

The Cultural Side of BRI – *Belt and Road Initiative*

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*Ladies and gentlemen*

First of all I would like to thank the organizers of this event for having invited me to participate as a Keynote Speaker

The Belt and Road Initiative launched ten years ago by the Chinese Government has its roots in the so called *Old Silkroad* launched by Emperor WuDi in the II century.

Curiously, through this first *Old Silkroad*, through land and later by sea, China initiated the first Globalization through a network of international trade from East to West until Europe. Portugal initiated another Globalization by sea, from West to East, and we met halfway, in India.

Both these Chinese approaches to Globalization, the old one and the one we are commemorating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, through a peaceful relationship among nations and the creation of a global community of different cultures have a deep and longtime cultural root.

Therefore, the Philosophy leading to the *Belt and Road Initiative* is an old pillar of Chinese Culture, whose principles were already defined by Lao Zi and Confucious nearly two and a half thousand years ago.

Two main philosophical currents of thought have formatted the ancient Chinese Culture. On one side a mystical and metaphysical current and on the other side a more pragmatic and social current. The first was represented by Lao Zi, the second by Confucious. Both these approaches never entered into conflict with each other, they represent the two sides of human mind.

Concerning Pacifism and Tolerance, Lao Zì does not differ from Confucius. There are 4 main opinions concerning the problem of the historical figure of Lao Zì. According to Professor Ren Jiyu, Professor at the Beijing University, Lao Zì was born before Confucius and lived between the XVI and XV century B.C.

According to his book *“Dao de Jing”* it seems clear that he was also a Pacifist advocating Tolerance. In Chap. 67 of his book he says: *“...with Tolerance, one can be brave, with economy, one can be generous. With his daring to go ahead of all people under Heaven, one can be a leader...”*.

There was a Parallel between his ideas and those of Confucius. *“He who assists the ruler with Dao does not dominate by force....great wars are always followed by famines....(Dao de Jing chap. 30). “Weapons are instruments of evil, they are despised by everyone, therefore those who possess Dao stay away from them. ( Dao de Jing chap. 31).*

And finally I would like to quote his words from the same book, chap. 46, *“ When state politics are in the right track, war horses are used in farming...”*

So, it was not a coincidence that when Deng Xiao Ping abandoned his political career he decided to buttress his successor by leaving some sentences to the officials of the Communist Party based on some of Lao Zì maxims.

They were called the *“24-character instructions”* and the *“12-character explanation”*.

In other words, the ancient Chinese culture of Pacifism and Tolerance is present in modern Political Thinking of China.

Now, coming to the Confucian cultural tradition, I would like to quote what Professor Patricia Buckley Ebrey, from Cambridge,

said about Confucious: “*Confucious and his followers were activists.*”

So, according to Confucianism, the one who sees the project of *Belt and Road Initiative* as a simple way to make money, instead of a program leading to a common benefit through an intercultural and peaceful dialogue, can be defined in Confucian terms as a “*petty man*” – “*xiao ren*”, and I quote Confucious “*The gentleman “jiun zi” sees righteousness; the petty man sees profit*”(Analects 4.16).

Bearing in mind that the main objective of Diplomacy is equal to one that Confucious taught to his disciples: To avoid conflicts among people and among States...in other words, as he said: *all men “under heaven” belong to the same family*, I consider the main objective of *Belt and Road Initiative* to be basically the same, that is: to build a world of a shared peaceful future.

I would like to stress once more, the Confucious idea of a universal brotherhood of mankind in these words “*A Junzi (Noble Man) only has to act earnestly, do nothing wrong, and be respectful and polite, and all men under heaven are his brothers*” (Analects 12.4).

If we substitute the word “Junzi” and “men” by the word “Nations” we have not only the recipe to achieve peace among nations, but we also recognize in these words the spirit of the program of the *Belt and Road Initiative*.

I therefore consider that BRI may contribute in a substantial form to keep Peace and Dialogue in the world, and nothing is more important in our days.

Being an European and a Portuguese citizen and looking at the world we are living in – which is characterized by tensions between nations, wars in Europe and in the Middle East – I feel happy and confident that among almost 150 countries, 19 European

countries signed a MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) with BRI, 11 of them being members of the European Union.

On the other hand, with exception of Brazil, all *Portuguese Speaking Countries* signed a MoU with BRI.

Timor Leste signed an MoU in 2017, Angola, Cap Verde and Mozambique, in 2018 as Portugal, S. Tomé e Príncipe and Guiné-Bissau, in 2021.

Recently, last September, in Hangzhou, during the 19<sup>th</sup> Asian Games, Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, Xanana Gusmão, announced in a jointly statement the elevation of bilateral relations with China to the level of a *Comprehensive Strategic Partnership*.

Brazil, the largest *Portuguese Speaking Country* in Latin America, according to declarations of President Lula da Silva, in April 2023, is considering joining soon the *Belt and Road Initiative*.

Nevertheless, Dilma Rouseff, the ex-Prime Minister of Brazil, assumed her post in March as president of the *Multilateral Development Bank*, which was established in 2015 by BRICS

I would like to quote here, as a sign of hope for the future, the words of António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations, during his meeting with President Xi Jinping, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October, during the Belt and Road Forum, “ *...developing countries are currently in a vulnerable and unfair position in terms of infrastructure, investment and financing...the BRI provides a crucial and effective way to help developing countries achieve sustainable development and it also sets a model to South-South cooperation...United Nations speaks highly of China’s firm commitment to upholding multilateralism, supports the three major global initiatives proposed by Xi and is firmly committed to deepening cooperation with China*”.

Summarizing and concluding, I would like to say that we are commemorating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Belt and Road Initiative* that is in line with the ancient Chinese Culture, that has always in history favoured a soft-power approach to a hard-power approach and in the international panorama of present days, it is the best path to foster a peaceful dialogue among nations and civilizations and increase prosperity for mankind in a framework of international cooperation.