

COMMENTARY

China, Twenty-Five Years Later

It should not be surprising, that the picture that Western “studies” and media reports paint about China, has little to do with the real historical processes going on in this country, whose culture is one of the cradles of humanity. Twenty-five years after my first visit, I have just visited the People’s Republic of China for the second time. I believe that the comparison of the situation, then and now, says more about the reality of the situation in the “Middle Kingdom,” where one-fifth of humanity lives, than all the widespread reports about China.

When I first visited China in summer 1971, the Cultural Revolution was in full swing. The Gang of Four dominated politics, the Red Guards had done everything possible to drown China’s ancient cultural heritage in red paint, and the intellectuals were considered “class enemies” who had to be re-educated through physical labor in the countryside or in cadre schools. Among the strongest of my impressions, were the propaganda and the revolutionary Beijing Operas which were blasting from ever-present loudspeakers.

China, which Leibniz called, with Europe, one of the two poles of civilization, lived through one of the darkest chapters of its 5,000-year history. As a young journalist, I was one of the first Western visitors who could visit China after years of isolation. When I just now returned to Beijing at the beginning of May, to participate in the International Symposium on Economic Development of the Regions Along the New Eurasian Continental Bridge, I felt, during the first days, like a traveller in a time machine. Beijing was hardly recognizable. Of course, I had been hearing and reading numerous reports about the impressive development of China, but only this personal comparison enabled me to find the expression which these reports omitted: There is no country in the world, which has seen such a dramatic change in the past twenty-five years, not only in vast parts of the country, in economic terms, but also

psychologically!

The comparison to Germany between 1945 and 1970 struck me. Even if China is, certainly, still governed by communist structures, fear and paranoia in the population had given place to a kind of calm optimism, and a very different dimension of the culture of the country, besides communism, became evident.

The enormous optimism and the will to develop, alone, which were expressed by the Chinese side at the symposium, were impressive. While the title of the conference already contains the concept of “development corridors,” as proposed by Lyndon LaRouche, several provincial governors said explicitly, that the aim of this program was not only the infrastructural integration of Eurasia, but also that the inner and western regions of China had first to be brought to the economic level of the developed east of the country, and then to a world level. This thought alone represents the exact opposite to that of the Gang of Four.

Beyond the economic component, the chairman of the symposium, State Councillor Song Jian, emphasized the great, civilizing effect which the building of the Silk Road has represented for the development of humanity for 2,000 years. According to Song Jian, when the first land corridor connected Europe, Africa, and Asia, during the reign of Emperor Han Wu of the Han dynasty, when commercial camel transport crossed the mountains and travelled



Schiller Institute

across China, and Central, South, and West Asia, to Europe and North Africa, these contacts laid the seeds of civilization and friendship along the Silk Road. According to Song Jian, the new Continental Bridge, also, should not be regarded only as a transport line, but also as an important connection for the exchange of goods and technology, cultural communication, and friendships among the peoples of Euro-Asia.

The worth of this kind of political approach, cannot be overestimated. The contrast to the evil geopolitical theses of Samuel Huntington, about the alleged “looming clash of civilizations,” is obvious. Huntington today is on the spiritual level of the Cultural Revolution: “Let the foreign devils kill each other!” was the rallying cry then; now, it is the essence of his “study” today.

British Sabotage Efforts

Despite the effort from the side of the British faction, through the European Commission, and especially Sir Leon Brittan, to delay and sabotage this symposium, and finally, when all these tactics failed, to force the programmatic perspective of the Continental Bridge into the vise of British free-trade politics, by, at least, integrating it into the framework of the March Asia-Europe Meeting in Bangkok, this conference

Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp LaRouche reports on her return visit to China, and of her experience of this vast nation's optimism and will to develop

represents an historical breakthrough.

Now, with the establishment of the New Eurasian Continental Bridge, the issue is on the table, and, at least, ratified as government policy by the government of China: this, which might be called *the* project of the Twentieth century, which the British-dominated oligarchical faction has already started two world wars to prevent. Since the times of French Foreign Minister Gabriel Hanotaux, Georg von Siemens, Count Sergei Witte of Russia, and Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the father of modern China, at the turn of the Twentieth century, it has been clear that the economic and cultural integration of the Eurasian continent is the decisive step needed to overcome the oligarchical system and its imperialist and colonialist variations.

