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The Triglav Circle

NOTE ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE TRIGLAV CIRCLE DURING THE PERIOD JANUARY 2005-SEPTEMBER 2006

I. Traditional two-day gatherings

*Harvard-Yenching Institute: 25-26 February 2005; and
16-17 December 2005; Orfalea Center, U.C., Santa Barbara:
18-19 March 2006; Ougny, Burgundy, France: 10-11 June 2006*

II. Joint Harvard-Yenching Institute, Friedrich Ebert Foundation Seminar: 15-17 September 2005

III. International Symposium: Beijing, China: 23-24 June 2006

IV. Forum for Social Development, Bamako, Mali, January 2006

V. Commission for Social Development, N-Y, February 2006

VI. Other contacts of interest for the work of the Triglav Circle

**For information on the Triglav Circle see:
www.triglavcircleonline.org**

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Introduction

During this period of less than two years the Triglav Circle has organized five of its traditional two-day gatherings, participated in an international symposium and in a forum for development, attended and contributed to a session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development and had several contacts for its future work. These different activities are summarized below. Complete reports on the meetings mentioned in this Note will be available in the first quarter of 2007.

I. Traditional two-day gatherings

1. Harvard-Yenching Institute: 25-26 February 2005

Note: More extensive notes on this meeting have been published on the Triglav website. See White Papers:

http://www.triglavcircleonline.org/pdf/public_discourse.pdf

Hosted by the Harvard Yenching Institute and its Director Tu Wei Ming, this meeting was attended by twenty-five persons, members and friends of the Circle, including five working at the United Nations in New York. The subject for discussion was *Moral Dimensions of the Public Discourse: the Legacy of the Social Summit Revisited*.

Three themes were proposed in the agenda: moral philosophy and the spirit of the time; moral issues in the political discourse; and, relevance of the values advocated by the Social Summit. The starting point was the observation that after many decades of neglect, moral philosophy is, as a discipline, making a “comeback.” In parallel, ethics is “on the market”, with notions such as ethical accounting and ethical investment becoming parts of the corporate language. The curbing of corruption is on the agenda of the United Nations. And, this public interest in moral issues is also accompanied by a revival of religion, or religiosity, in the form of sects and various forms of fundamentalism. References to God are no longer exceptional in the public discourse. And in the background of all this, or, rather, in the forefront of the political scene, are acts of terrorism and manifestations of state violence and contempt for human rights and international law.

Views of the liberal humanist on morals and the public discourse

For the liberal and secular humanist, heir of the European Enlightenment, the explicit intrusion of morals – and *a-fortiori* of religion -- in the public discourse is an added indication of the serious trouble in which humanity finds itself at this historical juncture. Calls to morality, pretense at virtue and at ownership of the truth are always suspect and dangerous. They are regularly accompanied by a denial of the humanity of the Other.

Moral principles and norms of good behavior, which are indeed universally understood and shared, are taught and transmitted by examples and deeds, starting in the family, continuing with schools and universities and culminating with the concrete policies of governments accountable for their actions. Reason, the responsible exercise of one's freedom and respect for the autonomy of the other – individual, community or nation – go together. The political realm has to be kept under the jurisdiction of Reason.

Religious and spiritual resources are sources of morality

While generally agreeing on the ambiguities and dangers inherent in public pronouncements on morals and morality, and while rejecting theocracy, participants raised questions and offered different perspectives on these issues. Religions have given and still give meaning to life and moral direction to considerable numbers of people. Religious thinking has strongly influenced moral principles embodied in “natural law” as well as in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus, when one thinks of how to deal with the excesses of fundamentalism, it would be wiser to revisit secularism and its excessive reliance on instrumental rationality, rather than to reject religion and with it an authentic source of morals.

Moreover, the spiritual resources that are available in the world ought to be mobilized in addressing the main issues that confront society today. The Dialogue of Civilizations initiated by the United Nations and pursued by UNESCO is a step in the right direction. And moral issues, rather than being confronted directly, can be approached through the cultural perspective, the aesthetics perspective, and, simply, through the application of the “love thy neighbor” principle. It is time to rely on several facets of the human spirit. And Reason gives better fruits when shaped by Love rather than by Power, Greed, or Fear. The message of the Social Summit, with its mix of idealism

and very concrete recommendations for a fair and peaceful world order, is seemingly lost today in the mainstream discourse of the United Nations but it lives through other discourses. In sum, the renewed interest in moral philosophy might help humankind confront the formidable problems looming on the horizon, but the teachings of liberal and secular humanism ought never to be left aside.

2. Harvard-Yenching Institute: 16-17 December 2005

This regular meeting of the Circle, hosted by the Harvard Yenching Institute, brought together twenty-nine persons to debate *Human Flourishing and Social Justice*. There were several reasons for the choice of this subject. Human flourishing was a notion often mentioned in the debates of the Circle, notably in the context of Confucianism, but never fully examined. It focuses on the individual whereas social justice, an issue at the centre of the Copenhagen text and of the recent work of Triglav, is in great part a matter of organization of society. Hence a number of questions: at what levels are these two concepts related? Does human flourishing presupposes social justice, or leads necessarily to it? Are there forms and degrees of inequity and injustice that hamper human flourishing? Are there types of economic, social and political arrangements that are particularly favorable to human flourishing and social justice? These questions were summarized under two themes: What is human flourishing? And, what are the relations between human flourishing and social justice?

