

## Message

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**M**Y heartiest congratulations on the international symposium at Peking University in China, hosted jointly by the Daisaku Ikeda Research Society of the Center of Japanese Studies of Peking University and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP) located in Hachioji, Tokyo, Japan. I wish in particular to thank all the scholars from various educational institutions who, despite their busy schedules, took time to attend the symposium, among them representatives from Soka University in Tokyo, of which I am the founder.

The participants, representing specialists in various fields related to Oriental thought, in conjunction with the delegates from Japan, came together to examine the theme “Perspectives of Oriental Philosophy in the 21st Century.” Approaching it from many different angles, their discussions will be, I am sure, of far-reaching significance.

Propelled largely by technological advances developed in modern Western society, our present-day civilization has been able to provide human beings with countless conveniences and much material wealth. Striking progress in the areas of transportation, communication, and the exchange of information has led to a process of increasing globalization.

At the same time, however, globalization has brought with it cultural conflicts, deeply troubling problems related to the natural environment, nuclear proliferation, the widening of the gap between rich and poor, marked increases in the refugee population, and other questions tied to ethnic and religious differences, dark clouds that profoundly shadow the horizon. The 9/11 terrorist attacks of three years ago are symbolic of these problems.

As a result of such friction, many innocent citizens in various parts of the world have found themselves caught up in acts of indiscriminate terrorism, and the situation shows signs of continued worsening. Hatred and distrust grow ever deeper, and the forces of division appear to be tearing humanity apart.

But human life is richly endowed with good impulses as well, with emotions of compassion and mutual trust. These impulses toward good

provide a source of energy that can bind humanity together. By drawing upon these good impulses inherent in human life, we can control the forces of evil and provide the key to cultural transformation. Oriental thought shines with the light of humanistic wisdom, a diamond-like beacon that can change hatred and retaliation into compassion and deeds of gratitude.

Some thirty years ago, when I engaged in dialogues with the historian Dr. Arnold Toynbee, he pointed out that the striking advances in science and technology of modern times have been accompanied by moral, ethical, and spiritual stagnation. This has brought about an atmosphere of divisiveness that sunders the ties among human beings, a “morality gap” that lies at the heart of the crises facing our modern materialistic culture. In short, it is a decline in the moral and ethical standards of humanity caused by the decrease of the impulse toward good. To remedy this situation, Dr. Toynbee believed that a force was needed to uplift the ethical standards of humanity, and that hope for such a force was to be found in what he termed “the ecumenical spirit”<sup>1</sup> with which the Chinese people have traditionally been imbued. He saw China as the country embodying the greatest hope for providing political unity and peace to the world at large.

In May 1974, the year after I held my talks with Dr. Toynbee, I was able to fulfill a long-held wish by paying my first visit to China. Since then, I have in all made ten visits to that country, seven of them to Peking University, which is one of my favorite spots. I have employed whatever influence I have, limited though it may be, to open the way for cultural and educational exchange on the popular level and to deepen the ties of friendship between China and Japan.

In my dealings with the people of China, I have been strongly impressed by the enduring virtues characteristic of the Chinese, the factors underlying what Dr. Toynbee has called their “ecumenical spirit.” These virtues, it seems to me, are of ever-increasing importance to the human population of the 21st century.

First among these is the concept of symbiosis that has long been an outstanding quality of Chinese cultural history. This is a spirit that encourages harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature and between one group of human beings and another, a spirit that strives for mutual support and the search for mutual well-being.

The classic embodiment of this spirit of symbiosis is found in the concept of the unity of Heaven and humanity that is at the heart of traditional Chinese thought, and in the ideal of *datong* or “great harmony” that is such a vital part of the Confucian doctrine of more recent cen-

turies.

The concept of the unity of Heaven and humanity holds that the spheres of the heavenly or divine and of human beings are essentially one, that the human mind or nature contains a heavenly element and is naturally endowed with moral virtues. Professor Ji Xianlin of Peking University, who has made an exhaustive study of this concept of the unity of Heaven and humanity that runs throughout the history of Chinese thought, asserts that the word “Heaven” here denotes the universe as a whole or the world of nature, and that “humanity” refers of course to human beings. I believe that this ideal of the symbiosis or mutual coexistence of nature and human beings has a most important contribution to make to humanity in the 21st century.

The *datong* or great harmony concept is likewise interpreted as a spirit of coexistence that embraces all human beings living in sympathy with one another and sharing one another’s joys and sorrows, one informed by the traditional Confucian virtues of humaneness and rightness. Thus the thinker and political reformer Kang Youwei (1858–1927) states in his *Book of the Great Unity*, “Since I was born on this great earth, all persons living on it are my siblings, and when I come to know them, I will feel love and kinship for them.”

