

The cultural groundwork for a Leibnizian renaissance in China

by Elisabeth Hellenbroich

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In his recent article, "History As Science," published in *Fidelio* magazine (Fall 1993), Lyndon LaRouche gives an outline of the prospects for the 21st century. The battle against hunger, misery, and cultural backwardness in many countries of this world will only be successful, he says, if mankind concentrates on the biggest task of the next century: the development of the Pacific Basin. The key question will be, how will China and its 1.2 billion population, the largest on the planet, develop? Will there be an industrial, scientific, and cultural renaissance, based on the most modern infrastructure—i.e., a very advanced rail network, combined with modern energy and water supplies? Or will China be transformed into a gigantic work camp, with millions of people being used up as coolie labor in the so-called Special Economic Zones?

How explosive the political and economic situation in China is, is indicated by a study published in May 1993 by some members of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The study warned that China could disintegrate as did the former Yugoslavia, if the central government in Beijing does not gain control over the economic situation. Beijing, the study says, is being bankrupted by the provincial governments, which are holding back taxes and other payments to the central government.

The Achilles' heel of China's internal dynamic, as history has shown numerous times, is the catastrophic situation of China's peasants. With an average income of \$134 per year—for 80 million peasants, it is barely \$50!—and increasing payment demands imposed on them, there is now a situation in which 200 million peasants are unemployed. In the year 2000, this number will have doubled. And this is taking place against a background of shrinking production, the loss of arable land due to droughts and floods, and a dramatic fall in the birth rate because of a malthusian birth control policy.

Nearly 200 million peasants or agricultural laborers are internally "migrating"; that is, they are fleeing catastrophic living conditions in the hopes of finding work in the supposedly booming Special Economic Zones, where they are cheap, expendable labor. In 1993 alone, there were 300-400 peasant revolts, in particular in Sichuan province.

China's social and economic dilemma is that on the one side, it has a very thin crust of a highly developed technology, contrasted with the backwardness in which the majority of the people live. Some 160 million homes lack water and electricity supplies. Per capita energy consumption is 180 million kilowatts for 1.2 billion people, compared to 60 million kilowatts for 80 million German inhabitants. Three percent of the energy supply comes from nuclear energy—among the lowest proportions in the world.

In Guangdong province, because of a lack of energy, the factories close three to four times a week. Aside from a chronic shortage of energy (keep in mind that China's energy supply is 75% coal), China suffers an acute shortage of transport, in particular rail transport capacity, which leads to high production losses. That is a short characterization of the type of problems China faces.

Axiomatics of a renaissance

Let me begin to introduce this question by outlining the axiomatic features of a Leibnizian renaissance for China. Methodologically, we will proceed as did Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz—one of Europe's greatest "scientific organizers"—after the devastating Thirty Years' War. He developed the design for a Eurasian development program. It is a vision in which Europe, Russia, and China would form an alliance based on the infrastructural exploration of these countries, in particular Russia's Siberia, the founding of scientific academies, and the common effort of engaging in scientific, historical, and comparative language studies—all areas which should serve as strategic and scientific guidelines for the work of the European scientific academies.

The founding of the Berlin Society incorporated this program in its official guidelines in 1700. In a memorandum in 1716 directed to Czar Peter the Great, titled "On the Arts and Sciences and Crafts in the Russian Empire," Leibniz gave an outline of how to create a scientific renaissance.

The main points he emphasized were: 1) create the necessary instruments for education; 2) educate people in science; 3) find out new information. Leibniz demanded in this outline that print shops, book shops, and libraries be established "in which manuscripts would be found which are unknown in Europe, manuscripts from Greece, Turkey, Persia. . . . They should also collect books in many different languages, Sla-



Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, author of a program for development of Europe, Russia, and China.

vonian, Dutch, Latin, Welsh, Spanish, also in Greek, in literal and vulgar Hebrew, Arabic, Syrian, Chaldean, Ethiopian, Coptic, Armenian, and Chinese. But the largest part must be in Latin. . . . Such a library should be established in such a way, that there would be pooled information from histories, countries, languages, sciences, food—in other words, that one would find there the whole treasury of human science, as much as there has been written about it.”

In addition to the library, there should be a cabinet displaying “all optical, nautical, mechanical, and other inventions.” “This includes instruments which an architect and an engineer *mechanicus astronomus* needs.” There also should be a *theatris artis*, Leibniz says, including models such as newly invented machines for waterworks, mining, etc. For Leibniz, the key precondition for an economic and scientific renaissance lies in the transmission, or rather, the replication of the method of *ars inveniendi*, the art of invention.

