

0. Main – A gloomy Blue Planet

Only astronauts can enjoy the beautiful landscape offered by the Earth when it is viewed from outer space as the Blue Planet. The recent exploit of a private company in successfully docking with the international space station is therefore good news for any one aspiring to reserve a seat on one next space flight! But one may rather suggest that the first guest astronauts to be served, as they may dispose of the necessary financial means, should be the heads of states directly or indirectly involved in the conflicts raging on Earth as if out of control for any foreseen solution. Such an experience would perhaps trigger in their hearts and minds what images of human suffering and destruction so frequently present on television screens are not able to produce effectively: a creative awakening to wider horizons where these struggles will lose their goals.

Seen from outer space, the Blue Planet is just a tiny gem, wandering and carrying and hiding under its beauty the ceaselessly troubled history of mankind. Is it not that the international community is lacking of creative imagination and will to solve its problems? A comparison here could stir up reflection.

Take for instance the progresses made in astrophysics during the last century.¹ In 1929, astronomer Edwin Hubble had observed that far away galaxies were distancing from each other and from the Earth in the expanding space. But astronomers all agreed that, the universe being static, it would finally stop expanding and reverse into one “big crush”. Yet in the 1990s, new measures were made on the supposed slowed expansion of the universe and they manifested an acceleration. This result was later attributed to the force of repulsive gravity, better known now as dark energy. Calculations were made to precisely measure the amount of dark energy necessary to account for the acceleration: it was extremely small. How then to explain such a fact? Here comes the latest development in the theory: in the universe, beyond molecules, atoms, sub-atomic particles, observation discovered still smaller tiny vibrating filament of energy called strings. To study them astrophysicists had to suppose that they vibrate in some variable multi-dimensional spatial forms, and that the various amount of such crumpled dark energy can be the origin of billions of very diverse universes, etc.

What is outstanding in this research continually renewed by new observations, hypotheses, calculations and questions, is the flexibility, one would say the convertibility of ways of thinking in order to be faithful to the observed reality.

Could not problems affecting humankind on the present gloomy Blue Planet benefit from solutions conceived by similar inventive and convertible ways of thinking? One of the “convertibility manoeuvre” at work in the progresses done by certain astrophysicists was to turn the issue at stake upside down, in other words to abandon wrong questions (for instance: how much dark energy is necessary in each of the billions of universes to expand?) and to think the problem in new terms (why is it that humankind has taken place in this universe and the evolution of life as we know them with their fine-tuned characteristics?). Without these characteristics universes would immediately either explode for excess of dark energy or implode for lack of it so that galaxies, stars, planets and human life could not be formed in them.

Astrophysics is one of the natural or “exact” sciences based on observation and mathematics. With brilliant convertible thinking, it deals with both universes and sub-atomic particles and their strings of energy. Could not human sciences have the same innovative imagination in conceiving solutions for economical, financial, political, juridical, social, environmental, and other collective problems that plague human societies on the Blue Planet? The task is awesome. Some of these issues are discussed in the following pages. Meanwhile, as the French poet Jacques Prévert had suggested: “And if only we tried to be happy, at least just to give a good example?” Indeed, the gloomy Blue Planet needs it.

Yves Camus

¹ The following paragraphs are based on “The multiverse in three parts: Brian Greene at TED2012”, accessed at <http://blog.ted.com/2012/02/28/the-multiverse-in-three-parts-brian-greene-at-ted2012/>

