

Chinese Policy Is Based on The Confucian Culture of Harmony

by Nancy Spannaus

April 3—Professor James Chieh Hsiung, long-time professor of Politics & International Law at New York University, provided an invaluable insight into the source of differences between Chinese foreign policy, and that of the West today, in his March 28 presentation to the Schiller Institute conference in New York City. Professor Hsiung argued that the Chinese approach, which is based on Confucian philosophy, is uniquely appropriate to bringing nations together in the “Quest for Peace,” the topic of his address.¹ His speech also proved complementary to that of the conference’s keynote speaker, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, who concentrated on the anti-Aristotelian philosophy of Nicolas of Cusa as key to creating world peace.²

Why have there been dozens of wars in the West (especially the years 1816 to 1977), as compared to the number in the East Asian region, which had only *two* wars in the five centuries between 1368 and 1841? Hsiung asked. The answer lies in the “Chinese culture of harmony, which really means the harmonization of opposites.”

The Search for Harmony

Hsiung elaborated on the concept, beginning with an appropriate mocking of sociological “experts” such as Max Weber.

“Now Max Weber, who didn’t know Chinese, picked on Confucius. He said, harmony will not work, because harmony cannot make the Chinese compete, as the capitalist system requires. But he did not know that the word for harmony in Chinese also means—and perhaps even more so—the harmonization of opposites. Because of this Confucian Chinese culture of harmony, I think East Asia was imbued with this dedi-



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Professor James Hsiung addressed the March 28 Schiller Institute conference in New York City, on the “Quest for Peace—Across Cultural Paradigm and Peace Theories.”

cation to working out the search for harmony, and the search for harmonization of opposites, and that, I think, ultimately, was the reason why there were so few wars,” in comparison with the British Empire-dominated West.

“And this harmonious culture rejects the Aristotelian rejection, that co-existence of opposites could not exist. That’s Aristotelian, and the Chinese culture of harmony rejects that. Because Chinese culture teaches you the importance of harmony, and also every effort must be made to make opposites work. And knowing this, is beginning to know why, in China, in post-Maoist China, Deng’s reforms could combine, could co-

1. For the full speech, see the conference video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1LHXPSOKGU#t=22>.

2. See *EIR*, April 3, 2015.

alesce, two opposites, socialism and the market, to work together, in unison, and to produce astounding results. . . .

“The premium, or emphasis, that the Chinese culture places on harmony, and on the harmonization process, is reinforced by China’s experience with a rule of conduct drilled in from the centuries-long semi-tribute system of international relations. The result is a disposition toward playing a non-zero-sum game.”

Professor Hsiung elaborated that even under the historical suzerainty system, the Chinese acted differently from the “hegemon” in the West. “If force was used by the Chinese suzerain, . . . the end was to pacify . . . to restore order, rather than to seek conquest.” The professor’s example hit the nail on the head:

“Under Pax Britannia, Britain established by force an empire on which the Sun would not ever set. It stretched all the way from the East to the West, around the globe. And Britain established it by force—and actually the Opium War was one such instance, by which Britain tried to force opium down the Chinese throat.”

The Application to Today

Hsiung showed how this Confucian philosophy seems “to underlie post-Mao China’s behavior system, in the context of foreign relations.” He cited China’s reluctance to use its veto at the UN Security Council—and thus directly challenge the U.S.—as one example.

He went on to apply this to China’s economic policy:

“Under this current President, Xi Jinping, China seems to eschew, or avoid, playing an outright geopolitical game against the United States, which would be suicide. Instead, China is playing what can be best summed up as a multi-sum game of geo-economics. . . .

“The post-Cold War world is often said to catapult geo-economics to the forefront, in rivalry with geopolitics. If the overriding concerns of geopolitics are ideology and territorial control, then geo-economics means that a country’s economic security may eclipse its military security. And to guarantee its economic security, a major power must be concerned with where it stands in the global economy, including participation in free trade associations, or FTAs; access to the global markets and financial resources; *and* having a voice in major decision-making on international financial and economic matters.”

Hsiung cited the work of Richard Rosecrance, who has characterized the 21st Century as an “Age of Vul-

nerability Interdependence.” “By that he means, there’s a little bit of me in you, and a little bit of you in me, and therefore, for me to rock the boat, is like being suicidal. He explains that ‘Chinese industries, while growing rapidly, may often be subsidiaries of major world corporations elsewhere, like in the United States, Europe, Japan, etc. Because this is an age in which not even the United States can boast of having obtained unipolarity of economics. Under the circumstances, of course, China is not likely to risk self-destruction by rocking the boat.

“Thus, economic ties and cooperation with foreign countries, including the United States, the EU, Japan, India, etc., will be preferable to military expansion against them.’

“In other words, Professor Rosecrance foresaw that China would shun the playing of the game of geopolitics, in favor of the game of geo-economics. And this prediction is borne out by China’s foreign policy directions and behavior, especially under Xi Jinping, since 2013.”

The Path to Peace

Hsiung concluded by defining his view of the two ingredients which are indispensable for the attainment of “a peaceful world without armed conflict.”

“And the two are: 1) a cultural commitment to the policy of harmony of interests; and 2) the presence of an economic vulnerability independence among nations.

“The first, actually, can be taught in an inculcation drive to extol, or to hold out, harmony instead of competition, as an overriding cultural virtue. The second condition, of vulnerability interdependence, can be engendered and deepened by conscious institutional efforts, particularly if supported by a non-monolithic cultural ambition.

“Now, non-monolithism is not the same as pantheism. It simply means that there are different manifestations of the same truth, and that the different manifestations are not necessarily exclusive, mutually exclusive, and that is deeply rooted in the culture of harmony. So, both these attributes prove to be more reliable in the attainment of world peace, while the democratic peace had proven inadequate, or insufficient to serve the purpose of attaining peace.

“And in its place, we may substitute a new theory to be known as the peaceful cultural theory,” and “I have a copyright on this,” he quipped.