as possible, you should know that the only people living on any of these islands are merchants who trade there.

There are said to be as many ships, mariners, and goods there as in the rest of the world put together. Especially in the principal port called Zaiton [Marco Polo's Zaitum, probably Quanzhou], where they load and unload a hundred great ships of pepper every year, not to mention many other ships with other spices. That country has many inhabitants, provinces, kingdoms, and innumerable cities, all of which are ruled by a prince known as the Great Khan—which in our language means 'The King of Kings'—who mainly resides in the province of Cathay.

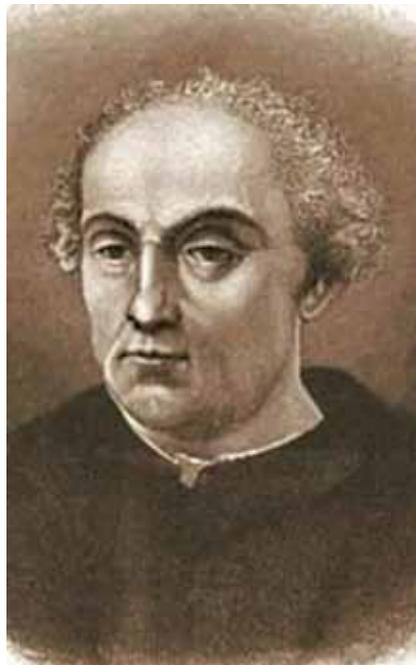
His forefathers greatly desired to make contact with the Christian world, and some two hundred years ago they sent ambassadors to our Pope, asking him to send them many learned men who could instruct them in our faith. But these ambassadors met with difficulties on the way and had to turn back without reaching Rome. In the days of Pope Eugenius, there came an ambassador to him, who told him of their great feelings of friend-

ship for the Christians. I had a long conversation with the ambassador about many things: about the vast size of the royal buildings, about the amazing length and breadth of their rivers, and about the great number of cities on their banks—so great a number that along one river there were two hundred cities with very long, wide bridges of marble that were adorned with many pillars.

This country is richer than any other yet discovered, and not only could it provide great profit and many valuable things, but also possesses gold and silver and precious stones and all kinds of spices in large quantities—things that do not reach our countries at present. There are also many scholars, philosophers, astronomers, and other men skilled in the natural sciences who govern that great kingdom and conduct its wars.

From the city of Lisbon to the west, the chart shows twenty-six sections, of two hundred and fifty miles each—altogether, nearly one-third of the earth's circumference before reaching the very large and magnificent city of Quinsay. This city is approximately one hundred miles in circumference, possesses ten marble bridges, and its name means 'The Heavenly City' in our language. Amazing things have been related about its vast buildings, its artistic treasures, and its revenues. It lies in the province of Manji, near the province of Cathay, where the king chiefly resides. And from the island of Antillia, which you call the Island of the Seven Cities, to the very famous island of Cipangu are ten sections, that is 2,500 miles. That island is very rich in gold, pearls, and precious stones, and its temples and palaces are covered in gold. But since the route to this place is not yet known, all these things remain hidden and secret; and yet one may go there in great safety.

I could still tell of many other things, but as I have already told you of them in person, and as you are a man of good judgment, I will write no further on the subject. I have tried to answer your questions as well as the lack of time and my work have permitted me, but I am always prepared to serve His Highness and answer his questions at greater length should he so wish.



Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli
(1397-1482)

Written in Florence on the 25th of June. 1474.³

Toscanelli's Letter to Columbus (1480)

Paul, the physician to Christopher Columbus, greeting. I received your letters with the things you sent me, and with them received great satisfaction. I perceive your magnificent and grand desire to navigate from parts of the East to the West in the way that was set forth in the letter that I sent you and which will be demonstrated better on a round sphere. It pleases me much that I should be well understood: for the voyage is not only possible, it is true, and certain to be honorable and to yield incalculable profit, and a very great fame among all Christians. But

you cannot know this perfectly save through experience and practice as I have had in the form of the most copious and good and true information from distinguished men of great learning who have come here in the [Papal] court of Rome [Florence at that time] from the said parts and from others being merchants, who have had business for a long time in those parts, men of high authority. Thus when that voyage shall be made it will be to powerful kingdoms and cities and most noble provinces, very rich in all manner of things in great abundance and very necessary to us, such as all sorts of spices in great quantity and jewels in greatest abundance.⁴

3. The source of this letter is *The Journals of Christopher Columbus*: In footnote 2, p. 4, it reads: "A copy of the original letter from Toscanelli to Martins in the handwriting of Columbus himself was found in the Columbine Library at Seville in 1860. It was a flyleaf of a book by Eneas Silvius, which formerly belonged to the Admiral. It is printed in Asensio's *Life of Columbus* (I, p. 250), and the above is translated from the text of Asensio. A Spanish version is given by Las Casas I, p. 92 and an Italian version in the *Vita del Ammiraglio*, cap. xiii." Eneas Silvius was Enea Silvio Bartolomeo Piccolomini (October 18, 1405 to August 14, 1464). He was Pope Pius II from August 19, 1458 to his death in 1464. In 1459, Pope Pius II appointed Nicolaus of Cusa the General Vicar of the Papal States.

4. <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/columbus/Columbus-Journal.pdf>