The geopoliticians around Karl Haushofer, Houston Stuart Chamberlain, and Halford Mackinder have, since that period, been painfully aware of the danger that successful national economic cooperation, on the basis of community of principle, would render British balance-of-power political manipulation ineffectual, and make the British empire irrelevant. The potential for such cooperation was demonstrated through the

construction of the Berlin-Baghdad Railroad and the railroad from Paris to Vladivostok.

Edward VII used all his evil energies, first as Prince of Wales, and later as King, to destroy this potential cooperation, through the anti-German Entente Cordiale, and later the Triple Entente, the Russo-Japanese War, and wars in the Balkans, until, finally, the chessboard had been set up for World War I. The larger portion of the tragedies of the Twentieth century, including two world wars, were the result of these British policies.

Now, at the end of this century, China is the country which, more than any other, has made the expansion of the Continental Bridge its state policy. This year, the government integrated the expansion of the Continental Bridge into the Ninth Five-Year Plan of National and Economic and Social Development, and the Long-Term Targets for the Year 2010.

Rich Culture, Complex History

But, is not China ruled by the last important communist dictatorship? Does not China represent the biggest military threat of the future? Did not Lester Brown, of the Worldwatch Institute, recently say, that the earth's food chain is threatened by so many Chinese?

Perhaps the picture becomes clearer, if one takes the following into consideration: Like Germany, China is a country with a very rich culture, and very complex history. Some of these problems are, so to speak, home-grown, i.e., they result from Chinese or German philosophical tendencies; others are the result of universal conflicts of history. Yet, if you study universal history, in its entirety, it emerges that the only thing that matters, is whether the axioms that underlie the thinking and direction of politics, are such as characterize a developing society, or a society destined to destruction.

Even if it perhaps shocks the reader: From this standpoint, one can only draw one conclusion from the lack of cultural optimism in the United States today, as compared to thirty years ago, and the lemming-like tendency towards self-destruction of the Europeans: The West,

the United States and Europe, but also Russia, are on a course that is taking them to their own deconstruction. China, on the other side, is developing itself in a direction, that is striving to build, and to overcome backwardness, and which even has the potential to enable China to, once again in its long history, make a universal contribution.

The ten years of the Cultural Revolution, one part of which I experienced in the summer and autumn of 1971, was a time of waves of open denunciations, kidnappings, and lasting terror against intellectuals, "pessimists," "Party enemies," and "reactionary elements," who wanted to "institutionalize capitalism" in China.

First Mao personally, and then the Gang of Four, had given free rein to the Red Guards, the radicalized Maoist youth, to go after the alleged dissidents and class enemies. Art treasures from the old China, and foreign representatives of world literature, were considered equally reactionary, and often fell victim to blind destruction. Sending scientists and highly qualified workers to work camps and the countryside, meant an immense waste of productive resources.

At the time, I visited Shanghai, Qingdao, Tianjin, and Beijing, and from these cities I was able to make a number of excursions into neighboring areas. I visited some industries and workshops, housing areas for workers, some of the then-famous children's palaces, several villages, schools, kindergartens, and performances of the revolutionary Beijing Opera.

In many personal discussions, people reported to me—many of them older people, especially in Shanghai, who spoke German or English—about their experiences and the conditions which had existed before the foundation of the People's Republic, and the improvements which had taken place since then. At times, an old man or woman telling me this, would have tears in their eyes.

The streets in the cities were dominated by huge numbers of bicycles, rickshaws, but few cars. The apartments in workers' housing areas, with one or two rooms, had to shelter families of three generations. Many houses in the coun-

tryside had dirt floors, and were heated by ovens, which extended from the kitchen to the bed. Usually there was no electricity or running water.

Today, the cities such as Beijing or Shanghai give the impression of a huge construction site. There are already a large number of modern buildings, business centers, banks, and housing areas. During rush hour, there are traffic jams no smaller than in other big cities of the world. The number of cars is the same as bicycles, and many of the roads in and between the cities have been expanded, and, in some parts, they are comparable to modern highways in Europe. Investment in agriculture during the past years has led to sometimes impressive increases of productivity. Also in the countryside, roads are being built everywhere. New villages with much better houses have been built, which now, often, have central heating and running water.

