

East and West: A Dialogue of Great Cultures

by Helga Zepp-LaRouche

Mrs. LaRouche's address to Panel II, the Dialogue of Civilizations, of the Schiller Institute conference entitled "The Belt and Road Initiative—and Corresponding Ideas in Chinese and Western Philosophy," in New York City on April 14, 2017. Her remarks are preceded by a brief introduction by the moderator, Dennis Speed.

Dennis Speed: This conference originates in a conversation that happened between two of the presenters on the occasion of an earlier conference that we held. There was a proposal that there should be a conference which would take up the Belt and Road Initiative, but should also begin a process of a more in-depth dialogue: Not merely on the question of East versus West, but on the common thread of humanity, which is really what characterizes the New Silk Road proposal we're making, and the old Silk Road, which was the pride of China, exemplifies. Over the course of the past three decades, Helga LaRouche has made the point over and over, that the primary problem of humanity is that it is not grown up. That doesn't mean that at certain points there have not been adults in humanity, and there have not been people who exemplified creativity, but we wanted to take the occasion today, to give you some idea about these areas.

So, to begin, I'm introducing to you the founder and chairwoman of the Schiller Institute, Helga Zepp-LaRouche.

Helga Zepp-LaRouche: Dear friends of Classical music and Classical culture and the Schiller Institute: The Schiller Institute from the very beginning had the idea that you have to have a Just New World Economic Order, but that it would not ever work if it were not connected with a renaissance of Classical culture. What I'm going to talk about, the topic I'm speaking about, is the idea of highest humanity, the common philosophical foundations of Western and Asian culture—you will see what I mean.

The hope-filled vision of President Xi Jin-

ping for what he always calls a community of shared future of mankind, which he conceptualized along with the "win-win" cooperation of the New Silk Road, has recently been adopted in a resolution of the UN Security Council. Which means that it is now officially—even if in any case it has been that already—it's now an over-arching principle which binds all nations of this world through this higher perspective. With this concept, for the first time, a strategic initiative has been put on the agenda which can replace the war-causing geopolitics with the ideal of a united humanity. In the three-and-a-half years since Xi Jinping proposed this policy in Kazakhstan, in September [2013], this idea has rapidly become widespread and inspired more and more nations. Particularly among the less-developed nations, it has promoted a previously completely absent optimism that in the near future poverty can be overcome, and that humane conditions of life for all people on this planet can be created. Countless people from different nations and cultures perceive that we are standing at the beginning of a new epoch of universal history.



UN photo/Loey Felipe

President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping, addressing the UN General Assembly Sept. 28, 2015.

But why is it that so many governments and heads of state and politicians and broad-minded people recognize in an instant the enormous potential embodied in it to define the common goals of humanity from the standpoint of the future, while others state, that there must be hidden reasons behind the Belt and Road Initiative, that there are sinister motives by China, replacing one imperialism with another one; this time a Chinese one. How is it possible that the same factual object, namely, that a concrete development concept for all of humanity is being realized, only to be interpreted in such completely different ways? These opposing points of view obviously have to do with the different axioms of thinking from which this question is approached.

The former publisher of the London *Times* and one of the leading mouthpieces of the British Empire, Lord [William] Rees-Mogg, once criticized the theses of Samuel Huntington that it will be unavoidable to come to a clash of civilizations between Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism. He advanced the notion that the real conflict would play out between the old values of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism and the new values of the New Age neo-liberal society and modernity.

Post-Christian Values

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in his recent annual press conference, made a similar point regarding the values of the free West, which it relentlessly tries to impose on all non-Western countries. “These are probably not the values espoused by the grandfathers of today’s Europeans,” said Lavrov, “but something new and modernized, a free-for-all, I would say. They are radically and fundamentally at odds with the values handed down from generation to generation for centuries in our country—which we would like to cherish and hand down to our children and grandchildren.

When during foreign policy battles, we and many others face a demand to accept these new post-Christian Western values, including permissiveness and universality of liberal approaches to the life of the individual, I think it is indecent on a human level, but in terms of professional diplomats, it’s a colossal mistake and a completely unacceptable overestimation of your influence on international relations.”

