

Renaissance and the Struggle of Ideas

This is an edited transcript of Michael Billington's April 14 address to the conference.

Dennis Speed: Our final speaker for today, the Asia Editor for *EIR*, is Mike Billington. This is a book by Mike which tells about the vacation he took [laughter], all expenses paid, by him and the Federal government: *Reflections of an American Political Prisoner* (2000), during which time he did much of the work you're about to hear.

Michael Billington: Thank you. Thank you, Dennis. "Sabbatical leave" I call it, not vacation.

I'll try, in the few minutes we have left, to answer some of the questions for which this conference was originally called, and which came up in the discussion between Helga and Patrick Ho, which are the misconceptions about Western thought in China *and* misconceptions about Confucianism in the West, and in particular, something that I did in fact do a great deal of study on while I was on my "sabbatical leave": Which is that it was precisely the British, who when they semi-colonized China, set about, as they did in all of their colonies, to profile the philosophies and cultures of those nations and pick out those backward tendencies, like the caste system in India, and define that as "the nature" of the colony, in order



Michael Billington

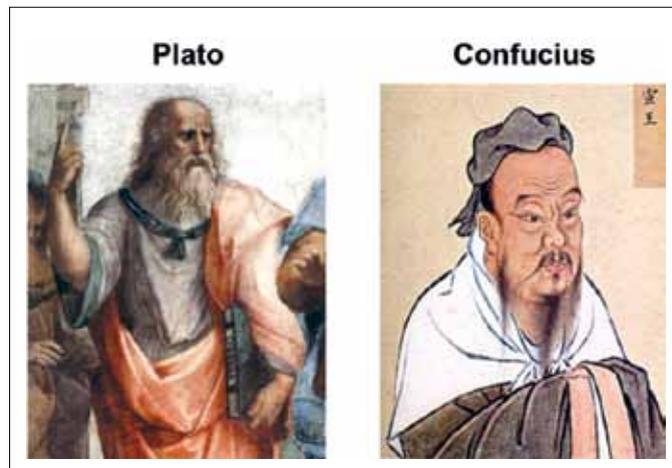
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keep them backward and to maintain colonial power over a divided and backward nation.

This is what happened in spades in China. And it's still very, very, much alive today, as we saw reflected in the brilliant presentation, but one which has this serious flaw, of not recognizing a misconception that persists today. Namely, that the British liberalism/imperial mentality, Darwinism and survival of the fittest, is somehow "Western thought." And I want to go through that as quickly as I can.

I think the main thing to start with is that both in the West and in China, there are not just these wonderful traditions, which Helga so beautifully drew on today, and which Patrick Ho drew on with, I think, some problems—but that these wonderful traditions that gave rise to these powerful civilizations were always battling with backward tendencies. And that wasn't discussed that much. You can understand why, but I think it's

very, very important to see that, because that's the way the Empire works, to subvert—as they are now subverting—the United States. And if you, for instance, wonder how Americans could be so gullible as to believe that Russia and China are aggressive nations, that Russia is aggressive in the Ukraine and Syria; that China is aggressive in the South





China Sea—how could you believe such foolishness? Well, it's because they've profiled America in exactly the same way, which is what we're dealing with now.

Now, in the case of Plato—and Plato and Confucius were roughly contemporaries and they're very, very similar in their recognition that it's the human mind, and the capacity to be creative and to love mankind, which characterizes man. But in the case of Plato, there was his opposite, Aristotle, who believed that man was an animal, that people were born either masters or slaves, that their mind was no better than a calculating machine, not a creative capacity to master laws of the Universe and discover new principles—but rather just a calculating machine in an Aristotelian logic. And it is this Aristotelian ideology which always guides Empire. As opposed to the Platonic, which gave rise to Renaissance thinking.

And the same thing in China: You had Confucianism, and Helga was absolutely right, I think, to raise with Patrick Ho the issue of Daoism. Confucius believed in the *Dao*, in the Way, in the principle of the Universe, but Daoism as it was developed by Laozi [Lao Tze] and Zhuangzi [Chuang Tze] was a policy which rejected creativity, which called for people to reject new technologies, in order to live with nature, to *commune* with nature, rather than to *change* nature, which is the nature of creativity.

