
III. Schiller Institute & Cátedra China Conference

October 21, 2020

Schiller Institute & Cátedra China Conference

China and the West Face to Face Rivalry or Cooperation

Videoconference Draws 250 To Discuss Cooperation or Conflict with China

by Dennis Small

The urgent issue of how the countries of Europe and the United States should relate to China in this moment of crisis, and the cultural and philosophical basis for such relations, was the subject of a four-hour videoconference on Oct. 21 sponsored by the Schiller Institute and Spain's Cátedra China think tank. The proceedings were held in both Spanish and English with simultaneous interpreting, and were broadcast live via YouTube. Participants from 30 countries attended the event, including high-level diplomatic representatives of a number of nations of the Americas and China. The presentations and Q&A session featured a lively discussion of Confucian philosophy and its relationship to innovation and creativity, as well as the Western Renaissance tradition, including Leibniz.

There were six featured panelists, representing China and the four largest nations of continental Europe (Germany, France, Italy and Spain): Yao Fei, Minister Counsellor of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China to Spain; Michele Geraci, former Italian Undersecretary of State for Economic Development; Marcelo Muñoz, Founder and President Emeritus, Cátedra China, Spain; Helga Zepp-LaRouche, Founder and President, Schiller Institute, Germany; Dr. Ángel Álvarez, Cátedra China, Spain; and Jacques Cheminade,

President of Solidarité & Progrès, France (see below for selections from their remarks).

All of the speakers voiced their commitment to the idea of improving relations between the West and China, especially in light of the grave escalation of tensions over the recent period. As the invitation to the event noted: "The direction of relations between China and the West may well be the decisive issue that determines the future of all mankind—from economics to politics to culture. And yet those relations today are characterized by rising tensions." There was also broad agreement that the event would be a springboard for organizing further such dialogues involving a wide array of institutions both in Europe and the United States, to foster a dialogue of classical civilizations to better understand each other, and also to devise solutions to the pressing crises facing mankind.

Leibniz: 'China Is Another Planet'

Marcelo Muñoz set the tenor of the discussion in his opening remarks:

What most surprised me [when I first arrived in China in 1978] was that I began to discover that China was "another world." And I have continued discovering, confirming and studying it over these last 42 years. Leibniz put it in different words: "China is another planet."

The West and China are two very different worlds. The Chinese have fully internalized this and many of their intellectuals and politicians have studied it fully. We Westerners do not know it, we don't accept it. ... In fact we are convinced, that our world is the only one and is

unique, and that whatever doesn't fit in this, "our" world, is not valid, or it isn't acceptable, or it isn't right.

For the West and China to understand each other, to dialogue, to collaborate, to trade, even to disagree, it is indispensable that we come down off our pedestal and that we begin by knowing, and recognizing, that China is another world, or "another planet."

Helga Zepp-LaRouche picked up the challenge, from the Schiller Institute's unique perspective:

First, let me thank Marcelo Muñoz for quoting Leibniz saying that "China is another planet," because hopefully that will be an incentive for people in the West who are watching the world through their Eurocentric spectacles and who are otherwise interested in space exploration, to get the idea that it really requires an intellectual effort to learn about Chinese civilization.

Yes, the West and China are two very different worlds. ... But apart from the substantive difference in terms of culture, history, language, philosophy and values between the two civilizations, there are also common universal principles which, once you have discovered them, make it much easier to relate to the other one.

The search for those universal principles in the cultures of both the East and the West, and how to apply them to the world's problems, characterized the day's proceedings. Two central themes of that discussion merit emphasis—not because there was universal agreement on them, but precisely because there was a productive exchange of differing views.

Action to Stop Starvation in Africa

China's Minister Counsellor Yao Fei stated repeatedly in his speech and during the Q&A session that his country's "opening up" policy meant that China was open to working with the West for mutual "win-win" economic benefit. But he also stressed that China was still a developing nation and would continue to adopt such measures as were required to fully eliminate poverty and achieve the general welfare of the Chinese people. He also forcefully rejected many of the familiar lies about China (on Hong Kong, Huawei, the Uighurs, etc.).