It is self-evident that geopolitics and the notion of a unipolar world, also the imposition of Western values, must be replaced with a real dialogue of cultures. But

how should a real understanding take place between philosophies and art forms from completely different cultures, which are separated from one another by different languages, traditions, and customs? Does one need a new lingua franca, or pop songs in English, Hindi, Arabic, or Chinese in order to understand each other? Or is there something more profound, universal, belonging to all cultures? And without abusing in the least their uniqueness, which puts them in the position for a real exchange, and allows reciprocal enrichment, a kind of cultural “win-win” harmony?

Much confusion regarding this issue has come into being because the characterization of foreign cultures is often not presented in a positive light, or at least objectively. Historians and culture experts of colonial powers always insisted on maintaining the right of interpretation; not only of their own, but also of foreign cultural histories.

As a result, many Europeans and Americans know very little about the best of Asian cultures, while the Asians often only get to know the British interpretation of European history. In European intellectual history for the past 2.5 thousand years, two fundamentally opposed directions have been in conflict, which one could describe as the battle between the oligarchical system and the republican system for the common good. The view of man of the first, associated with Sparta and Lycurgus, claims that all privileges are for the ruling elite; and it denies to the broad masses the right to mental and material development. Thus they remain subjects easier to rule over. The second considers all people as capable of potentially endless perfection, and sees it as the duty of the state to promote, in the best possible way, the creative capability of its citizens.

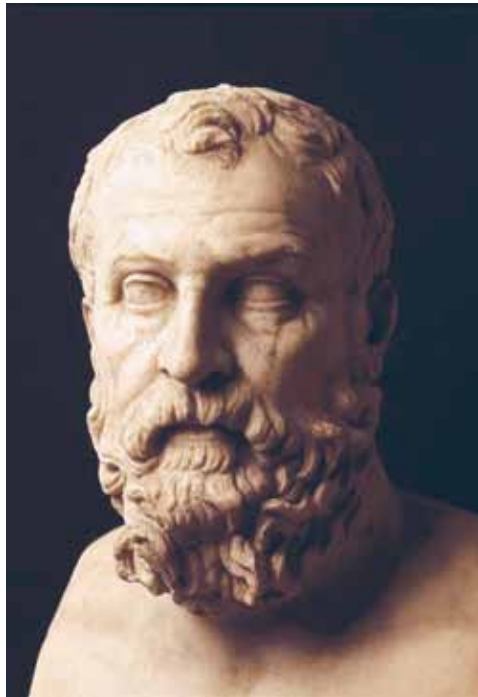
The most important of the various Western versions of the first, the oligarchical model, based themselves on a more or less mechanistic comprehension of the world in the tradition of Aristotle, which does not allow real qualitative advancement. The second, the progressive model, oriented to the common good, is based on the wise Solon of Athens, who saw the purpose of humanity in its progressive motion, but especially in Plato: thinkers in his tradition grasped that humans, thanks to their creative reason, are continually capable of formulating adequate hypotheses on the lawfulness of the universe, which potentially leads to the limitless deepening of knowledge as well as the development of humanity. Naturally, with the first system, various variations and neuroses emerged; like the Manichean

ideology with the idea that good and evil will always exist equally, or the pre-Christian notion of Gaia, with a cyclical notion of development. These forms have survived into the present, in the modern Gaia cult and the Greens.

Two Opposed Western Traditions

But in the end, all forms of appearance of the first system, this policy of empiricism, positivism, scholasticism, the deductive and inductive method, the French and English Enlightenment—for example, Locke, Hobbes, or Newton, up through the critical method of the Frankfurt School or the deconstructionism of the present—are all variations of the Aristotelian tradition. Common to all is the idea that the essential source of knowledge is experience through the senses. Man is evil by nature, and must be controlled by repressive forms of government. And finally, that the world is a closed, limited system.