The Jesuit Missionaries in China

And that Daoist influence was coupled with an even more evil influence, called Legalism, which was basically saying that man is an animal and can only be controlled through extremely strict government, strict laws,

strict punishment; that you had to restrain the animal instincts of men through force of arms. And this was the ideology which guided the so-called First Empire in China, and was a recurring problem through the Han Dynasty and Tang Dynasty. And there was a Renaissance in China in the Song Dynasty of the 12th Century under Zhu Xi—and Zhu Xi was one of the great minds of China, who, like Cusa and like Leibniz, basically gave a rebirth to the original concepts of Confucianism.

So these battles have gone on and on and on. And I'll say a few more things on that.

The Empire in the West—and I think I have to say this for something that comes later—has been a single Empire, from the Roman Empire through the Venetian Empire, and then into the Anglo-Dutch Empire. It moved its headquarters, but it was always the same Empire, based on the Aristotelian or bestial idea of man.

When the Jesuits first came to China, the Jesuit Matteo Ricci, whom Patrick talked about—when he and his associates first came to China, their immediate response was to see the Buddhists in their saffron robes, and to assume they were the religious leaders in China, and they immediately identified with them and began collaborating with them. And they maintained collaboration with them over time, but they quickly learned that the real religious—the real philosophers of China—were the Confucian scholars, who did not wear religious robes. This was extremely important, because in China at that time, the political leaders were the Confucian scholars. The way you became a political leader, through the merit system that Professor Wang was talking about, was that you passed examinations, which

were not examinations in calculations, but they were examinations in culture, in understanding Confucius and Mencius, for example.

In poetry: You had to *be* a poet, you had to *be* a musician. You had to prove that you were truly a cultured person and therefore, had the basis upon which you could be a moral ruler.

So, they quickly then established relations with the Confucians, as Patrick also indicated—I'll come back to that.

This then led to Leibniz, who was discussed today, and who, in correspondence with the Jesuits, was reading the translations of Confucius and Mencius, and especially of Zhu Xi in the Song Dynasty. With respect to China, Leibniz recognized that the fact that China had bigger cities by far than anything in Europe, a more highly educated population than anyone in Europe, a better-organized society—to him this proved that Chinese philosophy, which he hadn't yet mastered—meant, to him that Chinese philosophy had in fact mastered the fundamental laws of man and nature, since only knowing the truth about the laws of the Universe can lead to a successful culture over the long term. This was the way Leibniz viewed this.

He published *Novissima Sinica, News from China*, based on the writings he had, mostly of Zhu Xi actually, but also of Confucius and Mencius, and was conveying the truth about China to the Europeans at that time. What Leibniz had to say about Confucianism was “it is pure Christianity, insofar as it renews the natural law inscribed in our heart”; i.e., every human being is born with this potential for truth in his heart and in his mind, and this is the Platonic idea of all men being capable of creative development, and of having a moral society.

Kang Xi, who was mentioned, the Emperor at that time, got to know the Jesuits extremely well. He mastered the Christian ideology—he didn't become a Christian; he didn't think he needed to, as Patrick was pointing out. But he believed that these truths about man and



nature cohered with Confucianism, and he invited the Jesuits to go throughout the country, to spread their religion—there was no problem with this whatsoever.

The End of the Mission

I would definitely disagree with Patrick's description of how that fell apart. He said the Catholic Church decided that the Confucian rites contradicted Christian ideas and Christian rites, and therefore they broke off the connection. It didn't work that way: The Empire intervened—Venice intervened. It was the Venetians who went to work on the Vatican to stop the Popes who were collaborating with the Jesuits, and basically to coerce them—

just as Trump was coerced—to go against Christian self-interests, and to declare that since Confucians honored their ancestors, this did not cohere with Christian thought—therefore you could not be both a Christian and a Confucian. But keep in mind, the Confucians were the government leaders. So, to say that Christianity was against Confucianism was to say it was against the state. And that's why Kang Xi had to say, in effect, “I can't believe this, this is absurd, but I have to throw you out.” And he finally did.

And that laid the basis, just a few hundred years later, for the British to come in with their gunboats and their opium. That's how they conquered the country: They blew up its cities, and they forced them to take opium. They fought the war because the Chinese were trying to stop them from bringing opium in. So this was the beginning of the horror of the British role in China.