Italy's Michele Geraci defended economic cooperation with China, such as the March 2019 Italy-China

Memorandum of Understanding, of which Geraci himself was the principal architect. He also ripped apart the argument that nations should not cooperate with China, because of the so-called "debt trap." Other panelists, and various questions from the audience, focused on specific issues of China's policy on foreign investment.

Helga Zepp-LaRouche posed the issue of East-West economic cooperation from a higher standpoint, one which was the hallmark of her husband Lyndon LaRouche's policy outlook throughout his adult life: If a viable new planetary order is to be achieved, the nations of the East and West must cooperate to bring about the high-technology industrial development of the nations of the South.

Zepp-LaRouche, in her concluding remarks during the Q&A session, issued an urgent call for all those participating in the event—Cátedra China, the Schiller Institute, the Chinese government, and others attending—to support LaRouche South Africa leader Phillip Tsokolibane's appeal, which he also directed to President Donald Trump, for emergency international action to stop the wave of starvation sweeping Africa. The World Food Programme has stated that \$5 billion is needed to stave off the threat of starvation for some 30 million Africans. "The central banks have spent \$20 trillion for saving the bankrupt banking system, and almost no money from that has gone into any kind of real investment," Zepp-LaRouche stated. "So, I think we have reached a point where we need to change this present system. I would like to ask all the speakers if we cannot come out of this meeting to support such an initiative as a very practical example of the kind of international cooperation Mr. Yao Fei was just mentioning before."

LaRouche: East-West Cooperation To Develop the South

Behind Zepp-LaRouche's initiative was an in-depth strategic policy which she and her husband shared for nearly half a century. During a visit to India, Lyndon LaRouche delivered a speech to the Indian Council on World Affairs in New Delhi on April 23, 1982, in which he discussed his wife's proposal in Germany's Lower Saxony elections back in 1974:

The difference [in her proposal] was that East-West relations had to be tied to North-South relations. That is, that both Eastern nations and Western nations, and the so-called mythical divide—which is unreal, and indeed mythical—should not concentrate on cooperating among themselves economically as the basis for politi-

cal security. Instead, they should bring into play questions of high-technology economic development to the developing sector.

Confucius and the European Renaissance

The videoconference also provoked a discussion over the deep philosophical roots of China and Western Europe, and whether or not they provide a basis for today's cooperation. Panelist Ángel Álvarez stated that in his experience as a university professor of many Chinese students, Confucianism expresses a "collectivist" outlook that in fact is an obstacle to the kind of creativity or "disruptive" thinking that is needed. The "individualism" of the West is more conducive to such creativity, he argued.

He was challenged in that conclusion by Marcelo Muñoz, who pointed to 2,500 years of phenomenal, creative achievements by China based on that Confucian outlook (notwithstanding internal variations within it), including this generation's successful defeat of extreme poverty. Jacques Cheminade—whose remarks had exposed the Malthusian philosophical underpinnings of British geopolitics—also noted that Confucius himself had been quite creatively "disruptive" in Chinese society, and that the West's contribution does not derive from the

"individualism" of British liberalism and hedonism, but rather from the Classical Renaissance outlook of locating the individual's identity in fostering the good of the other, the common good—or *agapē*, in Christian theology.

Zepp-LaRouche's presentation addressed precisely this issue:

One can find an extraordinary similarity between especially Confucius and Friedrich Schiller, the German poet, in respect to the method of moral improvement of man: the aesthetic education. Confucius developed his philosophy of creating continuous self-perfection through life-long learning as a way to create harmony in the individual, the family, and the state. It was Confucius's very genial way of developing a method by which society could escape the chaos and disarray of the period he lived in.

Zepp-LaRouche concluded:

If the world is to come out of the incredible combination of the pandemic, world famine, and social chaos in many countries, we can learn a lot from Confucius, Leibniz, and Schiller about a cure.