In contrast, there is the tradition drawing on Plato, including not only such diverse thinkers as St. Augustine, St. Bonaventure, Nicholas of Cusa, Johannes Kepler, Gottfried Leibniz, Gottfried Ephraim Lessing, Friedrich Schiller, and the Humboldt brothers, but also Albert Einstein, Vladimir Vernadsky, and Krafft Ehrlicke, to just name a few prominent thinkers. These thinkers have in common a fundamental optimism about the role of man in the universe—that human mental creativity is itself a power in the further development of the physical universe and that there is a connection between the harmonic development of all human mental and spiritual capabilities, and the positive development of the commonwealth of the state, and the laws of the Cosmos. Virtually all progress of knowledge in the natural sciences, or great Classical art and European civilization, is uniquely thanks to the Platonic tradition. It is due to the capability of humans *not to be dependent* on random external influences, but to exercise the power of reason, to determine with scientific precision where the next higher qualitative breakthrough to expand knowledge must take place.



Solon of Athens

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It is easy to demonstrate that the viewpoint of the critics who impugn China's policy of the New Silk Road with secret motives, is just a projection of their own geopolitical motives onto China. They think like the famous chamber valet described by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of the Mind*, who could only imagine the world-historical individual in his underwear, as he must daily help him dressing and undressing. They are imprisoned by the "new values" spoken of by Rees-Mogg or the post-Christian values for Russia, rejected by Lavrov. They simply cannot imagine that there are people, and even governments, who are truly committed not only to the welfare of their own population, but are also for the harmonic development of all

of humanity. They hate the moral claim rising out of this mentality, because it puts into question their alleged right to the principle "everything is allowed."

On the other hand, mutual understanding is easier to achieve when one turns to the philosophers and poets of the optimistic tradition. There, a striking similarity among thinkers is found, though they come out of completely diverse cultural circles, they nonetheless come to the same insights about the nature of man and the purpose of existence. The most auspicious example of this concordance, is that of the philosophical and aesthetic principles of Confucius, whose influence has impacted many parts of Asia, well beyond China, for the past 2,500 years, with those of the great German poet of freedom, Friedrich Schiller, where both dedicated their life's work to the ennoblement of mankind. An important similarity is also found in many aspects of other thinkers such as Mencius, Nicholas of Cusa, Gottfried Leibniz, and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Common to all of these great minds was the tireless struggle with the question of how life together among human beings can be shaped, such that the inherent creative capability within them can unfold in the best way, and be brought into concordance with the world order such that natural law's right to happiness can be attained by all of society.

For Confucius, man is good by nature. Everything bad comes from a lack of development, man has the freedom and the moral obligation to improve himself through an act of his own will. Everything depends on this inner power, as an external evil is by no means always an evil, but to the contrary, a test of character through which he can emerge strengthened and with purer principles. Schiller developed the same thoughts with his concept



A statue of Friedrich Schiller in Belle Isle, Detroit, Michigan.

of the sublime—a state of mind which one can attain when one’s identity is bound to universal ideas which go beyond our limited physical existence; which yield not a physical, but better, a moral certainty. Also, Schiller emphasized freedom of the will. “All other things *must*; man is the being who *wills*,” said Schiller in his writings on the sublime. “The morally educated man, and only this one, is entirely free. Only the person who has a beautiful character, who finds joy in exercising justice, well-being, moderation, steadfastness, and devotion; and who doesn’t lose these qualities even if hit by an array of great misfortunes, is sublime.”

Aesthetical Education

For Confucius, the education of personal character is achieved, in addition to literary studies, through the six free arts: learning the rituals, music, archery, charioteering, riding, and mathematics. For him, poetry and music play the most important role, as they broaden the imagination and power of conception. Schiller writes about this in his critique of Berger’s poems. He says, “In a time when our mental powers have been compartmentalized, and their effectiveness scattered as a necessary consequence of the expanded scope of our knowledge and the specialization of professions—poetry is virtually unique in its power to re-unify the soul’s sundered forces, to occupy the heart and mind, activity and wit, reason and power of imagination, in harmonious alliance, and as it were, to restore the entire human being within us.”

