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Digital Exhibits on Confucius, Buddha and Laozi and their Impact on Fusion of One Belt One Road Civilizations

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1.0 Poverty Eradication and Belt and Road Initiative

The UN General Assembly in 2015 unanimously adopted the post 2015 Development Agenda with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In my opinion, the most important SDG is the first goal, “No Poverty”, because poor countries do not possess the resources needed to achieve social, economic and environmental development as required by the UN SDGs. Most countries are not on track to eradicate poverty. The exception is China in her spectacular success in lifting 800 million of her people out of poverty in 2021. The foundation of China’s success in eradicating poverty is her extensive and inclusive physical and virtual infrastructure that make even her most remote villages part of the global supply chain. “If you want to get rich, build roads first” (要想富先修路). China has been sharing her success in eradicating poverty with South countries through her “Global Development Initiative.” with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as its platform.

2.0 Fusion of One Belt One Road Education Curriculum (OBOR Curriculum)

The success of BRI projects owes much to the mutual understanding of the cultures and civilizations of Belt and Road countries. I have found

that peoples in Belt and Road countries including China have little knowledge of the cultures of Belt and Road countries and the contributions of other civilizations to their own. This needs to be rectified, starting with the youth of all Belt and Road countries. The Fusion of Belt and Road Civilizations Education Curriculum (OBOR Curriculum) is one such attempt.



<https://www.interacademies.org/publication/obe-belt-one-road-fusion-civilisations-education-curriculum>

<https://www.interacademies.org/publication/one-belt-one-road-fusion-civilisations-education-curriculum-chinese-version>

The OBOR Curriculum is presented in two parts. The first part comprises the Land Silk Road through the tales of the great Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta (1304- 1369) of Morocco. The second part covers the Maritime Silk Road through the seven epic voyages of the famous Chinese Admiral Zheng He (1371- 1435) from China to South East Asia, Arabia and East Africa. The curriculum has many student-centred classroom activities based on “Learning By Doing” methodology.

3.0 Global Civilization Initiative and Deficiency in OBOR Curriculum

With the pronouncement by Chinese President Xi of the “Global Civilization Initiative” in 2023, OBOR Curriculum’s deficiency was exposed as merely recounting the tales of the two great Silk Road travellers without philosophical underpinning. Professor Jeffrey Sachs’ Aristotle, Buddha, Confucius Initiative is most timely in rectifying this shortcoming of OBOR Curriculum.

One of the shortcomings of the "Belt and Road" curriculum is that it focuses only on China’s interactions to her West, such as: Han Dynasty Zhang Qian (195- 114 BC) to Tajikistan and Tang Dynasty Xuanzang (602-664 AD) seeking Buddhist scriptures in India. In fact, until the Mongol invasion of Eastern Europe in the 13th century, no Chinese merchant ventured further West than Samarkand. If not for the commercially savvy Sogdians with their capital in Samarkand trading between China and Europe, the Land Silk Road would not have become a reality. In fact, the Sogdians had a long association with China. The most famous Sogdian in Chinese history was An Lushan (703-757 AD), whose rebellion led to the decline of the Tang Dynasty.

The other serious omission in OBOR Curriculum is that of Alexander the Great (356- 323BC) of Greece whose empire stretched East through Persia, Central Asia to India. He had a great desire for knowledge and a love for philosophy and was a patron of both the arts and the sciences. This was attributed to his education under the great philosopher and polymath Aristotle (384-322BC). The Aristotelian philosophy of love for knowledge became the abiding psyche in the civilization of Central Asia well before its Islamic conquest of the 7th Century AD. In my opinion, Greek philosophy as typified by Aristotle must have reached China and influenced Chinese civilization from Central Asia. The great Buddhist “Yungang” Grottos of Datong in Shanxi Province date from 5th Century AD and some grottos have Greco-Roman features in architecture, sculpture and dress. The slogans that guide the governance of present-day China: “ Seeking Truth from Facts” 实事求是 and “ Crossing the River by Touching the Stones” 摸着石头过河 are to me very Aristotelian.

4.0 Confucianism and Chinese Civilization

The greatest and most influential philosopher in Chinese history was Confucius (551- 479BC). The fact that Confucianism has endured in China for 2500 years is due to its being rejuvenated by some of the most brilliant Chinese philosophers from dynasty to dynasty to make it more aligned to societal norms and needs in those times. Confucianism is underpinned by 5000 years of continuous Chinese civilization with its great capacity to embrace and absorb elements of other philosophies from home and abroad. The most striking example has been Daoism and Buddhism. Confucianism today contains many tenets from Taoism and Buddhism. A great example is the Three Religion/Philosophy Hall of Hengshan Xuankong Temple 恒山悬空寺三教殿 that is dedicated to Confucius, Sakyamuni and Laozi. The founders of the three great philosophies or religions have been venerated in the same hall of the 1500 year old temple. There are three philosopher associations venerating these three philosophers in many cities and towns in China. It is a great story of the tolerant, embracing and absorptive underpinning of Chinese civilization.



5.0 Virtual Exhibit of the Fusion of One Belt One Road Civilizations

Present day youth is much more attractive by virtual exhibits rather than texts on paper. This is amply demonstrated by the global popularity of TikTok; and Douyin 抖音 in China. A virtual exhibit of the Fusion of One Belt One Road Civilizations should be made as China's contribution to the Global Civilization Initiative. In recent years, especially the COVID- 19 years, major museums in China have

accelerated their digital transformation by the adoption of AI, Virtual Reality, Robotics, Internet of Things and 5G. These digital technologies in museum exhibits in China have brought high-definition, three-dimensional, interactive and virtual reality experiences for visitors. In view of Qufu 曲阜 being the storehouse of Confucius knowledge and Laoshan 崂山 being a cradle of Daoism, I suggest the task of creating the virtual exhibit of the Fusion of One Belt One Road Civilizations be entrusted to Shandong 山东 with Professor Sachs and his colleagues from Greece inputting the contributions of Aristotle.

The Digital Exhibit of the Fusion of One Belt One Road Civilizations can be offered to national museums in Belt and Road countries. All that is required is a hall in the museum equipped by modern digital audio-visual hardware and software. The digital exhibit in National Museum should feature her own civilization as the centrepiece. I believe by the application of digital technologies, it will revitalize many national museums in Belt and Road countries.

Currently, the West has encouraged the demonization of China by her politicians and media : “All that is right with the world is due to us, all that is wrong with the world is due to China!”. The urgent task is for the peoples of the West, especially their youth, to learn about Chinese civilization and the welcoming of other cultures and civilizations throughout Chinese history. They must understand that this Chinese civilization psyche nurtured by 5000 years of continuous civilization anchors the current spectacular development of China.