

Identifying with China

by Chen Weihua, originally published by *China Daily USA*

Helga Zepp-LaRouche sees Belt and Road Initiative as fulfilling lifelong pursuit by her and her US political activist husband, Lyndon LaRouche.

Aug. 18—Helga Zepp-LaRouche was 23 in 1971 when she embarked on a Swedish cargo ship to travel the world. The trip took her to a number of African and Asian countries and included several months in China.

The young German had just finished her training as a journalist. “My generation was still curious about the world. The youth of today, they just Google about things from the search machine. I want to see what the world looks like,” she told *China Daily*.

China was still in the midst of the “cultural revolution” (1966-1976), and as the ship had to be repaired in Shanghai, Helga had time to observe Chinese society and interact with local people.

She saw gray-painted warships at the mouth of the Yangtze River. She attended organized tours, visited people’s homes, factories and a children’s palace, and she heard modern Peking Opera played on loudspeakers.

She also met German-speaking Chinese, discussing with them politics and learning what life was like in China at that time. She found people were “kind” but said, “People were not happy at all.”

Helga also traveled to Qingdao, a seaside city in



Top: Helga Zepp-LaRouche speaks to China Daily in an interview. Chen Weihua / China Daily; Left: Helga Zepp-LaRouche poses for a photo during her attendance at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing in May. Provided to China Daily; Right: Helga Zepp-LaRouche in 1971 photo taken during her first trip to China. Provided to China Daily

Shandong province that had a lot of German influence, as well as to Tianjin and Beijing.

In Beijing, she toured places like the Summer Palace and was even tempted to learn Chinese but soon real-

ized that it would be difficult and take a long time. “You have to stay here, or you forget it. But anyway, it really started my interest in China,” she said.

Helga, who now travels frequently in China, felt it was fortunate for her to see China at a time of “cultural revolution” (1966-76).

Life-changing trip

Of her seafaring in 1971, Helga said she was shocked by the extreme poverty she saw in Africa. She described it as “such a shocking experience” and seeing Africa “from the bottom.”

“I came back from this trip with the absolute conviction that the world had to change, had to be improved,” she said.

Back in Germany, Helga tried to look for a theory to fix the problem that haunted her. She found Lyndon LaRouche, a U.S. political activist better known for launching the LaRouche Movement.

The movement, which has included many organizations and companies in the world, promotes a revival of classical art and greater commitment to science; advocates the development of major economic infrastructure projects on a global scale; and calls for reform of the world financial system to encourage investment in the physical economy and suppress financial speculation.

Helga found Lyndon to be the only one who talked about the need for the development and industrialization of Africa and Third World countries, as well as the establishment of an international development bank, something like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) today.

“Then I became part of the movement,” she said. On Dec 29, 1977, the two got married in Wiesbaden, a city in west central Germany.

Helga said she did not follow the Third World theory of then-Chinese leader Chairman Mao Zedong but paid more attention to the Non-Aligned Movement headquartered in Indonesia.

She has met some world leaders such as Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Mexican President Jose Lopez-Portillo.

Helga said they had been promoting the idea of development of a Eurasian land bridge through infrastructure in the early 1990s, but did not receive a positive response from the U.S. “The only government which responded positively was China,” she said.

In 1996, she returned to China for the first time to attend and speak at a meeting on Eurasian development. She found a China totally different from the one of 25 years before. The hundreds of thousands of bicycles on the streets had been replaced by cars.

But she said that comparing 1996 to today, China’s development has been more phenomenal. “The Chinese economic model is really the most successful model,” she said, adding that China has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty in recent decades.

Since then, she has frequently traveled there, often speaking at think tanks, including the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS).

During a trip in 2014 to explore the ancient Silk Road in Northwest China’s Gansu province, Helga was amazed to see the construction of the Lanzhou-Urumqi railroad going at full steam simultaneously in various spots, literally in the desert. The 1,776-kilometer (1,100 miles) line went into operation at the end of that year.

Belt and Road Initiative

Helga was excited when President Xi Jinping unveiled the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013. The BRI, which was then known as the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, is a development strategy proposed by Xi to focus on connectivity and cooperation between countries.

