
THE SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES INDISPENSABLE FOR THE BRI CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) proposed by China is now being carried out. The preparation for BRI is rich and sufficient. At the same time to achieve its material goals, the issue of values, ethics and spiritual principles is more and more attracting people's attention. President Xi advocates the spirit of the Silk Road and its intensive cultivation in the humanistic fields and cooperation among the humanities. His dream of a "community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility" will benefit mankind not only on the material side, but also on the spiritual side. The spiritual benefits especially will make the achievements of the BRI permanent. We therefore need to clarify the spiritual principles indispensable for the BRI construction, to help people all over the world to explore points of convergence with their own values, ethics, and spiritual beliefs, and invite them to unite in achieving the commonwealth state or grand harmony as advocated by Confucianism, that bears a family resemblance with the perspective advocated by the Parliament of World Religions' 1993 Declaration toward a Global Ethic. Although the values are drawn from various cultural and political backgrounds that differ in thousands of ways, a common basic principle can, nevertheless, be found. That means there is always the possibility for people all over the world to find something common in their spiritual need. My

paper will show that the wisdom of the Confucian “*junzi*” ideal must play an important role in the formation of appropriate spiritual principles for BRI construction and the community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility.



THE SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES INDISPENSABLE FOR BRI CONSTRUCTION

The BRI Project initiated by the Chinese government is now under construction in an increasingly progressive and orderly way. As the BRI Progress, Contributions and Prospects points out,

The Belt and Road Initiative upholds the principles of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits. It follows a Silk Road spirit featuring peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit. It focuses on policy coordination, connectivity of infrastructure, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and closer people-to-people ties. It has turned ideas into actions and vision into reality, and the initiative itself into a public product widely welcomed by the international community. (Office of the Leading Group for Promoting BRI, 2019)

This is the general principle animating the BRI’s basic ideas and targets, intended to address the challenges along the BRI way, including different religions and faiths, different habits and customs, different political influences, different economic systems and levels, different cultures and cultivations, different values as well as different nations with unbalanced development. The problems inherited from previous history and the conflicts of realistic interests caused by differences in values and religious beliefs as well as by competition for resources such as petroleum, inevitably will create various difficulties for the BRI construction.

President Xi’s “community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility” (hereinafter referred to as “community”) is a great dream,

and it involves not only capital investment, the building-up of a firm economic structure and an effective network of transportation, as well as cooperation based on a convergence of economic interests, but it also lies in the establishment of a spiritual principle universally applicable. The realisation of genuine “community” is in the final analysis a spiritual issue, an issue of values, that is, it depends on whether a common orientation can be found in the basic values of different cultures. Five goals for the BRI were stated in the central Party journal *Qiushi*. (Ou X., et. al., 2017, pp.12-17) While four of these focused on the material and operational dimensions, the fifth goal emphasised closer people-to-people ties, following the direction asserted by President Xi Jinping, “to lay importance on the intensive cultivation in the humanistic fields, respect the different peoples’ cultures and histories, customs and habits.” (Xi, 2016) This fifth dimension, however, raises questions that require reflection on our common spiritual principles through the exchange and communication of values. We need to seek a basic principle that emerges from the common spiritual needs of people all over the world.

Although the values and ethical perspectives of all the religions in the world vary greatly, a promising way forward already may have been outlined for us in the *Declaration toward a Global Ethic*, passed by the initial Parliament of the World’s Religions in 1993. The *Declaration* points out:

We affirm that there is an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations and religions. There already exist ancient guidelines for human behaviour which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the condition for a sustainable world order. (*Declaration toward a Global Ethic*, p.2)

The set of shared core values is a spiritual principle, which transcends the materialistic concerns of life but at the same time is related closely to them. It is universally applicable to any societies, any individuals, any families, any races, any countries, and any religions, and expressed

by different cultures in different forms.

We consider humankind our family. We must strive to be kind and generous. We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely. No person should ever be considered or treated as a second-class citizen or be exploited in any way whatsoever. There should be equal partnership between men and women. We must not commit any kind of sexual immorality. We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse. (*Declaration toward a Global Ethic*, p.3)

Confucianism expressed a similar idea more than two thousand years ago:

When the perfect order prevails, the world is like a home shared by all. Virtuous and worthy people are elected to public office, and capable persons hold posts of gainful employment in society; peace and trust among all people are the maxims of living. All people love and respect their own parents and children, as well as the parents and children of others. There is caring for the old; there are jobs for the adults; there are nourishment and education for the children. There is a means of support for the widows, and the widowers; for all who find themselves alone in the world; and for the disabled. Every man and woman has an appropriate role to play in the family and society. A sense of sharing displaces the effects of selfishness and materialism. A devotion to public duty leaves no room for idleness. Intrigues and conniving for ill gain are unknown. Villains such as thieves and robbers do not exist. The door to every home need never be locked and bolted by day or night. These are the characteristics of an ideal world, the commonwealth state. (*Liji IX, Li-yun*)