Therefore, it is important to “rediscover” the best knowledge of mankind, starting with the earliest possible date of human civilization, Leibniz wrote in a memorandum to Czar Peter the Great. “We should order this knowledge in such a way . . . that we can see *origines inventionum*—the ‘origins of invention’—how, by what method, did man come to specific discoveries in the past, how can he make new ones; because by rediscovering the discoveries, we would have a method at hand which would improve the sciences and a pathway for making new discoveries.”

Leibniz, who since very early on had investigated the question of a “grammar of thought,” an alphabet of human thinking as he called it in his *characteristica universalis*, addressed with the notion of *origines inventionum* a question that in LaRouche’s writing, “History As Science,” is the underlying “metaphor.” It addresses the question of iso-

chronicity in the history of mankind—namely, what is the connection between idea revolutions of the past, the present, and the future? And what is the underlying “continuity principle” in mankind’s history which is the precondition to guarantee the durable survival of mankind?

The capacity for durable survival of our species is measured by what LaRouche terms “relative population density” (which collapsed whenever mankind was at a standstill, and which grew during times of technological and cultural growth). LaRouche connects this measurement with three other necessary axioms: divine natural law, the idea of the sovereign individual, and the idea of the sovereign nation. It is the same question with which Plato introduces his most famous dialogue, *Timaeus*.

At the beginning of this dialogue, Critias tells the story of the wise man Solon, who once visited the Amon priests in Egypt. These people told Solon: “You Hellenic people, you think you understand something about history, but you are like children. You have forgotten that once, many, many centuries ago, you had a civilization which collapsed because of natural catastrophes, and this happened to many cultures without the question being asked why this happened.” This story is like a prelude to the dialogue, in which the astronomer Timaeus presents a series of hypotheses about the creation of the universe. Only when sovereign man explores the laws of nature, he does not become the victim of fate, but willfully directs the course of history, Plato says here.

But let me get back to Leibniz. Leibniz was the first European scholar who in a more systematic way transmitted to Europe a deeper knowledge about China’s Confucian tradition. The only thing that at that time was known about China in Europe—and among a very small circle of people—were the reports written by the Franciscan monks Montecorvino and Rubruch from China at the beginning of the 13th century. These reports were known to the Vatican, and may be the small circle around Christopher Columbus. Except for a few books here and there, there was no comprehensive map of China. (And nobody knew in Europe that at the beginning of the 15th century, the famous Chinese Admiral Cheng had made five major maritime expeditions going up to the east coast of Africa, expeditions which were carried out with the most advanced ships, but which were suddenly halted and never resumed.)

Leibniz and the Jesuits

Leibniz got his first direct knowledge about China, when in 1689 he met in Rome the Jesuit Father Filippo Grimaldi. This eyewitness told him about China, Russia, the first Chinese-Russian border treaty, the treaty of Nerchinsk, and about the work of the Jesuits, which had been initiated at the beginning of the 16th century by the Italian Father Matteo Ricci. This priest, who had gotten his mathematical and astronomical training from the German Christopher Clavius, brought a cembalo and some of his own compositions to China. During

the 28 years that he was there, he translated into Chinese the most modern scientific books of Europe, and developed a systematic cartography, thus beginning the most fascinating collaboration with the Chinese imperial court.

Participating in this were the fathers Adam Schall von Bell, the Flemish Ferdinand Verbiest, the Italian Grimaldi, the French fathers Joachim Bouvet, Jean François Gerbillon, and Antoine Verjus, to name a few—all of whom were either directly the presidents of the emperor's Astronomical Station and Mathematical Tribunal, or consulted as engineers in the various hydraulic works that were undertaken then, or served as diplomats. In some of the letters Leibniz wrote to Father Grimaldi, as well as to the Polish Father Kochanski, he wanted to know, for example, "whether there are not some traces of geometry by proofs in the old writings of the Chinese and some traces of metaphysics, and whether they knew the theorem of Pythagoras? . . . Whether there are some natural scientific works by the Chinese translated into Latin. . . . Whether they have some interesting machines, which could be replicated in Europe . . . what kind of artificial means they use in agriculture . . . what about their iron production and mineral mines, how do they produce salt and sodium?"