Now, here's where what I wanted to go through, begins. Immediately, the British picked up a bright, young scholar, named Yen Fu, who was an opium addict, which they considered very important—that he was more imaginative because he was an opium addict; they sent him off to London. And Yen Fu was trained, in depth, by the British—in Darwin, in the survival of the fittest, and especially in Herbert Spencer, who was the



he had; but he said, “Yes, indeed,” and, “You must learn, my stepson, that there are two kinds of people: There’s the strong and there’s the weak, and the strong have to be willing to crush the weak. What are you going to be? Are you going to be strong or are you going to be weak?” And Obama writes about that in his book, which is where his killer instincts came from.

Here’s what Yen Fu said, talking about Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. He writes: “There may be those... who say that, according to [Adam] Smith’s book, human morality is nothing more than a matter of self-interest and the pursuit of profit, and

person who shaped Darwinism into Social Darwinism—that man is in fact just an animal; since it’s not through the creativity of the mind that man progresses, but by the strong defeating the weak: survival of the fittest.

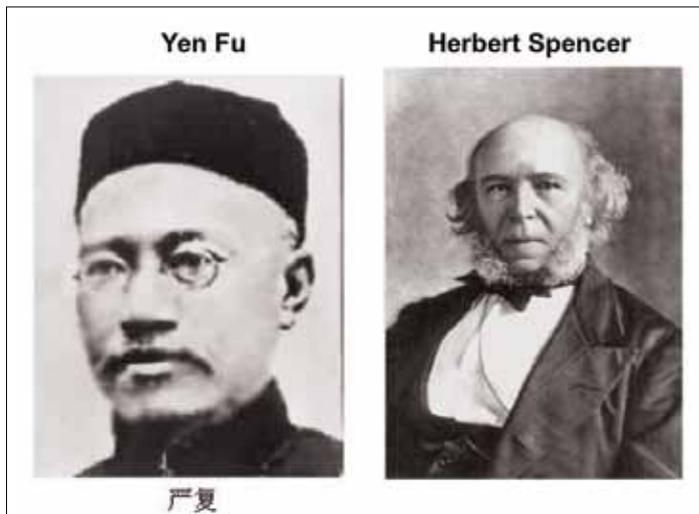
He learned these ideas, took them back to China, and basically wrote the curriculum for all the schools that were under British direction, and taught: The British conquered us because they had wealth and power. Where did they get wealth and power? They got wealth and power by this Darwinian idea of *crushing* the weak. Being willing to crush the weak in order to be strong. We have to learn how to be Darwinian, and be strong and crush the weak. This was the attempt at total brainwashing of the Chinese population.

I would just, in passing, point out that this is exactly the way Barack Obama was brainwashed into being a killer. As he writes in his book, he suspected his stepfather had been part of the slaughter of the PKI, of the Communist Party in Indonesia, under Sukarno. Therefore, he asked him, “have you ever seen a man killed?” and his father said, “Yes, indeed, I have.” He didn’t admit he’d killed people—which

the principle of heaven will be lost...” He’s obviously referring to the American System advocates who would argue that with such thinking, you’d lose the principle of Heaven.

“What they do not understand,” Yen Fu said, “is that science concerns itself with questions of truth and falsehood, and not with whether its findings coincide with benevolence and righteousness.” There’s no morality in science, it’s just observation—no creative thinking, it’s just observation, sense-perception.

Now, just to confirm that that is what he’s saying—here’s what Adam Smith actually says in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: “Nature has directed us to the greater part of these by original and immediate instincts. Hunger, thirst, the passion which unites the two sexes, the love of pleasure, and the dread of pain, prompt us to apply those means for their own sakes, and without any consideration of their tendency to those beneficent ends which the great Director of nature intended to produce by them.”



Who Was Sun Yat-Sen?

Is there any mention of the human mind in there? Pure instinct. Men are animals, no more, no less. And that is the conception which Yen Fu is defending



against anybody with brains, and that is what he taught to the Chinese to get them to believe it.