The more practical implications of the Confucian ideal of “*datong*” (大同)—the great harmony or the commonwealth state, which affirms that “the world is like a home shared by all”—are as follows: a) Every person should participate in its public affairs, and elect the leadership of ability, talent, and virtues, to build

a harmonious society; b) While every person cannot avoid taking his family as the starting point of his consideration of interests, at the same time he should take a broad view of the society, sharing the social responsibility of mutual caring, mutual assistance, and developing a harmonious society; c) We must cooperate to develop the wealth and human force resources

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with sustainability; and d) We must realise social security and harmony through integrity and mutual trust. This is not a utopian illusion, but the basic root of the spiritual guiding principles for achieving the BRI’s “community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility” or of the “human destiny community”.

But how can the “*datong*’s” four points to be realised? There is a need to cultivate the personality of a “*junzi*” (君子, “exemplary man,” or as in James Legge’s translation, “superior man”) based on the two key characters “*zhong*” (忠, “loyalty”) and “*shu*” (恕, “reciprocity”) in Confucianism, because this is “one principle that can run through the whole of one’s life” (*Confucian Analects* 4.15). These can be counted as the two key concepts supporting the foundation toward a global ethic, and the important spiritual principle of the community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility.

“*Zhong*” (忠, loyalty) means faithfulness to one’s own sincerity and cordialness, as well as one’s own spiritual principle, that is, to recognise the world and the self with sincere mind and rectified heart, to treat other people with sincerity and cordialness by discarding the false

and retaining the true. When Legge translated “为人谋而不忠乎” into “whether, in transacting business for others, I may have been not faithful” (*Confucian Analects*, 1.4), he understood “zhong (忠)” clearly as faithfulness. If one is faithful to others and others’ affairs, as well as to the truth of the world, one has to get rid of the disturbances caused by selfish interests and subjective prejudices. To understand “zhong” in its right sense can help us to distinguish a true spiritual principle with universality from political strategy posed in a hypocritical way. Even if our goal is the “datong” (大同) or “human destiny community”, according to Confucius, it is important to rectify the names (正名)—meaning to live by the truth in them—because “when names are not correct, what is said will not sound reasonable, affairs will not culminate in success.” (*Confucian Analects*,

of toughening and self-cultivation. The self-cultivation of a “junzi” is especially important. It helps to form a “junzi’s” many excellent qualities. In contrast with “xiaoren” (小人, the mean man), the advantages of “junzi’s” qualities stand out strikingly. For example, “The superior man (i.e. junzi) is satisfied and composed; the mean man (i.e. xiaoren) is always full of distress.” (*Confucian Analects*, 7.37) This means that “junzi” knows satisfaction and has an open mind. “The superior man is catholic and not partisan. The mean man is partisan and not catholic.” (*Confucian Analects*, 2.14) This means “junzi” keeps friendly ties widely and never forms cliques with a few people. “The mind of the superior man is conversant with righteousness; the mind of the mean man is conversant with gain.” (*Confucian Analects*, 4.16) This indicates that a “junzi” understands

From the perspective of moral understanding, a comparison of “shame” (*chi*) and “guilt” can establish the possibility of a consensus, a united front against the acts that violate the common basic spiritual principle.

13.3)

“Shu” (恕, reciprocity)” is explained by Confucius himself as “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others,” (*Confucian Analects* 15.24) which is a Chinese ethical creed as important as the Golden Rule in the West.

The two characters “zhong” and “shu” thus summarise the ethical foundation and moral ideal of the Chinese commitment to benevolence as the proper way to share interests, responsibility and destiny. This is the spiritual principle indispensable for the BRI construction.

“Junzi” held much in esteem by Confucianism is a model for carrying out this spiritual principle. “Junzi” is not innate. Mencius said, “Before Heaven lays a grand mission on a man, it will first distress him in the spirit and exhaust him in the body, causing him to suffer from hunger and poverty, and subverting every bit of his effort, with which to inspire his ambition, forge his endurance, and remedy his defects in capacity” (Mencius, 12.15). Those who can assume a grand mission must undergo the hard experience

well what righteousness means and knows how to deal with the relationship between righteousness and gain. “The superior man seeks to perfect the admirable qualities of men and does not seek to perfect their bad qualities. The mean man does the opposite of this.” (*Confucian Analects*, 12.16) This means that a “junzi” always helps others to realise their noble ideals but not their evil ideas. “The superior man is affable, but not adulatory; the mean man is adulatory, but not affable.” (*Confucian Analects*, 13.23) This means that “junzi” seeks harmony and mutual coordination, not superficial agreement with others. “What the superior man seeks, is in himself. What the mean man seeks, is in others.” (*Confucian Analects*, 15.21) This means that a “junzi” assumes but never escapes his own responsibility.