1. World

Posted on 25 May 2012, on a leading world media, the irony of a blogger is worth quoting: “A pretty Correction: So Greece is on the verge of implosion, and the euro area also. The United States is soft, and China too. Brazil is not out of danger, and South Africa also. Japan is uneasily, and Italy too. Etc. Everyone began to mope after a year with a bang in 2011 when everyone thought the crisis was over. Ignored sanitation banking and real estate on track in America! Zapped the resilience of the economy of the Middle Kingdom! Forget the low global inflation! But of course the blues. In terms of raw materials, it triggered the so-called “correction”, a word which can mean “correction” after an error or an excess, but also a monumental “punishment”. As well be optimistic, let it through and opt for the former interpretation, as so suggests the CRB [Commodities Research Bureau] index that compiles prices of energy, agricultural commodities, precious metals and industrial metals. [...]. Indeed, on 25 May 2012, the CRB index is found almost at the peak reached June 27, 2008, just before the market’s collapse, a harbinger of the collapse of Lehmann Brothers and the unleashing of the crisis. Nothing to shout to the Apocalypse. Just a correction.” A pretty correction indeed that is hiding a real thrashing inflicted by many corporations’ own deeds! In this regard, the present section is fortunate to host two contrasting articles: Étienne Perrot, Jesuit and French economist at the Catholic Institute of Paris, analyses in the first “The Excesses of Capitalism” which have contributed to generate the present global crisis. Yet the dark consequences of that hubris should not put in oblivion the efforts made during the latest twenty years towards sustainable development the world over, as the UNO 2011 Human Development Report aptly summarises. Its Overview makes the second contribution entitled: “Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All”.

The Editor

2. Society

One of the driving forces of contemporary societies around the world is no doubt what ordinary parlance would call (without any ideological undertone) “the middle classes” or “middle classe”. Yet even sociologists are at pain in defining what middle class is without shamelessly presenting a tautology, for instance: “The middle class is a class of people in the middle of a societal hierarchy. In Weberian socio-economic terms, the middle class is the broad group of people in contemporary society who fall socio-economically between the working class and upper class. The common measures of what constitutes middle class vary significantly between cultures.” It is no doubt because of this indetermination of its social nature that the middle class is growing in importance around the world, not only in numbers but more significantly through its role in the economic development of the countries and in their rapid urbanization. The phenomenon is all the more important in China where urbanite citizens constitute already half of the entire population and will reach two thirds of the total in the coming decade or so. In the following article, 杨静 Yang Jing, visiting research fellow in East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, examines the major socio-political trends of present day China middle class.

The Editor

3. Arts & Letters

The writer of the first article of this section, Chen Yaowang, has contributed to past issues of *Chinese Cross Currents*. His present article is mainly an introduction to one of the main pioneers of the modern Western-Eastern fusion in Chinese art, the sculptor 張充仁 Zhang Chongren. He also traces the history of other pioneering Chinese artists who deliberately studied and absorbed modern Western styles at the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century—initially denounced as culture traitors by the art establishment in China. They include the painter 吴作人 Wu Zuoren, and Zhou Xiang, who in the first decade of the 20th century established several Western-style art schools in Shanghai, from which leading painters such as Liu Haisu, Lin Fengmian and others emerged. The article, therefore, focuses mainly on the modern school of Shanghai artists. This school has its roots in Tushanwan Orphanage, founded by the French Jesuits in 1864. It was here that the Spanish Jesuit Juan Ferrer first ran a school of arts. In fact, some even call it the cradle of Chinese Western-style painting. Fittingly, the vanished orphanage reopened two years ago as Tushanwan Museum (see Chen Yaowang, “Ma Xiangbo at Tushanwan”, in CCC 8.4, p. 80). Zhang Chongren, who had an extraordinarily touching and colourful life, was himself an offshoot of the

Orphanage, where he grew up after becoming an orphan at the age of four before becoming a famous artist in France, Belgium and later in China.

The second article, by the Italian musician Aurelio Porfiri currently active in Macau, discusses music education in tertiary institutions in the city. Music education was mainly in the hands of the Jesuits in Macao until the order was expelled from the city in the 1760s, and did not make a come-back as higher education until 1997, when a music degree was awarded by the Macau Polytechnic. With his own involvement in the development of choral music at the University of Saint Joseph, Professor Porfiri is the best musician to provide readers with an excellent overview of the many vicissitudes of music education in Macao, where fortunately it is now flourishing.