According to the *Lunyu*, or *Analects*, from the translation of Richard Wilhelm into German, Confucius fo-

cused his students in the following way: “My young friends! Why are you not engaging yourselves with poetry? *Shijing* [*Classic of Poetry*]: Poetry is congenial to stimulate the imagination. She lets us view life in a contemplative mirror, thus cleansing our emotions. She awakens social nobleness; she arouses anger against injustice and deceitfulness. She permits the emergence in families and in the state of intentions for moral actions, and otherwise broad-

ens our knowledge of the whole organic world; namely, the names of birds, animals, herbs and trees.” Likewise, in the *Lunyu*, Confucius recommended that “He who wants to be a scholarly person, should read poetry in order to develop in himself a soul oriented to truth and beauty. Then, read the Moral Laws in order to stay on the true path, and then learn music to be able to harmonically ensoul himself.”

Between Confucius’ highest idea of the intellectually, morally, and aesthetically educated person, the *junzi*, and Schiller’s concept of the beautiful soul, there exists an intimate inner connection. In *Grace and Dignity*, Schiller writes, “We call it a beautiful soul when the moral sentiment has assured itself of all emotions of a person, ultimately to the degree that it may abandon the guidance of the will to emotions, and never run the danger of being in contradiction with its own decisions. Hence, in a beautiful soul, individual deeds are not properly moral, rather, the entire character is. And further, it is in such a beautiful soul that sensuousness and reason, duty and inclination, harmonize; and grace is its epiphany.” In Confucius he says, “This person can follow the wishes of his heart without infringing on proportion.”

For Confucius, this development of the individual up to the highest ideal of the intellectual, moral, and aesthetically educated person, the *junzi* the noble person, was the precondition for a well-structured state. “When the personality is well educated, only then the home is administered. When the home is administered, then the state can be ordered. When the state is ordered, only then

can we have world peace. Once humanity is in order, thus will also Heaven and Earth and the whole procession of nature come to order: All disruptions of the course of nature are but the result of disorder among men and the faulty development of character in the ruler.”

Exactly in the same way, Schiller drew the conclusion from the failure of the French Revolution caused by the Jacobin terror, that a great historical moment had found a little people, where the objective potential for transformation existed, but the subjective, moral precondition was missing. “From now on,” Schiller said, “any improvement in the political realm can only happen through the ennoblement of the individual.” For him, this is also the precondition for the well-being of the state. In the Fourth Aesthetical Letter, he says, “Every individual man, one can say, carries by predisposition, a purely ideal man within himself—to agree with those whose immutable unity, in all his outer alterations, is the great task of his existence. This pure man, who gives himself to be recognized more or less distinctly, in every subject, is represented through the state.” And Schiller adds, “This congruence should not come to pass in that the state represses the individual, but that the individual becomes the state. And that man, in time, ennoble himself to the man in the idea.”

The Future in the Present

It is also clearly the idea of a more perfect future which guides actions in the present. This clear vision also gives the criteria for making an educated prognosis of the future. Confucius says on this, “The path to the highest truth leads to clearly recognizing the future.” In the book *Proportion and Mean—Zhongyong*, he speaks of the duty of man to search for truth as “Who seeks truth, chooses the good and stays with it.” The path of the highest truth makes it possible that man can recognize in advance if a kingdom is about to flourish—then there are favorable signs; or if a kingdom is about to collapse, then there are ominous signs.

Nicholas of Cusa, who founded modern natural science with his new scientific method of thinking at the level of the coincidence of opposites, *Coincidentia Oppositorum*—the “win-win” thinking of the 15th Century—was also the inventor of precise scientific measurement, and made the decisive step in formulating a representative system of the nation-state. He is—prior to Schiller—the philosopher who had the greatest affinity to Confucius. He had the same idea that the sage can recognize the future on the basis of the recapitulation of

the overall development of the universe to his time, through prior knowledge in his mind of that which he seeks. Without prior knowledge, one does not know either what is the proper question, nor if what is found is really what was sought. For Schiller, too, the inner-educated ideal of a better future is that in which man acts on reality, in that he gives direction toward the good. In the “Ninth Aesthetical Letter,” he demands that this idea must be fully educated in the heart so that the idea can effectively confront the dubious society of reality. He says, “Live with the century, but be not its creature. Give the contemporaries what they need, not what they praise.” With this, Schiller demands the same inner moral independence as Confucius, which can only be achieved with a completely human education of the character.

