

Fire stimulation

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Introduction

This is a talk not on physics but on humanity and philosophy based upon the author's writing on the subject and his analysis of human societies. He guides the audience to briefly look at four monuments and proposes a way to work towards the goal of cooperation, collaboration and internationalization through the leadership of the Humboldt Foundation.

Egypt

When I visited the pyramids in Egypt, I was awed that a real facet of the more than five-thousand-year old culture still stood intact vividly in front of me. Some of the ancient culture is still preserved. Let me translate part of a poem written by me in Chinese. (The Chinese version of the poem is given in appendix 1.)

We visited far-away Egypt.
The pyramids,
Five thousand years full of myth,
Stand smiling at the repeating stories of human species,
Stare boldly at the human history, flowing into infinity.
Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar,
Still too young, they conceded
In front of the pyramids.

Why were the pyramids built? The Pharaohs wanted to have an eternal after-life.

China

Let's now go to Beijing and visit the Imperial Garden 'Yuan Ming Yuan', constructed only about three hundred years ago, a 3,500,000 square meters garden, praised to be the garden of all gardens by Victor Hugo of France. We find only a ruin with a lot of regret and shame. The reason? Fire! It was the fire that destroyed the garden of all gardens. The fire was set by the

British-French Joint troops in 1860. The purpose? To force China to open up the market for them to sell their lucrative products....Opium! That was during the opium war in Chinese recent history.

Italy

We now go to Rome. We visit the coliseum. It is almost intact. Fire could not destroy it; But weather and time did. Let me share with you the rest of the translation of my poem in Chinese (appendix 1).

But, just at a blink of the eyes,
No more, the thousand-year-old Roman Empire there lies,
Leaving behind the grand Coliseum which inspired,
The strong thick granite walls, half fallen,
The searing screams of the gladiators and the beasts,
Reverberating forever.

Why did the Roman Empire build the Coliseum? They wanted to enjoy the fight (to death) between human (prisoners and slaves) and wild animals.

China

Going now into the middle of China, Xian, the ancient Capital. Here is the tomb of the first emperor of the Qin dynasty who united China by force. In the underground tomb surrounding the main tomb of the first emperor of China, Qin-Shih-Huang, those terracotta, fire-made earthen life-sized soldiers, horses, chariots, etc. were 'preserved' since more than two thousand years ago. It took 40 years and 70,000 forced laborers to build the tomb. However, the terracottas could not stand the destructive force of the revolutionary soldiers led by Xiang-Yu and collapsed. And the great palace of the first emperor, Aw-Fang-Gong, known only in history books, is no more. The revolutionary heroes put a fire and burned down everything. The fire lasted three days and three nights. The first Chinese dynasty was gone after only less than 100 years. Why was the tomb built? The emperor of China built it for an eternal powerful and comfortable after-life.

Lesson from these monuments

What can we learn from all these? Many. First of all, fire, weather and time could turn all monuments into ruins sooner or later. My question is: could we preserve human's current real architectural culture into history one thousand years or even 10 thousand years from now on without the destruction by fire? Or is there anything more important that should be preserved? I say: yes, for the generations to come. We should build new monuments that can stand fire, weather and time forever.

Question: what should this monument be? Should it be a monument similar to the ones mentioned above? I would say no. But what is special among these four monuments that I don't like?

'It is the abuse of the absolute power of one person or a group of people at the time.'

Ideal Monument

An ideal monument should be one that

- Is built by a collective effort;
- Is able to resist the destructive power of fire, weather and time;
- Works towards peace, harmony and prosperity of the collective human endeavor;
- Is invisible in our eyes
- Yet very visible in our minds.

When to build this new monument

When should the monument be built? In fact, the construction of this monument is already taking place. Each and every one of us, being a human being, is building a personal monument without ever noticing it. This personal monument could be large or small. Putting them together, it would become the formidable ideal monument.

Visualization of this monument

How should this ideal monument be built? Individual monument could not be built single-handedly; it is built based upon the achievement of many predecessors. Most of such personal monuments would be buried along with the death of the person. It would be nice if we could put these personal monuments together and create a new one. This new monument would be dynamic and alive. Spreading out each personal monument flourishing in its own way, the consequence is a new garden of all gardens.

This monument will be very powerful. Putting all these personal monuments on top of one another, it would become a pyramid. Grouping them together, a coliseum could be created. Individuals would compete friendly in this coliseum and encourage one another to push towards the common goal of peace, harmony and prosperity.

Guidance by Alexander von Humboldt Foundation

However, we need guidance. To build such a monument, the Humboldt's ideal of cooperation, collaboration and internationalization is a guide. Every endeavor has to start sometime, somewhere. Humboldt Foundation has already started it; Humboldt Foundation could lead this endeavor towards a real world of peace and prosperity.

Reason to build a new one

Why do we need to build this collective monument? It is because we are humans. Let me translate another of my poem in Chinese. (Appendix 2 gives the Chinese version. The first nine lines are from a popular Chinese story book, Ji-Gong-Chuan, preaching the Buddhist philosophy.)

This is life

Since ancient times,
Rare has it been to live a hundred years and fine.
And in this short span,
Worry and anguish often come.

One can't spend all the abundant wealth of the world.
One can't occupy all the positions in the cabinet of the emperor.
The abundant wealth, how long could it last?
An important position, how long could it be occupied?
Soon, they turn your hair white.

Why then do you study and work so hard,
Struggling for the glory and the wealth?
Why then do you dash in all directions,
In the battle field of life,
Worry and anguish being defied?

I am born with the desire to live.
Nobody wants voluntarily to be buried.
Living must satisfy the heart's desire.
Who wants to be poor forever?

And this is why.

Conclusion

By combining our collective effort with the guidance of the Humboldt Foundation as a starting point, we shall eventually see harmony and prosperity in the new garden of all gardens for the generations to come.

Appendix 1

The original poem in Chinese by the author (S. L. Chin) on Egypt and Rome (unpublished)

埃及羅馬遊

遠遊埃及兮,五千多年金字塔。
笑看人間故事來回演，
雄視歷史遠長流
亞歷山大，凱撒大帝，

塔下自認太年青。
才轉眼，千年羅馬帝國已不見。
留下雄偉競技場，
堅厚岩石牆半倒，
當年人獸嘶吼仍盪漾。

陳瑞良 2004.12.05

Appendix 2

The original poem in Chinese written by the author (S. L. Chin). From the book : S. L. Chin, 'This is life' (in Chinese), Global Publishing Company, NJ, USA.

通俗詩

人生百歲古來少，先出少年後出老；
中間光景不多時，又有閑愁與煩惱。
君不見：世上財多用不盡，朝內官多做不了；
君不見：官大財多能幾時，惹得自己白頭早。
君爲何：孜孜不倦爭名氣，處處努力財富好；
君爲何：人生戰戰橫衝刺，不怕閑愁與煩惱。
↓
『天生就有生存志，没人自願埋荒草；
生存必須稱心意，誰願窮困直到老。』

陳瑞良

1989.9.20.

註：頭四行（不算「君不見」），是錄自通俗小說「濟公傳」裏的通俗詩，意思是「四大皆空」。後四行是作者的觀感。最後兩行代表了全書的精神。