César Guillen Nuñez

4. History and Culture

On arrival in China Jesuit missionaries were required to kowtow, a posture of submission demanded of subordinates and barbarians in the presence of Chinese officials. From time immemorial the Chinese Emperor was believed by his subjects to be the Son of Heaven, or 天子 *tian zi*, who ruled over all humans from his Middle Kingdom, a realm situated in the centre of the earth. As a Catholic missionary Ricci was thus faced with the formidable challenge of arguing through his theological teachings that Jesus Christ was the only Son of God, to scientifically show China's real position on the map of the world and to convince the Chinese that the missionaries were not barbarians. His famous world chart shrewdly conflated these last two arguments. In her article Ann Waltner discusses a splendid 1602 version of Matteo Ricci's map, where his use of cartography as a tool for proving his arguments is quite apparent.

In the following article Gianni Criveller tries to dispel the popular notion that in order to humour his Chinese audience, Matteo Ricci had obsequiously placed China at the centre of the world. This idea persists up to the present, but the author finely contends that in creating his famous map Ricci had more spiritual motives in mind.

César Guillén Nuñez

5. Thought and Humanism

A very long time before the first circumnavigation by Magellan in 1516-1521, already in the second century before CE (common or Christian era) Hellenistic astronomers and Greek philosophers had clearly established the sphericity of the Earth. Yet, although on the surface of a sphere, there cannot be any centre, Matteo Ricci in China might have realised that civilisations, in the East as in the West, had shared the same illusory self-esteem that placed themselves at the centre of the world. Information technologies (like the online software *Google Earth* or the Chinese counterpart 天地图 *Mapworld*) have enhanced public curiosity about global geography. But despite cartographic progresses in the representation of the world and as scientific tool for trade – or conquests –, the elusive pretention of being at the “centre” still remains less as an illusory quest than as an open enigma: with global positioning systems (American GPS or European Galileo, China's BeiDou Navigation System. [北斗导航系统] and others), now available even on smart phones and private cars, people can travel with their own location markers given by satellites, which are geo-positioned on their orbits. But no one centre anywhere, neither on the Earth (which Galileo Galilei had proved not to be in any central position), neither beyond the Sun, or among the galaxies, or in the Universe. In the context of such an expanded Copernican revolution, where different civilisations of the world strive to cohabit peacefully, Ricci's intercultural embryonic initiative continues to bear fruit. To zero in on the enigma, this section presents in this regard two important contributions. In China as elsewhere, at the university level the development of techno-scientific knowledge is so great and quick that an urgent need is felt to rediscover and transmit what is the “inner centre” of one's own inherited culture. The first article presents a selection of opinions expressed by various scholars at a 2008 Conference organised by the Yunnan University, on “Classical Studies in China”. In the second, as it was at the time of Ricci as in earlier civilisations, the dialogue between ‘western scientific learning’ and ‘celestial theological understanding’ is resumed again in a modern introduction given by Dr Michael Fuller, scientist and theologian from The Theological Institute of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

The Editor

6. Debates and Features

The so called Chinese Diaspora is the fruit of the world's largest continuing migration that has touched all the five continents. Through different ages, it has been a long and variegated series of emigrations from one single nation ever. Those Chinese emigrants were not primarily tycoons in Hong Kong or the United States of America, they had been first of all coolies in Peru and South Africa, joined underworld gangsters in San Francisco and other places. New emigrants are now poor labourers travelling on low cost planes and freighters, or if they have received some higher education, they work on banks or stock markets where they hope to make money and scale up the social ladder of their countries of adoption. It is with this multifaceted background in mind that the feature presented in this section introduces to the reader a small Chinese community of emigrants who have settled, through the probably many twists of their family histories, on the main island of the Chiloe Archipelago.. Written by Pablo A. Pérez, a free-lance writer from Argentina, the “article deals with the presence of two Chinese people in the southern island of Chiloé (Chile), where they are recorded in the late nineteenth century according to parish documents of the place. Thus these records or “Roster and Genealogy of Emigrants from China (1800-1900)” establish the fact that there has been a Chinese presence in the island for over a hundred years. Chiloe is a secluded island in the South Pacific Ocean, ancient possession of the Spanish crown and now belonging to Chile.”

The Editor