

0. Crossing Leaks, Global Links

With the beginning of the year 2011, one would hope that the long series of natural disasters and human negligence generated tragedies, that have plagued several past months, would not reproduce itself in the days to come. As we said in concluding the Editorial of the preceding issue of this quarterly : “By not heeding what is happening, there is no way to heed what has to come: a better world.” Some positive signs or some renewed awareness for greater human cooperation in this world may open new perspectives and hopes for the future.

Here are a few instances. Remembering the global deception that had followed the fiasco of the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference (December 7–18 2009), most world media have celebrated the initial positive conclusions of the following 16th session of the Conference held in Cancun, Mexico. from November 29 to December 10 2010. An agreement, not a binding treaty, was reached between wealthy countries that would reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and developing countries that would plan to do the same, thanks to a "Green Climate" fund that would assist poorer countries in financing such an adaptation. — On the economic front, a few member countries of the European Union, due to the debts incurred as a consequence of the lingering financial crisis, are risking to get bankrupt and to expose the so-called Euro zone to excessive currency pressure. In a recent emergency meeting held in Brussels on December 17 2010, the 27 leaders of the European Union have agreed to build a “Permanent Euro Zone Rescue Fund” open to the 16 member states of the zone, in case of need for financial help, through a simple mechanism but under strict conditions. — Practically at the same time, in a kind of “première” after so many years of no contacts, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited India,. Discussions were held in order to rebuild trust between the world most populous two nations. Contracts were signed to the benefit of both parties that have more to gain from exchange than from confrontation. Even sensitive questions were examined like India’s eventual membership in the United Nations Security Council or boundaries disputes or irrigation issues related to the damming of the Yarlung Zangbo River in Tibet, which enters India as the Brahmaputra.

But excessive optimism would be out of place: outstanding questions remain unsolved. The first and most burning one is the tension in the Korean peninsula. Media have clearly mentioned how prudently neighbouring and concerned countries have made some diplomatic or other moves in order to prevent the eventual conflict to flare up but without being directly involved as it had been the case in the 1950s. — The seas are not either deprived of occasional frictions – the case of the Senkaku or Diaoyutai Islands – or lingering disagreement concerning the appartenance of the Paracels and Spratly Islands. — On the African continent, in recent years until now, not a few in principle “democratic” presidential elections turned out to be a test of honesty and fair play, as it has recently been the case in Ivory Coast!

Positive or negative, the instances will, for the best or for the worst, continue to be part of our life horizon in the coming months. But who would have thought, a few weeks ago, that beyond that horizon, an other one, formerly ignored by ordinary citizens, would have been widely open through plenty of electronically obtained diplomatic “leaks”! A great part of them, we are told, can be considered as “diplomatic gossips”, a fact that is already quite strange by itself. Yet the most important ones have been duly classified by dates or topics or regions, etc., so much so that important world media have duly and without excessive hesitation provided them to the public at large. Responsibility for the “leaks” should basically be attributed first to the poor management of the source, that had unfortunately become a trap for the apprehended “leaker” or “leakers”. But they made a point and debates continue: if diplomacy needs secrecy, how diplomats can be accountable to their co-citizens for what they promote? Beyond crossing leaks of these secrecies, could we not have more global public links?

With the hope that 2011 lead us closer to such a goal!

1.

It is generally accepted that Asia as a whole, but more particularly East Asia, will become more influential in the world at large than it used to have been in the last century. Economists have already observed such a shift that had preceded the current financial crisis and many multi-nationals and large corporations of the industrial world have benefited from it by delocalizing their factories in the region. As if it were by getting rid of the legacy of the turbulent last century — the second World War defeat and the Cultural Revolution —, Japan first and then China have successively become the main actors occupying the centre stage. But their entries under the limelight, their mutual relations and their performances, if they are compared, show contrastive differences. Doctor Elżbieta Potocka, a political scientist from Poland and expert on Asia-Pacific studies, in the unique presentation of this section, analyses in detail how both powers have followed their own paths to reach their present position of influence. How will they compete or contribute to the stability of the region in the following years remains a question.

2.

On November 1st 2010, China has dispatched about six million census workers around the country in order to visit the 400 or so million of households: the aim of this new census, regularly done every ten years, is not only to count the people by categories, but to count them where they live and work and not as before where they are legally registered. The change of method and of objective is significant of the debate that has been lingering on for many years already and concerns the “household registration” or *hukou* system. It had been initiated in 1958 by the Chinese government to avoid internal migrations. In his contribution, Professor Kam Wing Chan, of the University of Washington, Seattle, USA, summarizes the development of the system, its intended objectives and its social and economic consequences. The divide of the population into two categories of citizens holding for life either a “urban *hukou*” with its advantages or a “rural *hukou*” deprived of these advantages has recently shown its weaknesses: the peaceful rise of China has relied heavily on internal migrations of “migrant workers” living by millions in the urban areas of factories without “urban *hukou*”. The data of the census should help devise the reform of the system.

3.