She hasn’t stopped talking about it since. The Schiller Institute she founded in 1984 also has published significantly on the subject.

In May, Helga went to Beijing to participate in the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, a meeting that drew 29 heads of state and representatives from more than 100 countries.

“I was really happy to be able to participate because we’ve been fighting for this for so long. I sort of identify with the success of this project,” she said.

Helga had chatted with many people from Africa to Latin America attending the meeting and found that they shared the same experience. “We were proud to be part of the historical moment of the birth of a new paradigm of mankind. It was a very strong feeling,” she said.

She said she was extremely impressed by Xi’s

speech, calling it “very rich” and reflecting the ideas of a Confucian philosopher and harmony.

The Schiller Institute also has sponsored conferences in cities across the U.S., from San Francisco to Detroit and New York, promoting the BRI and urging the US to participate.

Unlike the Obama administration, which was more resistant to the Chinese initiatives of AIIB (Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank) and BRI, U.S. President Donald Trump has put infrastructure construction atop his agenda and sent an interagency delegation, led by Matthew Pottinger, a National Security Council senior director for East Asia, to the Beijing forum.

Helga believes that China’s financing could help build infrastructure in the US. She claims that the US needs to build 40,000 miles of fast train routes if it wants to match China’s plan to connect every large city by fast train by the year 2020.

“The US economy would experience a tremendous boost through such a grand-scale infrastructural investment and could in turn export into the fast-growing Chinese market, and once competition is replaced by cooperation, the opportunities for joint ventures between the US and China in third countries are enormous,” she said in May in a seminar in Beijing.

Helga has repeatedly expressed her admiration for Xi’s call that “we have to have a community for a shared future of humanity.”

She told a seminar in July that the BRI is not just about infrastructure and economic growth, but a new paradigm in which geopolitics is overcome.

Africa development

Helga also was happy to see the growing Chinese investment in Africa.

“If you look at Africa, without Chinese investment, Africa would have no hope. Now people have hope,” she said, and told of two Chinese companies that built a 752-km electric railway linking Ethiopia’s capital Addis Ababa and the port of Djibouti, where most of landlocked Ethiopia’s trade flows.

In late May, Kenya also inaugurated its largest infrastructure project in more than 50 years—a \$3.2 billion railway funded by China linking the capital Nairobi with the port of Mombasa.

Helga was especially excited that China is also help-

ing build a new railway linking Rwanda, Uganda and Congo, a train that she said will go into the heart of Africa “for the first time.”

“I have talked with many African diplomats who said for the first time they see the horizon of overcoming poverty and obstacles for development through the help of China,” she said.

She was disappointed that Europeans talk about human rights and democracy but not development in Africa, and it was the Chinese who have been doing the development work.

A report released in May by Ernst & Young said China has invested in 293 FDI (foreign direct investment) projects in Africa, with total investment of \$66.4 billion, creating 130,750 jobs. Bilateral trade between China and Africa also exceeded \$137 billion in 2016.

Besides trade and FDI, Chinese companies and state-related entities have financed and built many infrastructure projects across the continent, including ports, roads, railways, dams, telecom networks, power stations, and airports, the report said.

The report also said that the BRI could prove to be a win-win situation for China and Africa.

Helga dismissed the slight by some in the West about Chinese motivation in Africa, citing a seminar she attended in Frankfurt, Germany, when the Ethiopian consul general was asked if China had an “ulterior motive.”

“No, because Ethiopia almost has no raw materials,” Helga quoted the Ethiopian diplomat as saying.

Helga said what China is doing has justified what she and her colleagues have done for the last 40 years.

“We are very happy. It is one thing for a small organization like ours to produce ideas, but it’s a quite different thing that the largest country in the world started to do it,” she said.

Helga said she felt sorry that her husband has not yet been to China. “He would have enjoyed it so much to come. Now he is 94, so it will be difficult, but not impossible. Maybe one day he will come,” she said.

“He loves China. He is convinced that the Chinese initiative (BRI) is the most important on the planet right now,” she said.

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