Now, Patrick already went through the brilliance of Sun Yat-sen and his use of Lincoln's "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Let me add, that he learned this when he was in Hawaii being trained by the Damon family, that came from Philadelphia and was part of the school of Henry Carey, whom Helga had mentioned several times—the people who promoted the Hamiltonian school. And not only did he follow Lincoln, but in his writings, in his book *The Three Principles of the People*, he explicitly talked about Alexander Hamilton, as well as John Quincy Adams and Lincoln. But he also understood the American System so well, that he polemicized against Thomas Jefferson. He said that Hamilton understood the need for industry, for infrastructure, and for the education of all people, whereas Jefferson was an agrarian fanatic, who believed in slavery and wanted to keep the country backward as an agrarian nation.

So he wrote about this, and he taught the Chinese people this. This was Sun Yat-sen bringing the American System to China.

One more thing about Sun Yat-sen—this happened during the so-called May 4th Movement, which Patrick

also mentioned. During the First World War, Sun Yat-sen polemicized against joining the British in the war against the Germans. He said, if we join the British and they win the war—and they probably will—don't think that we would share in the spoils. No. He said: We will be treated the way a farmer treats the silkworm. They will draw out the useful silk and then the worm will be used as fish food. He said, we will be used as fish food—which is exactly what happened. They joined the British—that's when Deng

Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai went to France; some of you know that our presidential candidate in France, Jacques Cheminade, has been talking about that.

But after the war, the Chinese, having joined the British, were torn apart, divided up, and pieces were given to each of the imperial powers.

So during that May 4th Movement which Sun was intervening in, to build into a republican movement, he polemicized against what he saw as the influence of a British irrationalism. He said: "A group intoxicated with a new culture have begun to reject the old morality, saying that the former makes the latter unnecessary. . . . [They say] there are no princes in a de-



Sun Yat-sen's map for the development of rail and canals for China, 1919. A comparison with China's current extensive rail development shows that Sun's program has finally been realized.

Bertrand Russell



John Dewey



mocracy, so loyalty is not needed and can be cast away.”

He identified this ideology with John Stuart Mill, another of the British ideologues, and he said, it would make the 400 million Chinese “like a sheet of loose sand,” basically manipulable and not unified.

In 1919, he wrote *The International Development of China*, and you saw these maps yesterday by Prof. Nie Lei, of China’s rail developments today: There it is. This is what Sun Yat-sen laid out for the rail and water development of China in 1919, as an international project. So in fact, what Xi Jinping and the Chinese are doing today, is literally realizing that movement.

The British recognized the extreme danger of Sun Yat-sen’s American System intervention into China, and had to *crush* it. So they sent one of their top, top agents, Bertrand Russell, whom Lyndon LaRouche has declared the most evil man in the 20th Century. He was sponsored by the Anti-Religious Society. He argued that Christianity was the bane of the West, and that Confucianism was the cause of backwardness in China. He wrote a book called *The Problem of China*, which is entirely a “noble savage” piece, saying that we should leave them happy in the mud, basically as Daoists, happy as farmers with no science, no technology.

This is his quote: “Chinese officials are, as a rule, corrupt and indolent, so that control by foreigners is necessary in creating a modern bureaucracy, and to prepare the way for the creation of an efficient Chinese state.

“Instinctive happiness, or joy of life, is one of the most important goods that we have lost through industrialism. . . . Progress and efficiency, for example, make

no appeal to the Chinese, except to those who have come under western influence. By valuing progress and efficiency, we have secured power and wealth; by ignoring them, the Chinese, until we brought disturbance, secured on the whole a peaceable existence and a life full of enjoyment.”

John Dewey

The noble savage: Keep the people backward and we can continue our control. Russell was a libertine and a homosexual; what he most despised in Confucianism,

was the honoring of the family. He said that honoring the family was holding the country back. He said that in China, the Malthus theory of overpopulation “finds full scope.” There are too many people. One thing Dr. Wang didn’t get to—but it’s in his writings—is that Benjamin Franklin aspired to have America be as populous as China. That’s what he wanted.

And John Dewey—I won’t go through it now—he came to China from the United States, but he was working for JP Morgan, who was running the British takeover of the American banking system. He was the deschooler. He said you should learn by doing; you shouldn’t learn from textbooks. You should all go out and dig in the dirt. I bring this up because Russell and Dewey—the words, “Russell and Dewey,” are very, very well known in China. People know that these were the people who brought “Western” thinking to China during the May 4th Movement.