The articles in the Arts and Letters section deal with how cultural heritage can be neglected and destroyed or rescued for posterity. In the first article Dr. Michael Saso, an American expert on Buddhist and Taoist religions (especially the latter), introduces readers to the little-known Tohendo Collection, situated in Sanjo Street, in the cultural heart of Kyoto, Japan. Here priceless works of East Asian art have been rescued from the ravages of war and are carefully exhibited. Michael Saso brings to the attention of readers seven of these unique pieces, among which there is a superb 25 kilo green jade that dates back to the 良渚 *Liangzhu* period, which flourished in China during the late Neolithic. It is a piece that will no doubt delight readers, especially modern sculptors and designers. — The care given to the art pieces in the Tohendo Collection are a good indication of the way heritage may be preserved for future generations. The same, unfortunately, has not always been true of Macao. In the following article architect Jorge Graça discusses religious art, as well as military pieces or architecture that was once very much a part of Christian Macao. His text is inspired by Richard Garrett’s remarkable book on the Defenses of Macao, recently published. Jorge Graça is himself the author of a much-admired pioneering book on the city’s forts. Apart from providing new facts and interpretations, he also directs a round of salvos at those in charge of the city’s heritage that, in the period prior to Macau’s handover to China in 1999, were less than conscientious in their duties. Certain of his comments may seem unfair, but on the whole his arguments still reverberate in the memory of many. Naturally, the views of the author do not necessarily reflect those of the editors of 《神州交流—Chinese Cross Currents》.

4.

In 2010, many institutions in China and around the world have commemorated the four-hundredth anniversary of Matteo Ricci's demise in Beijing. This section is not the place to summarise past celebrations, but it is fortunate to present two contributions indirectly related over the elapsed time since Matteo Ricci's sojourn in Macau for only a few months (August 7 1582 till September 1583). Among the many aspects of his personality, Ricci is known for his excellent memory and for the mnemo-technical devices he had learned and, most probably, applied when he started learning, in particular written Chinese, in Macau. Thanks to his "memory palace", to quote Ricci himself and Jonathan Spence, he had been able to master the Mandarin Chinese of his time more easily than his elder Michele Ruggieri. The first contribution of this section, by Zhang Zhiyan, of the University of Exeter, UK, explains why "Matteo Ricci's Art of Memory" did not appeal to his Chinese contemporaries despite the fact that they had been amazed by his performances (!). The second contribution deals also with languages as presently practiced in Macau. In it, written by David C. S. Li of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, the author dresses a state of the bi-lingualism as it is lived now in the city of Macau. There are probably similarities with the state of the matter in Ricci's time. Yet, not every one has built, as he did, any "memory palace" to help!

5.

The meeting of various cultures in a world that is increasingly and intensely more and more interconnected is facing unavoidable challenges, globally or individually speaking. Not a few misunderstandings may generate frictions or even conflicts with, more often than not, "collateral damages" that escape control. In such a context, China and Europe have shared for many centuries a fruitful but difficult experience of mutual appreciation and discovery. In their cultures, they both cherish human values which, in the West, are rooted in the dignity of the human "person". Such a concept (probably due to its historical and religious origin) remains quite difficult to translate into Chinese. Yet its influence in Western culture has radiated in the many aspects of human life, be they familial, political, juridical or religious. Along that line of cultural and humanistic thought, this section offers two valuable contributions. In the first, Edmund Ryden, from Fu Jen Catholic University, New Taipei City, examines the challenges encountered in translating the concept of "person" into Chinese while at the same time respecting Chinese traditional ways of thinking. In the second, James M. Byrne, from St Mary's University College (University of Surrey), focuses his reflection on how and why the concept of "religion" has become problematic in the post-modern world that is searching for meaning. As he writes: "Post-modern dissipation of meaning may open possibilities for a renewed understanding of religion [...]" "in the conviction that 'religion' is inherent in the human character".

6.

There is no doubt that chroniclers, economists, historians will continue, for years to come, to observe, analyse, describe and discuss what present world media already call the "peaceful rise" of China. Actually the catch-word was first coined by the Chinese leaders in order to assuage any eventual fear in China's neighbourhood or even in the world at large. The dynamics of the so-called "Beijing consensus", so different from the "Washington consensus" focused on sustainable capitalism and prevalent after the second World War, has already transformed China into the second most powerful economy in the world. Yet it remains fragile as the contributors of this section try to show. Dominique Tyl, from the Macau Ricci Institute, first analyses two recent publications related to such a topic. As the title of his article indicates, his attention is less focussing on economic matters than on their social dimensions. That is why, if there is a "Beijing consensus" at the root of China's "peaceful rise", the "social consensus" remains weak in the quest for "social harmony". The second contribution by Shen Dingli, from Fudan University, Shanghai, takes Shenzhen as an instance of such a fragility: "Shenzhen was the pioneer of China's success, yet it has not, so far, provided a solution to the problem of sustainable and balanced development," as he writes at the very beginning of his article. There is a need to go beyond to achieve its purpose.