Lastly, he wanted to know something about a *Clavis Sinica*, a language grammar. Leibniz again and again emphasized the importance of comparative language studies. He wanted language studies of the Lord's Prayer to be carried out, in particular for those languages in the region between Russia and China, in order to discover something about the origin of mankind and human thought. And by comparing the basic principles of Confucian philosophy with the principles of Platonic-Christian philosophy, he came to the conclusion that, in the ancient Chinese culture, the same universal questions concerning a Supreme Being, the laws of the universe, and man, were asked, as they were asked by Plato and answered by the Christians.

That is, he found that the human mind, no matter in which part of the world, follows the same pathway of reasoning. This proves the universal quality of the creative mind. One example was Chinese astronomy, which was ancient, and which Leibniz studied. In "History As Science," LaRouche points to the oldest poetry, the Vedic hymns, which tell the story of how human civilization began to develop on the basis of observing the planets and by developing a solar astronomical calendar, measuring 26,000-year cycles, and how the laws of the universe were explored and civilization born.

In one of the many letters written to Grimaldi, Leibniz refers to the correspondence between the famous astronomer Johannes Kepler and Father Terrentius, who in 1630 worked as astronomer at the court of the Chinese emperor. He reported that Kepler was very interested and helped to bring to China his Rudolphine Tables (a systematic astronomical mapping of the planets), and also corrected a few mistakes that had crept into Chinese astronomy because of mis-handling. One of the key figures in the intellectually fertile

exchange between the Jesuits and China was the emperor himself, Kang Hsi. A descendant from the Manchu dynasty, this emperor every day received four hours of lessons in mathematics and astronomy from Adam von Schall, and later from Verbiest, as Leibniz reports to us in his book *Novissima Sinica (News From China)*. But this ruler also showed great interest in hydraulic and canal projects, which would improve agricultural production.

Kang Hsi corresponded to the Leibnizian ideal of a "philosopher king," one of the most central concepts in the Confucian philosophy, the philosophical writings of Mencius and of the great neo-Confucian, Chu Hsi. Unlike the legalists, the sophists, and the Taoists, Confucian philosophy states that man is "by nature good," and that the highest goal in the life of man is to be able to govern himself, to do *bona opera* (good works) and contribute in the best possible way to the well-being of all. Those who rule, the principle says, should rule according to the idea of the good, justice, love, and reason. They should fulfill "the Mandate of Heaven," and if they violate it, they should not rule.

Leibniz's 'News from China'

In the year 1697, Leibniz synthesized his programmatic ideas for China in a kind of *leitmotif* in the little book *Novissima Sinica*. "I consider it a singular plan of the Fates that human cultivation and refinement should today be concentrated, as it were, in the two extremes of our continent, in Europe and in China, which adorns the Orient as Europe does the opposite edge of the Earth. Perhaps Supreme Providence has ordained such an arrangement, so that, as the most cultivated and distant peoples stretch out their arms to each other, those in between may gradually be brought to a better way of life. And I think it is likewise not accidental for the Russians, who through their big empire connect China with Europe and who rule over the far north of the uncivilized area along the coasts of the Arctic Ocean, that with the help and the engagement of their present ruler, they will follow on the pathway of our discoveries."

Comparing China to Europe, Leibniz is deeply touched by the ethical conduct of the Chinese, their respect for the individual. And he therefore suggests that, given the moral decay in Europe, the Chinese should send missionaries to Europe in order to teach them their practical philosophy. On the other side, while Leibniz sees Chinese manufacturing and machine building—i.e., the technological level equal to Europe's—he nonetheless emphasizes that the Chinese lack the "one eye" that the Europeans have developed: exact mathematics. "And we also have a 'second eye' which they don't know too well, which I call the 'first philosophy,'" Leibniz wrote. "But the scientific study of the stars and the planets (as Father Verbiest said in his Latin and Chinese studies), the *Muse Urania* which seems to influence the Chinese emperor, has opened up a situation in which our sacred and truly heavenly teachings (Christian theology) are finding an open field."

Leibniz, in full admiration for this great country of the Orient, was of the opinion that perhaps not since the Apostles, had there been started a bigger cultural endeavor from the standpoint of Christian thought, than in China.

