

A CHINESE VIEW OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND COEXISTENCE

Jim Kidd

To understand any given culture is to understand how it sees the world, itself and others. Until each culture approaches the philosophies of others with an open mind and studies them seriously there will not be any possibility of enrichment of one's own culture.

Peterson B. Zhou, opens a path which calls for a flexible attitude of exchange rather than conflict, "Differences in ideologies, cultures and social systems . . . should not be the barriers of a sound relationship."¹ Zhou presents two themes, which can bring about collaboration rather than conflict, "It is my idea that any sound relationship between countries should be built on the basis of mutual understanding and mutual respect of each other."²

In Chinese political theory there are certain presuppositions: People invest the interests of life in this world of actuality where they can be realized; the aim of life is not found in selfish interests.

There are three presuppositions to moral life: The cultivation of universal benevolence; the achievement of virtue in unity with Tao; the practice of universal love.³

Thomé H. Fang elucidates two views of politics: ideal and practical.⁴ The practical says Fang:

Consists in the skill of handling the great mass of people for the sake of private gains. Human history has fully testified to the evil deeds done by the demoniacal political monsters at the expense of many countries and to the detriment of many peoples. . . . Many persons, devoid of virtue but covetous of gain, have an immense interest in politics, betaking themselves to the quest of fame, riches and personal benefits like the candle moths fluttering round the flame or the summer flies swarming about the refuse.⁵

With this view politics is conquest, domination, acquisition and accumulation.

What is called ideal politics are: the framing of right measures; the creation of fair opportunities by virtue; and the development of natural abilities. This creates the possibility of living together, through mutual

understanding and mutual respect, under any circumstances. Fang observes that:

The only essential thing being that the principle of social justice should be strictly observed and that, different nations, with their distinct characteristic traditions of culture, can enter into a harmonious interrelationship according to a scheme of thoroughly open-minded and openhearted co-operation.⁶

One could say that this does not work. Why are there still so many problems? Not everyone lives these values and social justice is not always observed.

One could say that this is just an ideal. But if we did not have an ideal vision we would not have anything to move toward. Fang brings this to clarity:

It is only under the guidance of such an ideal that the happiness of human existence can come to be realized. If it were otherwise, ideal politics would soon become degenerate, gradually losing its ideality, till eventually it would take the fearful form of political demonry.⁷

In the Chinese language, virtue is explained as meaning being in harmony with. The aim of politics of virtue is for all people to be in harmony with the spiritual context of life. This constitutes a person, a nation, humanity and the universe. All the elements and participants enter into a comprehensive harmony.

Philosophically it is a system of dynamic ontology founded upon perpetual creativity in incessant change.

At the farthest horizon this is located in Chinese cosmology which is a value-centric philosophy. The principle of Extensive Connection that is rooted in the Book of Change tells us that everything leads through life to the attainment of ultimate value. It is said to be great and extensive in the way of appropriating functioning.

With the Principle of Extensive Connection we see: life in the mode of creative creativity; the mutual relevance of all forms of existence in respect of inherent meaning and value; the never-ending process of change and transformation; a thread of connection running through all forms of life, by reason of mutual relevance and interpenetration, constitute the universe.⁸

The philosophy of any people is the *crème de la crème* of its culture and finds expression in its styles of thinking, feeling and living.

Philosophies have given rise to civilizations of people for whom the meaning and influence of living and being, learning and knowing are foundational to life. This is the inexhaustible richness of the human being. Each culture exists in its own right as does each person. This speaks to mutual understanding and mutual respect.

Notes

- 1) Peterson B. Zhou, "A Theoretical Test by Sino-U.S.Relations (III)", Superdirector.com, 2001, p. 4.
- 2) *Ibid*, p. 3.
- 3) Thomé H. Fang, *The Chinese View of Life: The Philosophy of Comprehensive Harmony*, (Taipei: Linking Publishing Co. Ltd. 1980), pp. 147-148.
- 4) *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- 5) *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- 6) *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.
- 7) *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- 8) *Ibid.*, p. 51.

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