This concept of symbiosis or coexistence underlies what in Buddhism is known as the Law or doctrine of dependent origination. Buddhism teaches that all forms of existence in both the natural and human realms are connected with one another through an interrelatedness of mutual dependence and assistance. The resulting condition, in which all the phenomena of existence join one another in a state of symbiosis, con-cords with the underlying rhythm of the universe.

I am convinced that this concept of symbiosis that is characteristic of traditional Chinese thought, if it is shared by all the peoples over the world as the spirit of our present age, is capable of opening the way to harmony and prosperity for all humankind.

The second virtue of the Chinese people that I wish to stress here is the humanism based on the concept of symbiosis just discussed. Chinese thought directs all its attention to questions pertaining to the object of human endeavor and never departs from the human being as the standard for all measures. The focus upon the study of humankind that underlies Chinese historical writing is marked by a strong ethical tone. For example, Confucian thought holds up the concept of *ren*, benevolence or humaneness, as the highest expression of Chinese humanism. The character for *ren*, 仁, is made up of two elements, 人 or “person” and 二 or “two,” and expresses the idea of two people aiding and loving

one another. In modern times it has come to designate the ideal of humanism, the awakening to the proper path for the human being, or, in broader terms, to the love for all humanity.

The 6th century Buddhist scholar T'ien-t'ai (Tiantai), one of the most outstanding figures in the history of Chinese Buddhism, stated in his work *Great Concentration and Insight*, "To nourish feelings of pity and humaneness and refrain from harming others is none other than the precept against the taking of life."<sup>2</sup> Thus he equates humaneness with pity or compassion. The "precept against the taking of life" represents the ideal of compassion, the highest expression of the Buddhist view of the dignity of life. He is thus pointing out that compassion and the Confucian virtue of humaneness are one in their underlying spiritual and ethical nature.

The tradition of Chinese humanism, exemplified in the Confucian concept of humaneness and the compassion of Chinese Buddhism, represent, I believe, the pivot that can lead to the transcending of the "morality gap" that Dr. Toynbee has referred to, and can change a century of war and violence into one of peace and nonviolence.

When I try to imagine what person most naturally personifies this traditional Chinese spirit of humanism amid the struggles of the present age, the figure that comes immediately to mind is that of the late Premier Zhou Enlai.

I met Premier Zhou just thirty years ago, in December of 1974, a year before his death. A man whose powers of memory encompassed not only the affairs of China but those of the entire world, frugal in his personal expenditures, scrupulously upright in never allowing his relatives or associates to use his name for personal profit, one whose behavior was marked by complete sincerity and steadfast devotion to the service of the people. And in the welcome he extended to foreigners he displayed the utmost thoughtfulness.

When I met Premier Zhou, he was already seriously ill and in a hospital in Peking. And yet, in spite of his critical condition, he took the trouble to go to the entrance of the hospital to greet me when I arrived, and to accompany me to the entrance when I took my leave. The image of him, the epitome of courtesy and decorum, remains even now etched in my mind.

The profound words and sayings left behind by Premier Zhou as he looked forward to the coming of the 21st century overflow with a longing for the spirit of "great harmony" not only between China and Japan but among all the nations of the world.

In autumn of the year before last, to mark the 30th anniversary of the

normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China, I arranged for the publication of a work entitled *Dialogues on Eastern Wisdom*, which represented discussions held among Professor Ji Xianlin of Peking University, the late Professor Jiang Zhongxin of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and myself. In the course of these discussions, we examined the concepts of commonality and diversity in the systems of Eastern and Western thought.

In our conclusions, Professor Ji, discussing the shape that human culture should take in the 21st century, had this to say: “The correct procedure is to carry on all the splendid achievements realized by Western culture over the past several hundred years, and at the same time employ the synthesis typical of thought processes in Eastern culture to rescue us from the predicament brought about by the analytic thinking of Western culture, and in this way advance human culture as a whole to newer and higher levels of development.”

What is required now of Eastern thought, I believe, is that it transcend the confrontational dualism of East and West and apply the “ecumenical spirit” noted by Dr. Toynbee, a spirit that has grown up in Eastern thought over the past several thousand years, to the service of humankind as a whole. Then it may serve as a source of spiritual light ushering in the creation of a truly glorious human culture.

My hope is that the historical symposium that is the occasion for this message will help to shed the light of wisdom represented by Oriental philosophy over the years of the 21st century.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup> *Choose Life*, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> *Great Concentration and Insight*, T46. 77b.