

Why Go to China?

by Michael G. Steger

Oct. 3—Upon returning from his first trip to China, Sept. 17-21, for the People’s Daily Media Forum on the Belt and Road, Michael Steger offers these reflections on the state of the U.S. mission for scientific and industrial progress, relative to that of China.

If you, the reader, ever get the chance, you should go to China. See for yourself the level of development. See for yourself the changes that have occurred within just twenty-five years, within the scope of this massive nation. With a dramatic geography changing quickly from arid coasts to jagged mountains, then barren desert, then rivers that flood annually across huge basins, then again stark mountains, and then to farmland, and again back to desert: These people have built a civilization over 5,000 years!

It is clear to all that China is now looking to play a role in the modern world. They are adept with new technology, and most Chinese are living right next door to typical western luxuries. Yet, their progress over these last forty, and especially these last twenty-five years, has achieved what can only be described as an intangible sense of mission: A sense of mission for progress that is now a shared value within the very fabric of their society, a mission that has been replaced in the western elites, over that same forty years, with a ubiquitous and casual cynicism characteristic of a drunken Faust.



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Michael Steger at the new concert hall in Dunhuang, China.

One cannot help but think of what Napoleon had said, “Let her sleep, for when she wakes, she will shake the world!” China has awakened, and she is certainly shaking the world. Perhaps most ironically, she is shaking the world with the best of western civilization. Yes, it is often draped in Asian ceremony and traditional customs, which are sometimes refreshing compared to our casual practicality. What stands out most, however, is China’s sense of mission for real scientific and social



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Camel caravan at the oasis near Dunhuang.

progress, an energetic by-the-seat-of-your-pants playfulness, and a pride in their civilization, nation, and culture which touches their very hearts with happiness.

These characteristics remind one of the essence of Beethoven's pulsing sense of mission, or Benjamin Franklin's incessant and unrestrained playfulness, and even, on deeper reflection, of Plato's idealistic meritocratic Republic.

By no means has China reached the pinnacle of these expressions, but these poignant references, of the heights of European civilization, resonate far more strongly in China today, than in the West, where such ideas are attacked as racist, drab, or antiquated. Perhaps, today, China is the mirror to which the West can turn to rediscover its own beauty, its own soul for discovery, development, and exploration.

With the initiative of the Belt and Road, China has called upon the world, and perhaps, even more specifically, upon the United States, to join in cooperation with the great civilization of the East for a project of Global Development, enriching all of mankind with the greatest mankind has to offer.

We must say yes to this collaboration. For ourselves, and for the entire world, it is today not an option, but an immediate necessity.

People's Daily Media Forum on the Belt and Road

Flying west from Beijing to Dunhuang, a three-hour flight across most of northern China, the landscape is more similar to the western United States than it is to the rich farmlands of our Midwest or the origins of industry in the hills and rivers of our Northeast.

The *People's Daily* is the largest circulation newspaper in China, and has been coordinating its coverage with Government policies since its first publication in 1948. It has a daily print circulation of 30 million. Its new online platform, including social media, which has been developed to a state-of-the-art facility over the last two years, now reaches 300 to 600 million people each day. It intends to expand this platform for a growing international audience.



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The tallest building in Beijing, under construction.

In September and November 2013, President Xi announced the New Silk Road policy of China, first in Kazakhstan in September, and then in Indonesia in November 2013. Since then, China has shaped what is now known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), including both over-ground rail and development corridors from east Asia to western Europe, as well as two maritime routes, through the Indian Ocean basin and the Mediterranean Sea, and another through the Arctic Ocean to northern Europe. By the end of this decade, the project will be twenty times the size of the Marshall Plan, the project which rebuilt Europe after World War II—or, in other words, the BRI has quickly become the new gold standard for global development projects.

The U.N. has endorsed this audacious project now in its fourth year, as have the 66 nations which attended the inaugural BRI Beijing forum in May 2017, hosted personally by President Xi. Each year since President Xi's announcement, *People's Daily* has held a Media Forum on the BRI, inviting directors and editors-in-chief of major news agencies from around the world, in hope of expanding global coverage of this ambitious and globally important project.