In the same year that *Novissima Sinica* appeared, Leibniz wrote a letter to Duke Rudolph August of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, titled "The Secret of Creation." Added to the letter was a coin which Leibniz had designed, in which he represented the binary number system, which he had been able to "rediscover," as he says, on the basis of a study of the 3,000-year-old texts of the Chinese Fuh Hi. "*Imago creationis*" and "*ex nihil ducendis Sufficit Unum*" were the *leit-motifs* for the coin. Leibniz explains why: The world has been created out of nothing, by the almightiness of God. And this could not be better represented, he says, than by the origin of number (which for Leibniz was a metaphysical idea, a Platonic thought-object), and the development of number out of One and Zero. The secret of Creation was that God "not only created all out of nothing, but that he created it well, and that all that he created was good." Therefore, he said, He would have conceived of an image showing light and darkness "because in the beginning the earth was without form, and void, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." The empty void, the terrible darkness belongs to Zero and Nothing, but God's spirit with His light is the One, Leibniz explained. And he prints underneath, on the coin, the binary number system, the predecessor to today's digital computer systems.

Leibniz's philosophical method

Leibniz was a devout Platonist. Contrary to the empiricists, naturalists, and Taoists, Leibniz showed with his scientific method that man, on the basis of a "universal" quality of his mind, a "natural light," can, out of himself, create new ideas. And he does it in such a way that, in a sense, everything that man thinks exists "virtually" in his mind from the beginning, because the mind always expresses his future thoughts. And he thinks in a somewhat confused way that which he will one day think out as a clear thought-object, Leibniz says. "Nothing could be taught to us (as Plato's *Meno* dialogue on the discovery of an irrational number shows), if the idea were not 'inborn' in our mind—which is like the matter out of which new thought-objects are formed."

Leibniz saw the excellence of the Platonic method of thinking demonstrated by the fact "that he [Plato] defines the mind as a self-moving substance, which out of its own, freely determines its actions, and therefore Plato correctly conceives the mind as the 'principle of action' contrary to matter . . . that all real knowledge is concerned with 'eternal' truth, and that 'universal, eternal ideas have more reality than ephemeral ideas, which come and go and participate in matter.' "

This means that for Leibniz: 1) Mind is not matter, but nature has its origin in metaphysical principles, which super-

sede the material. 2) The capacity to create universal ideas is an "inborn" faculty of man, in the sense that St. Paul understood it, that the "laws of the universe are inscribed in the hearts of people," "even if they can't grasp all, one must admit that the idea of God, the idea to think of God, is within man's nature," as St. Paul said. 3) Behind the phenomena of nature there lies an eternal, invariant principle, which Leibniz calls "sufficient reason," which, since it does not need any cause, lies outside the chain of causes. "It is therefore a necessary Being, a necessary existent, which is its own cause; this ultimate cause is called God." 4) The fundament of a just society is only possible, if man practically, i.e., physically, demonstrates God's existence, by discovering new laws in nature, by *bona opera* which improve man's living conditions.

Natural theology and ecumenicism

Shortly before his death in 1716, Leibniz wrote a philosophical essay, which he unfortunately could not complete, called "The Natural Theology of the Chinese." This essay contains a harsh criticism against a reductionist approach in the interpretation of Confucian philosophy. Leibniz's criticism had been prompted by the work of the two Jesuits, the Italian Niccolo Longobardi and the Frenchman Ste. Marie, who in Leibniz's opinion had reduced Confucianism to a materialistic, naturalistic, or pantheistic philosophy. "China is a great empire, no less in area than cultivated Europe," Leibniz writes, "and indeed surpasses it in population and orderly government. Moreover, there is in China in certain regards, an admirable public morality conjoined to a philosophical doctrine, or rather doctrine of natural theology, venerable by its antiquity, established and authorized for about 3,000 years, long before the philosophy of the Greeks, whose works nevertheless are the earliest which the rest of the world possesses, except for our sacred writings. For both of these reasons, it would be highly foolish and presumptuous on our part, having newly arrived, compared with them, and scarcely out of barbarism, to want to condemn such an ancient doctrine because it does not appear to agree at first glance with our ordinary scholastic notions. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that one could destroy this doctrine without great upheaval. Thus, it is reasonable to inquire whether we could give it a proper meaning. I only wish that we had more complete accounts and greater quantities of extracts of Chinese classics, more accurately translated."

Leibniz, studying the original texts of Confucius and Chu Hsi, makes out of this dialogue a fascinating synthesis between the basic principles of Confucianism and Christian philosophy. With the kind of love that we know from Lyndon LaRouche's approach to people, to always take the best from everyone, and from the standpoint of reason, Leibniz concluded that the three main principles of Confucianism all come very near to what the Christians conceive as God.