And really, what happened was that 45 years later, their ideas were implemented in China in the Cultural Revolution. Schools were shut down, people were sent out to work with the farmers, scientists were attacked and killed—it was a nightmare for China, and it was these ideas, these British ideas, which gave birth to it—there’s a lot more to say about that, but they basically gave birth to what became that nightmare.

One last thing is this fellow, Joseph Needham. I’m sure none of you, except the Chinese here, have heard of Joseph Needham. The Chinese know him very well. He was one of the great British lovers of China! He loved China. He wrote seventeen volumes of *Science and Civilization in China*. He’s praised as somebody who “respected” the fact that the Chinese had devel-

oped great scientific ideas. And some of what he documents is true.

But what's his purpose? His purpose was to show that all the great scientific developments in China—Let's look at it this way: He had something called the "Needham question," which was discussed among all China scholars for a long, long time. This was: "Why did the development of China stop, when the Renaissance took place in the West?" What made it stop? Was his answer, the Venetian Empire, the Venetian empiricists who shut down the collaboration? Was it the British Opium Wars?

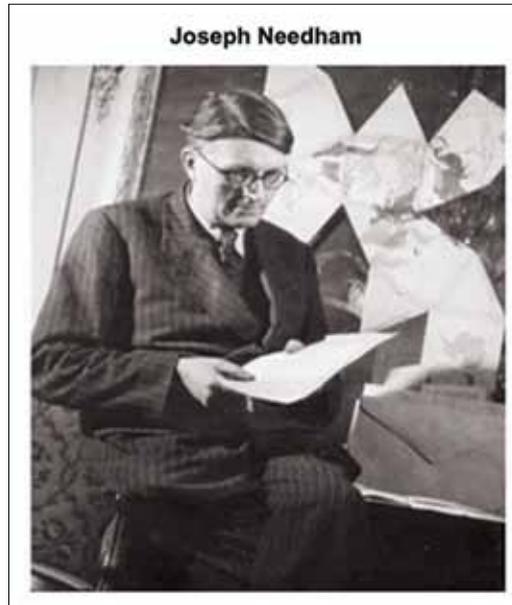
No. It was Confucianism. That's what stopped China's progress. And to explain how they had great science, he said it was mysticism that gave rise to science. Magic gives rise to science, not Confucianism.

Here's Joseph Needham's quote: "Rationalism proved itself less favorable than mysticism to the progress of science. . . . Science and magic are in their earlier stages indistinguishable." I'm not kidding.

"Rational theology was anti-scientific; mystical theology proved to be pro-scientific. . . . Thus, the interest taken in the early Royal Society in what we now can see were magical claims."

Indeed, you probably know about when Newton's case was opened up, after they had initially refused to allow anybody to open his trunk. When they opened it, it turned out that Newton was a raving mystical fanatic, a believer in magic. Which explains why Leibniz was able to basically show that Newton was a fraud as a scientist.

So, Needham also had to explain, somehow, how the great period of scientific development in China came during that Song Dynasty Renaissance, which was the Confucian Renaissance under Zhu



Xi. Well, it was pretty simple for Needham: He just basically said that Zhu Xi called himself a Confucian but he was really a Daoist. And Leibniz—who loved Zhu Xi—was a Daoist, too. I won't go into the details, we don't have time. But it's a fascinating story.

I think I can close with that. We now have this Confucian Renaissance: the Confucian Institutes around the world. I think there's a problem, still, in China. Joseph Needham is still thought of as a great hero by the Chinese.

Oh, by the way, on Joseph Needham: During the Cultural Revolution, he went to China,

and then he wrote and he spoke all over the world saying that this is the greatest revolution in Chinese history. Going back to the stone age! And there's more to say about Needham.

But the traditions of Russell and Dewey, the traditions of Yen Fu, and the traditions of Needham are still very strong in China. This is what Xi Jinping is working against. This is what he had to root out, and still has to root out. These are fundamental issues, which are being fought out there, and luckily, in China, the humanists are winning. We have to link up with that tradition in China, just as we have to link up with our best traditions in the West, in order to realize the kind of Renaissance which we have to bring about. And to do that, the evil of the British system, indeed, must be crushed. We have to. We won't survive if we don't.

So we need to know that the tremendously inspiring presentation that Helga gave this morning, was the basis on which we can move ourselves to the mission that we do have as a human race, but we do have to recognize that we have to crush this British system if we're going to make it work.

Thank you.