As many readers of this weekly publication well know, *EIR*, the Schiller Institute, and the LaRouche organization internationally have been initiating, developing, and covering this project since our first publication of this program in *EIR* in 1992. But most of the other periodicals and daily newspapers of Europe and



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Sand dunes at the oasis near Dunhuang.

the United States have not covered the project at all, in any honest or supportive way, ever.

With this year's *People's Daily* conference, the leadership of China hopes to change that!

Travelling the 2,000-Year-Old Silk Road

For its first three years, the conference was held in Beijing as a two-day conference.

This year, following growing international support, *People's Daily* held the conference in the far western reaches of the northwestern province of Gansu, with nearly 400 representatives from more than 120 nations. Gansu is located where the Gobi desert and the Takla makan desert meet, literally at the fork-in-the-road of the millennia-old Silk Road, that very road traveled by camel caravans bringing silk, porcelain, gunpowder, movable-type printing, and spices from the East, and algebra, metals, gems, and Mediterranean culture from the West.

The city of Dunhuang is located at a mirage-like oasis in the sand-covered desert, with a landscape unlike anything in the

world. The sand dune mountains rise above the town of Dunhuang, surrounding an ancient freshwater oasis which is fed by underground reservoirs from ancient mountain runoff, and the Mogao caves, built between 400 and 900 A.D., are filled with ancient Buddhist temples sculpted from the ancient river's porous sandstone, then plastered and painted with the colors of Himalayan stone such as lapis lazuli, green copper, and onyx, as brilliant in color today as they were 1,000 years ago.

These legacies of the ancient Silk Road capture the vibrant culture, trade, and spirit that embodied the international richness of the ancient Silk Road. Today there are camel trains heading deep into the mountainous dunes as in millennia gone by, now letting tourists relive the ancient Silk Road—tourists who seek to experience

this remarkable place.

Such was the start of the conference, with a day of reimagining.

The Message Is Clear

“China has taken the international responsibility to develop nations around the world. It is time for you to cover this project.”

It is hard to say if the many western journalists un-



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A camel caravan at the Dunhuang oasis.

derstand the scope or importance of this project, rather than it being simply something China is “doing.” Many western journalists unfortunately have little understanding of physical economics, science and industry, agriculture, or infrastructure development. In short, most are simply not prepared to understand this project, and this goes as well for many others around the world today.

One might say that the current understanding of the BRI is similar to the understanding by the average American, or leading journalist, of John Kennedy’s mission to land a man on the Moon. For most, that mission was simply a competitive feat to beat the Soviets. For the more enlightened, it was, and still remains, the only path to enduring peace through scientific development!

As is the BRI today.

However, after an intense day contemplating the ancient Silk Road, including a beautiful evening concert, followed the next day by a media forum with presentations by leading figures from many of China’s thirty-two provinces—as well as presentations and panel discussions by leading figures of western, African, and Asian media agencies—some of this incomprehension began to change. Then, on returning to Beijing, all 400 participants convened in a summit in the Great Hall of the People with Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli, the man responsible for the BRI at the top of China’s government. Then, after this intense four-day forum, including flights back and forth across northern China, there began to be a palpable sense of inspiration and excitement from many of the participants.

On leaving the Great Hall, and after reiterated calls to cover this grand global project, with increasing confidence and magnanimity by China’s political leaders, combined with the



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A meeting in the Great Hall of the People with Zhang Gaoli, the first-ranked Vice Premier of the People’s Republic of China.

accumulated awe at China’s modernization as seen throughout Beijing, and in light of myriad reflections on the life and times of the ancient Silk Road—there came a sense of wonder.

A sense, perhaps not fully conscious for most, that the world was clearly headed in a new direction—a direction no longer based on the mistakes of the past, a new direction, based on global cooperation towards our shared destiny.

And perhaps, by the end of this conference, even the most cynical of the participants would agree, that even if it is not perfect, it is a good direction. It is the New Silk Road worth taking!

The author was also a participant in the inauguration of the People’s Daily’s new Center for International Studies, to act as a foreign adviser for the next three years. Fourteen participants were selected from the U.K., France, Germany, Holland, Israel, India, Canada, the United States, Australia, Japan, Russia, and Thailand.



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Headquarters building of the China Global Television Network (CGTN).