In such matters, the intent is not merely to realize in one’s self the highest ideas, but to actively contribute to the betterment of society. Likewise, true knowledge is not won by mere contemplative observation, but by active transformation of society. Confucius says in his book *The Great Learning—Daxue*, “The highest knowledge is that reality is impacted; Only when it engages has reality reached its height. Then ideas become true. When the ideas are true, only then is the consciousness just. Only when the consciousness is just, will the person be educated. Only if the person is educated, is the home regulated and the state governed, and is there peace in the world.”

With Nicholas of Cusa, the same idea is expressed in this way: That “only when all microcosms are developing in the best possible way, can harmony in the macrocosm come into being.” At the same time, this development is not static, as the further education of one, engages like a fugal counterpoint in the development of the other, and leads to a harmonic development of the totality. Such Cusa-like thinking, albeit in a Confucian way, emerges from the words of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, when he says, “The Belt and Road Initiative is no Chinese solo act, but a symphony performed by all nations.”

Schiller, in his later years, occupied himself with the question of how the resolution of inner conflicts, both in the single individual, as in society, could be portrayed in poetry and whereby “the voluntary unification of inclinations with the law, the pinnacle of moral dignity to a more refined nature, is nothing less than the idea of beauty applied to the real world.” He depicts here the idea that reality should strive for, in the sense

of Percy Shelley, that “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

The Coming Adulthood of Mankind

Why should it not be conceivable that mankind becomes adult? That we cease to attack each other like uneducated four-year-olds? Or, to express it otherwise, why arrest the development of humanity in senseless geopolitical conflicts? Why should it not be within our immediate grasp to eliminate poverty from this world? To make possible universal education for all children? With that, making the beautiful soul the goal of education, as Wilhelm von Humboldt did, but also Confucius. The most crucial question for Confucius and Schiller was educating love of mankind, which Confucius valued higher than life itself, more important than fire and water, and which Schiller called “the most beautiful phenomena in the soul-filled creation; the omnipotent magnet in the spiritual world, the source of devotion, and the most sublime virtue, where man becomes richer with everything he loves.” For Confucius, the love of mankind was the highest morality; making possible all other ethical values, as in the *Lunyu* [*Analects*], where Confucius says, “All deeds of man must be embodied in it; otherwise, they are worthless.”

From this, it also follows that man must have compassion for the other. For Lessing, the most compassionate human being was also the best, “as he is ready to act on the foundation of all civil virtues and demonstrates all manners of generosity.” It is told that Confucius never satisfied his hunger when eating next to a man in mourning, as he did not want to enjoy his meal when another one suffered. Likewise, in the *Lunyu*, Confucius emphasizes how important it is for a state to continuously cultivate in its citizens a love of mankind. Otherwise, it is doomed. Confucius said, “To lead a people lacking education into war, is to guarantee their doom.” The analogy for the present is obvious, and requires no comment.

Both Confucius and Schiller advocated cultivation of the individual and society by means of aesthetical education, whereby art—which itself must attain the highest standard—plays the most important role. Schiller demanded from poets, as from artists generally, to elevate themselves “to the highest moral and aesthetical height before practicing their art. The task of enno-



Dawei Dong/Asian Cultural Institute

*Musicians perform traditional Chinese songs for stringed instruments, the *ehru* and the *guzheng*, at the April 14 concert sponsored by the Foundation for the Revival of Classical Culture.*

bling that personality to the highest degree, of refining it into the purest, most splendid humanity, is the first and most important business the artist must address before he may venture to move his audience. There can be no greater value to his poetry than that it is a perfected imprint of a truly interesting disposition of a truly interesting perfected mind.”

In his poem “The Artists,” Schiller assigns artists the responsibility for civilization. “The dignity of man into your hands is given. Its keeper be. It sinks with you; with you it will be risen.” The same idea is found in Confucius, in particular regarding music. He says, “Music rises from the heart. When the emotions are touched, they are expressed in sound. And when the sounds take definite forms, we have music. Therefore, the music of a peaceful and prosperous country is quiet and joyous, and the government is orderly. The music of a country in turmoil shows dissatisfaction and anger, and the government is chaotic. The music of a destroyed country shows sorrow and remembrance of the past, and the people are distressed. Thus, we see music and government are directly connected to one another.” In a very beautiful treatise on music, Confucius writes, “When the likes and dislikes are not properly controlled, and our conscious minds are distracted by the material world, we lose our true selves and the principle of reason, and nature is destroyed. When man is con-

