

IIE Presentation: Harvard Business School: Triglav Circle
Date: 03. May 2008

The morning that Dr. Joseph Doherty (JD), Alexander Bach, both IIE Germany Members, along with two IIE Consultants – for Finance and Marketing (Tom Walsh) and System Dynamics (Steve Gorman) – arrived at Harvard Business School, we were met at the entrance by Prof. Tu Weiming.

Inviting us for breakfast, Weiming explained to JD's three colleagues how he and JD had met in the Fall of 1973 at the four-week Intercultural Meeting held in Heidelberg and Zurich by the Institute of Intercultural Research (IIR).

Weiming had come to the 1973 meeting with his own Chinese Professor, one of the leading Chinese Philosophers at the time, Prof. Tang Chun-I, who had earlier founded the Chinese Cultural University in Hong Kong.

Weiming emphasized how the scholars from diverse cultural areas had been attracted by the German philosophers and their language, which all the visiting scholars found to play a mediating role in supporting the understanding and cooperation that arose among the scholars from different fields and diverse cultures attending the Intercultural meetings.

Weiming often invited his colleagues at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in China to Triglav Meetings at the Harvard Yenching Institute, looking forward to the day when he and his Chinese colleagues working in Beijing could work together with JD and German scholars and practitioners in resurrecting the IIR Intercultural Research Program in Heidelberg. It was in this context, that Prof. Tu Weiming also invited colleagues from Sun Yatsen and Nanjing Universities as well as Dr. Guoxiang Peng, Secretary General of the Chinese Society for Confucian Studies to the IIE Presentation at Harvard.

Furthermore, over the years, Weiming always kept in contact with JD, to see if and when JD would succeed in finding sufficient funding to reopen the Heidelberg intercultural research program.

At the discussion period following the IIE Presentation, Prof. Tu mentioned that the Western notion of Progress (Compte and Rostow) are not validated by history. Perhaps the notion may be replaced or the notion of Progress must be abandoned altogether.

Alex mentions in his protocol notes that the notion of social progress, as distinguished from technological progress, remains important. Otherwise, there would be no hope, but may be this too will only become valid in the context of intercultural cooperation.

As an example, take progress in the political sector. Democracy, recognized as popular participation in political decision-making, may be expressed in different forms. Hence, democracy is seen as not just a question of taking over foreign institutions.

Intercultural dialogue provides a context for pointing out these different forms.

Intercultural research, as proposed by IIE, will show empirically that dictatorship is not an essential feature of any culture, while there may be times in history, in which all societies may sink into dictatorships or oligarchies, even Western society.

Example: classical philosophy describes dictatorships as a temporal, not a cultural, phenomenon.

According to James Liu, material progress today implies destruction of nature, e.g. human obesity.

More important, he argues, is immaterial progress.

Alex brings up the question of progress in the media. Technologically, the media is expanding. But, is the content media brings relevant?

Richard Harley, a journalist present, airs the same concerns.

Alex emphasizes IIE's understanding of progress: as increasing awareness of human creative potential, an inexhaustible resource, as expressed in different societies, across all sectors. Appreciation of differences. If this immaterial progress is achieved, material progress may follow by mutual learning and adaptation.

All of us at IIE thank Prof. Frank Aguilar for hosting the IIE Presentation at the Triglav Meeting held at Harvard Business School on 03. May 2008, whereby so many of our colleagues from different fields and different cultures came together to reflect on the importance of intercultural understanding.

Some other points that were discerned:

When peoples present themselves, how is bias avoided? Alex underlines that a people has to reach a consensus by itself; outsiders may ask questions, but external censorship or amendments are not in line with IIE principles.

Better still: everybody may read IIE Database, in particular, how a people, because its in their language, have a statutory right to voice their concerns.

The question arose: what about CIA biasing cultural information: Answer: if good information is for free, they need not torture.

A further example: wife-beating as "integral" part of (e.g. chinese or islamic) culture? Answer: Not sure whether chinese or moslems would agree. Rather a problem that western societies share too (e.g. U.S.) what are the solutions that chinese society have come up with? Are they deemed sufficient? Why? What can we learn?

Food crises (Dirck Stryker): Alex offers another perspective: instead of population control, create/maintain incentives for rural population not to desert their villages and migrate to the city, e.g. by ensuring that villagers may continue to evolve their own institutional framework and adapt it to globalization.

Further points noted by Steve Gorman, IIE system dynamics consultant: one visitor at the IIE presentation, Sarah Alier, from Sudan, insisted that the intercultural approach JD presented in the morning session needs to be enacted somewhere in the third world – and sometimes in the first world as we shall see - especially in the case of women who come from a culture where they are regarded as property. In such a case, when a couple comes, for example, to the States, women become enlightened, but their husbands do not. Local U.S. authorities,

however, do not have the intercultural understanding to deal with the problem. Nelson Kiang, Prof. at MIT, experienced similar problems with student couples from different cultures.

Another visitor, Dorothy Coutin, recounted a related type of intercultural experience: at the new Asian Women's University in Bangladesh, where new students were being selected on the basis of their cultural contexts, not wealth nor any other elite factors.

Both Sarah and Dorothy (and her husband) were guests of Barbara Baudot at Saint Anselm's College. JD thanks Barbara, Coordinator of the Triglav Circle and her husband, Jacques Baudot, former Coordinator of the 1995 UN Global Social Summit in Copenhagen and beyond for inviting them to the IIE Presentation.

A third visitor invited by Barbara, Richard Harley, a marketing strategist also offered to advise IIE on how to move, i.e. execute IIE Strategy in local areas, including establishing contacts to prospective underwriting sources.

JD has always found that local colleagues, with their ear to the ground in their local culture's institutional framework, are the first ones to hear of what local group in their neighborhood have been meeting with their fellow villagers to discuss what different socio-demographic groups, on their own initiatives, with no contacts to financial channels, have come up with plans for a practical project to meet the needs of their specific group. As Tip O'Neal, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives from Massachusetts, often reiterated, "politics is always local".

Finally, IIE's consultant for finance and marketing, Tom Walsh, an expert on Powerpoint presentations, continues to find ways to link the two basic components of the IIE Intercultural approach:

first, the cultural symbol, sensitive to each culture grounded in its local institutions-based social perception framework that all members of a society share with one another since childhood as they as they walk through their local institutions in handling their daily concerns; and

second, the socio-cultural professional work, sector-for-sector, as doctors, lawyers, teachers, composers, artists create meaning in a living form. They do it by serving the people, one-by-one, profession-by-profession, providing them with meaning, orientation in life embodied in the professionals' practices.

The first, the cultural symbol, is concrete, empirical; it is not a representation, a concept, an idea, something purely rational, abstract. Rather, at historical moments in a life of a culture, a presence, in which the cultural identity of each individual in society is embodied in the present moment. The institutions-based inter-sectoral framework unique to each society in its own geography and history is the thriving cultural identity active in each member's social participation and in each work produced by a society's professionals.

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08. August 2008