“Junzi” must be close to men who follow the *Dao* so as to learn from self-criticism and correct mistakes. In this way can he himself be a man who follows the *Dao*. Confucius says, “He who aims to be a man of complete virtue (i.e. junzi), in his food does not seek to gratify his

appetite, nor in his dwelling place does he seek the appliances of ease; he is earnest in what he is doing, and careful in his speech; he frequents the company of men of principle (i.e. men who follow the *Dao*) that he may be rectified:—such a person may be said indeed to love to learn.” (*Confucian Analects*, 1.14) “*Junzi*” do not think much of materialistic enjoyment and sensual satisfaction, on this point Confucius encourages us to learn from Yan Hui: “With a single bamboo dish of rice, a single gourd dish of drink, and living in his mean narrow lane, while others could not have endured the distress, he did not allow his joy to be affected by it.” (*Confucian Analects*, 6.11) According to Confucius, “*junzi*” pays more attention to action, that is, acts diligently, speaks carefully: “The superior man wishes to be slow in his speech and earnest in his conduct.” (*Confucian Analects*, 4.24) or “He acts before he speaks, and afterwards speaks according to his actions.” (*Confucian Analects*, 2.13) However, even if he does not speak, in his mind there is always a principle he follows in his action. So Confucius says: “The superior man bends his attention to what is radical. That being established, all practical courses naturally grow up.”

Then what is the radical? How are we to understand its social implications? Confucius goes on: “Filial piety and fraternal submission—are they not the root of all benevolent actions?” (*Confucian Analects*, 1.2) According to the Confucian principle of “*Shu*” (恕, reciprocity, or, considering others in one’s own place), this root is not confined within a family, but is widely social. Recall the words of Mencius: “Respect your own elders and extend such respect to those of others; cherish your own young and extend such cherishment to those of others.” (*Mencius*, 1.7) Memorable and very typical is what Confucius says: “Wishing to be established himself, he seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others.” (*Confucian Analects*, 6.30) Therefore, from a cultivated root a lifelong principle emerges. This principle is evident in the guidance given by “*junzi*” and saints as well as the spiritual representatives of different civilisations, which strengthen our capacities for carrying on

exchange, communication and co-ordination. The “*junzi*” does not strive for worldly recognition. If there should be contention, then it is a friendly competition, before which each is polite to the other, while during the process of competition, each is friendly to the other, focusing on win-win. After the competition, the rival friends will have a drink. (*Confucian Analects*, 3.7).

The nature of the Confucian “*junzi*” can be summarised as the four characters of “*li*” (礼, propriety), “*yi*” (义, righteousness), “*lian*” (廉, honesty), and “*chi*” (耻, shame) that are traditionally considered in China as the “four cardinal principles of the country.” The first three characters have been involved in the above description of the “*junzi*”. Here the fourth character “*chi*” should be clarified. The Chinese ethical culture is very different from the Western “guilt” culture. The Chinese may not know what guilt means in the Western culture, but like the Japanese (who have been influenced greatly by the Confucian culture), as described by Ruth Benedict, they hold that “*chi*” or shame is “the root of virtue. A man who is sensitive to it will carry out all the rules of good behaviour.” (Benedict, p. 224) From the perspective of moral understanding, a comparison of “*chi*” and “guilt” can establish the possibility of a consensus, a united front against the acts that violate the common basic spiritual principle.

To go further into the spiritual wealth of the ancient China, we find more ideas that relate to this spiritual principle. Mozi’s “*jianai*” (兼爱, universal love), an idea that is often associated with Christian notions of fraternity, means “to treat the states of others as one’s own, to regard the houses of others as one’s own, and to treasure the bodies of others as one’s own” (*Mozi*, Chapter 15); his “*feigong*” (非攻, the condemnation of war) forms part of the spiritual legacy of non-violence advocated by great men such as Jesus, Leo Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King; his idea of “*jiyong*” (节用, economising expenditure) already anticipates modern thinking regarding the importance of practicing thrift in managing resources well so as to realise sustainable development, corresponding to the objectives upheld by the United Nations’ Sustainable

Development Goals, (United Nations, 2019).

CONCLUSION

We need to reach a key common view that the universality of the spiritual principle indispensable for the “community” is above suspicion, because it originally exists in various cultures. But great efforts will have to be made to carry it out in mind and in action. Especially on the issue of the “community”, not only a shared spiritual principle is needed, but also we need the ethical attitude and decision to carry out the principle perseveringly. In the final analysis, whether to take the initiative of the “community” as a political strategy or a spiritual principle with universality, it is the key to decide if the BRI can bring in the long run a sustainable benefit to the people along the zone of the BRI, even of the world.



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