But, perhaps the most telling difference, is the changed psychology of the population. They express a calm determination to go forward, and a will to never again let such catastrophic events happen, as did during the Cultural Revolution.

The experience of the extreme deconstruction of those ten years, has brought about a shock which could perhaps be compared to the experience of the collapse in Germany in 1945. One should add, that there are Chinese intellectuals today who compare the rule of the Gang of Four with the “Gang of the Führer” of the Nazis. However, while Germany, through the policies of “re-education,” was not allowed to find the way back to the roots of its own positive culture, the German classics, but rather had Anglo-American values forced upon them by diktat, at least part of the Chinese elite have found their way to the more profound foundations of Chinese culture. Confucian thought is reflected in many political examples.

The Confucian Concept of ‘Li’

Confucius (born 551 B.C. in the southwest of today’s Shandong Province) himself lived in a time of profound social change. He opposed the despotism and arbitrariness of his time, with a moral teaching whose highest aim was a

reconstruction of society out of chaos. For Confucius, the society of his time had left the right track, and was without a *Tao* (a path). The destruction of the previously valid rules of human society, the attack on traditional authority from below, and the decay of order; all this Confucius tried to work against. He thought that there was correspondence between cosmic and human order, a conception which is coherent with Platonic natural law. “It was Heaven which brought about the moral forces, which are in me,” he said.

The idea of correspondence between cosmic and earthly order became a lasting foundation of political culture in China.

A central notion of Confucianism was *li*, which demanded that one had to fulfill the place one has in society. Acting according to *li*, is a precondition for the ordering of the social cosmos. It also means that society should not allow any break between past and present; it is the expression of being human, of cultured humanity. “The virtuous man knows his duties, the lower order only sees his own advantage.”

For Confucius and Confucianism, therefore, the position of the individual depended on the grade of his or her moral perfection. As for Nicolaus of Cusa, it was not birth or family relations that determined rank in society, but rather morality and way of life. In addition, every individual has to perfect himself morally through the acquisition of knowledge.

The moral quality, *jen*, which means humanity, or “love of man,” defines a whole scale of behavior. *Jen* and *li* also give man the duty to take care of the well-being of his own people. Confucius demanded that morality and power form a unity. These thoughts, which can only be sketched here, put Confucius within the highest order in the history of humanist thought.

Mencius vs. Mo-zi

Mencius, born about a hundred years later, who developed Confucius’ ideas further, led the fight against the ideology of Mo-zi (Micius), and of Mohism, which is named after him. This is the idea that every individual is only trying

to maximize his own benefits, including at the cost of others. According to Mencius, the orientation to “benefits” was preventing the unity of society. Mencius was deeply convinced that the world could be brought into order, only on the basis of Confucian values. Like his teacher, Mencius’ thinking was also characterized by deep cultural optimism. The nature of man is good, therefore also the world can become good.

There is no doubt, that there is a real elite in China, which is thinking about the problems confronting the world today, on the basis of this philosophy. On the basis of Confucian and neo-Confucian thinking, both the nation’s own history and the problems of the world are considered. Thus, Mencius’ rejection of Mo-zi represents a point of departure against the negative effects of free trade.

Representatives of this elite are convinced that a society in which every individual is only running after material values and only wants to maximize his personal benefit, will lose control over civilization. One asks, what should the meaning of civilization be, in the coming century? If the presently dominant philosophy of the West would simply be expanded worldwide, humanity falls into catastrophe.

Therefore, there is consideration of how to redefine the notion of wealth, from the standpoint of common well-being, and also, how a new international system of law and a new parliamentary system can be created.

Representatives of this elite, are convinced that something must urgently be done to change the course of the world, and that a new civilization has to be created, which will allow a real dialogue between the cultures of East and West for their mutual benefit. China is ready to bring into this dialogue, the entire wealth of its old Classical culture, of which not least is the beauty of its art, which is of such value for society.

In conclusion, I want to say, that my travel to China twenty-five years later, is among my most rewarding experiences. Schiller and Leibniz would agree with me when I say: If it is China that thus takes the cause of humanity forward, so be it!

—Helga Zepp LaRouche