stantly exposed to things in the material world which affect him, and does not control his likes and dislikes, then he becomes overwhelmed by material reality. He becomes dehumanized and materialistic. When a man becomes dehumanized or materialistic, the principle of reason in nature is destroyed, and man is submerged in his own desires. From this arises rebellion, disobedience, cunning and deceit, and general immorality. We have then a picture of the strong bullying the weak; the majority persecuting the minority; the clever one deceiving the simple-minded; the physically strong going for violence; the sick and crippled not being taken care of; and the aged and young helpless, and not cared for. This is the way of chaos.”

One Universal Principle

So music, he says, is connected with the principles of human conduct. “Therefore, animals know sound, but they do not know tones. He who understands music comes very near to the understanding of the *li*”—the *li* meaning to find one’s proper place in the state and in the universe. “If a man has mastered both the *li* and music, we call him virtuous because virtue is the mastery of fulfillment. Truly great music shares the principle of harmony with the universe. When the soil is poor, things do not grow. When the fishing is not regulated according to the seasons, the fishes and the turtles do not mature. When the climate deteriorates, animal and plant life degenerates. When the world is chaotic, the rituals and the music become licentious. We find a type of music that is rueful without restraint, and joyous without calm. Therefore, the superior man tries to create harmony in the human heart by the rediscovery of human nature, and tries to promote music as the means to the perfection of human culture. When such music prevails and people’s minds are led toward the right ideals and aspirations, we may see the appearance of a great nation. Character is the backbone of our human nature, and music is the flowering of character.”

How can it be that between a philosopher from China who lived almost 2,500 years ago, and a German poet who was active 200 years ago, we find such a similarity of ideas and methods? Naturally, Schiller knew Confucius; he dedicated to him the poem “The Sayings of Confucius,” which ended with the lines: “Relentless, forward you must strive; never tired, standing still. If thou wilt see perfection, it must unfold in breadth. Shall the world shape you? In the depths you must rise; let Nature show itself to you. Only perseverance leads to

the goal; only fulfilledness leads to clarity. And in the abyss lives the truth.”

The inner affinity between Confucius and Schiller is because both are inspired by the same idea of sublime humanity, in which they were deeply convinced would be achievable in the future as the true identity of mankind, despite intermittent setbacks. Already 100 years earlier, Leibniz, taking note of the fact that the Emperor Kangxi came to similar mathematical results, drew the conclusion that there must be a universally knowable principle, and more generally recognized that this affinity between Chinese and European culture exists. He wrote, “By a unique decision of destiny, as I believe, it is so that the highest civilization and the highest technical civilization of mankind are now collected, as it were, at the two extremes of our continent. In Europe and China, which like a Europe of the East, adorns the opposite end of the Earth. Perhaps the highest providence pursues the goal by which the most civilized, and at the same time most distant peoples, are reaching out their arms; and gradually leads all found between them to life filled by reason.”

Unfortunately, Europe today does not keep up with these high points, but is instead turning to, in the words of Lavrov, “post-Christian values.” To the contrary, the Confucian tradition is experiencing a great renaissance in China right now, led by President Xi Jinping, who has made it a point that Confucian teaching must be taught on all levels of society. We could turn back to the European high tradition at will. We could go back to Plato, the Classical Greeks, the Italian Renaissance, the German Classical period. And this is the European culture which is the New Paradigm of the New Silk Road, and if it is revived with a dialogue of culture with it, then at any time we can make it alive and with it a new Renaissance. If each nation and each culture makes alive again their highest cultural achievements, presenting to themselves and other nations their best aspect, it is certain a new renaissance will come—seizing upon the best from universal history, but beyond that, enthusiastically creating new corresponding concepts for mankind achieving maturity. We should remember that it was Benjamin Franklin who was inspired by Confucius’ moral teachings, to shape the young America. So, there is an absolute basis for this dialogue.

Schiller foresaw: “No one be like the other; be each like to the highest. How to achieve that? Each one be, in his person, complete.”