"One should above all consider their *Li*, which is the

prime mover and ground of all things," Leibniz says, and he quotes: "The first principle of the Chinese is called *Li*, that is, reason, or the foundation of all nature, the most universal reason and substance; there is nothing greater nor better than *Li*. From *Li qua Li* emanate five virtues: piety, justice, religion, prudence, and faith. For the Chinese just as *Li* is Being *par excellence* so it also possesses truth and Goodness *par excellence*. . . . Should one after all not say that the Chinese came very close to that absolute substance which we pray to under the name of God?"

Li is not the material cause of things, as Father Longobardi had assumed, nor a world soul in the sense of Spinoza or Averroës. (Spinoza reduces everything to a single substance, of which all things are only modifications.) But *Jovis omnia plena*—God fills all, that is, He is in all things and all things are in Him. The second principle, *Ki*, corresponds to matter, just as it corresponds to the instrument of the first principle which moves matter. "In consequence of this production of prime matter by the primary principle, or primitive form, by pure activity, by the operation of God, Chinese philosophy more closely approaches Christian theology than the philosophy of the ancient Greeks. . . . Admittedly, it appears that the Chinese believed that the *Li* first and always produced its *Ki*, and therefore one is as eternal as the other. But there should be nothing surprising about this, since they were apparently ignorant of the one 'Revelation' which can explain to us the beginning of the universe. St. Thomas Aquinas and other great doctors have claimed that the dogma could not be demonstrated by reason alone. . . . And there are those who believe that because the beginning of the Chinese empire occurred during the time of the Patriarchs, they could have learned about the creation of the world from the Patriarchs."

The third principle, *Xangti*, and *Li* are the same thing, Leibniz says. One has every reason to give to God the name of *Xangti*. What we call the light of reason in man, Confucius calls the commandment and law of Heaven: "To offend Heaven is to act against reason, to ask pardon of Heaven is to reform oneself and to make a sincere return in word and deed in the submission one owes to this very law of reason. For me, I find this quite excellent and quite in accord with natural theology. Far from finding any distorted understanding here, I believe that it is only by wrong interpretations and by interpolations that one could find anything to criticize on this point. It is pure Christianity, insofar as it renews the natural law inscribed in our hearts—except for what revelation and grace add to it to improve our nature."

Leibniz conceived his idea of an ecumenical alliance between Confucian and Christian thinking from the standpoint of *bona opera*, that is, a method to transmit, assimilate, and generate new discoveries. For him, there was no difference between any nation or party, as he said in a memorandum to the czar: "That country in which the sciences will best flourish, will be the most loved by me, because all mankind will profit from it."

Zhirinovsky echoes British geopolitics

by Mark Burdman

While Vladimir Zhirinovsky is being described as the "new Hitler" and "a fascist," the essential point has been altogether missed by the international media and the vast majority of "Russia experts." He is a man of the Russian military-intelligence establishment whose declarations are, in part, made for domestic Russian political consumption, but, more fundamentally, are designed to put forward the *geopolitical* views characteristic of the Russian "Third Rome" world view. In this respect, Zhirinovsky's pronouncements are often a Russian *mirror image* of the geopolitical outlook of spokesmen for the Anglo-American geopolitical establishment. He is only more brutal, in projecting mass devastation in the South in the coming years, than those western geopoliticians who are revered by the same media that are quick to call Zhirinovsky a fascist.

During 1993, one line of thinking that became prominent in Washington and London is the idea that future wars will be "clashes between civilizations," with "the West" pitted against "the rest" of the world. This idea was put forward by Harvard University professor Samuel Huntington, in his article entitled "The Clash of Civilizations?" in the Summer 1993 New York Council on Foreign Relations' magazine *Foreign Affairs*. The terms are borrowed from British Middle East specialist Bernard Lewis, an architect of Anglo-American destabilization strategy vis-à-vis the Third World.

In Huntington's view, "Conflict between civilizations will be the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world." In this "conflict between civilizations," NATO planning must be "increasingly directed to potential threats and instability along its 'southern tier.'" . . . In the post-Cold War world the primary objective of arms control is to prevent the development by non-western societies of military capabilities that could threaten western interests." The West, he says, must "limit the expansion of the military strength of Confucian and Islamic states; to moderate the reduction of western military capabilities and maintain military superiority in East and Southwest Asia; to exploit differences and conflicts between Confucian and Islamic states."

One finds here the kernel of the policy of "technological apartheid," the idea developed during the Persian Gulf war,