Human flourishing and human happiness

In the context of the efforts to build a new humanism – also often called a renaissance of the human spirit – is human flourishing a notion preferable to the concept of happiness? Human flourishing is said to be the best translation for the Greek word *Eudaimonia*, which, for both Plato and Aristotle, means not only good fortune and material prosperity but a situation achieved through virtue, knowledge and excellence. In Tu Weiming's work on Confucianism, human flourishing is also "creative transformation" of the self, a self that "far from being an isolated individual, is, experientially and practically, the center of relationships" (chapter on Confucianism of the book *Our Religions*, published in 1993). Human flourishing is both a personal project and a goal for society. By contrast, human happiness, as commonly perceived, has individualistic and selfish

connotations. And it evokes a state of mind rather than a process; a situation rather than a quest.

Yet, the American and French revolutionaries who put the pursuit of happiness in their declarations and constitutions were strongly influenced by Stoicism and were certainly not inclined to confuse happiness with uncontrolled and selfish hedonism. In this light, it was questioned whether it was preferable for the Circle, to look for notions that were politically, relatively pure rather than to attempt to restore the original meaning to seemingly polluted words. It was felt that both initiatives would probably be useful and, in any case, participants proceeded to give their views on the contours of human flourishing and its compatibility with social justice.

Two perspectives on human flourishing and social justice

From one perspective, which complements the dominant political culture, human flourishing is the realization of one's potential, whether the subject is an individual, a group, or a nation. Freedom, autonomy, the removal of obstacles to growth and blossoming are therefore critical. Likewise are education -- because the human being does not "naturally" blossom -- health care, and security -- although risk-taking is for some people intrinsic to self-realization. Since one is here considering the flourishing of an individual subject, the situation and well-being of others -- whether individuals or nations -- are peripheral to this perspective. Social justice does not come into play because it implies balances and equilibriums whereas life's gifts are not balanced. Since peoples have to live together, correctives have to be made to what would be the "natural" result of very unequal capacities to flourish. Equality of opportunities for all seeds to grow, and "safety-nets" for those who fall out of the basket, should therefore be sought. But because social justice is by no means an inherent component of human flourishing, nor, for that matter, of human happiness, an excessive emphasis on equality, in its different forms, can stifle the creative potential of a society.

From the second perspective, the flourishing of the person implies the capacities for self restraint and for overcoming adversity which are indispensable for justice in a society. No single individual, community, or species can live fully independent from others and from nature. Moreover, the fact that life is perishable should provoke the sense of moderation that creates harmonious individuals and societies. Wisdom and social justice are ultimately rooted in the understanding that human beings are bound together,

mysteriously perhaps, but inescapably. To be educated is to learn what is the sufficient measure of fulfillment of desires, aspirations, and ambitions. The three dimensions of social justice – equality of rights, equality of opportunities, equity in the distribution of the fruits of human activity – are interrelated and indispensable to the flourishing of society. When one dimension is missing, as it is the case now with the general aggravation of inequalities, human flourishing is impossible.

Human flourishing and the recourse to different sources of knowledge

This second perspective, which links flourishing (or happiness) with justice, is much more demanding than the first, which is close to traditional liberalism, in terms of demands placed on the individual and on public institutions. In addition to the private apprenticeship in wisdom and the design of purposeful policies for the common good, which are in turn condition for success in these undertakings, this perspective necessitates resort to other sources of knowledge. In addition to scientific or empirical reason, sources of knowledge include intuition, pure logic and philosophical reasoning, poetic muse and inspiration or mystical revelation. The Western culture has, since the Enlightenment, gradually narrowed its knowledge base for understanding the world. Today that base can be characterized as largely positivist and utilitarian, relying almost exclusively on instrumental rationality. This source of knowledge is ideal for technological development and economic growth, but also generates materialism, a predatory attitude towards nature, and fails to discourage greed, selfishness, and violence. The other sources of knowledge are complementary to Reason and a culture that neglects them has little defense against the emergence of various forms of irrationality and brutality. Human flourishing is not only a matter of calculation. Social justice is not only a matter of respecting rights. There is much more to life.

Beyond issues of social justice, human flourishing calls for different approaches to development and progress. Respect for peoples, for their traditions and cultures, imposes alternative objectives, structures and processes on development. At the same time, there are universal values. The requirements for human dignity and for justice are fundamentally the same across cultures. And the shrinking of the world, associated with the emergence of powerful global actors, makes imperative the construction of a universal humanism. Such tension between diversity, pluralism, and the

need for globally common norms and values is a recurrent theme and challenge for the work of the Triglav Circle.

At this meeting, a paper prepared by Saad Z. Nagi, entitled *Equality, Equity and Justice: Terms, Concepts and Frames* was distributed to participants. It argues that justice is indivisible and should be understood and practiced in a broad and encompassing manner, including: a constitutional structure and mode of governance that guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms; the checks and balances necessary to channel authority towards the public good; impartiality in civil and criminal law and respect for legal institutions; equity in the system of rewards so that people's earnings and gains are proportional to the quality and amount of effort they put in their work; redistributive measures to meet the needs of the unfortunate and the dependent, while preserving the motivation of the capable and talented; rules for governing environmental behavior with the aim of protecting the necessary balances, aesthetics, and sustainability; and, justice meaning people's fairness and civility to each other in their daily interaction. In conclusion, Saad states that education and justice are the primary pillars of progress at the individual and collective levels.

3. Orfalea Center, U. C., Santa Barbara: 18-19 March 2006

Organized with and hosted by the Orfalea Center in Global and International Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, and devoted to a debate on *The Global Civil Society*, this meeting brought together twenty-two persons, nine of which being regular members of the Circle. The participants considered three themes: What are the contours and characteristics of the global civil society? What are the most salient criticisms concerning the activities and behavior of organizations of the civil society? And, under which conditions could these organizations make a greater contribution to the emergence of a better world?

The Agenda had two annexes. The first, *Notes on the Evolution of the Concept of Civil Society in the context of the United Nations*, prepared by the secretary of the Circle, outlined the main steps of the participation of NGO's in the work of the United Nations. Such participation rests on Article 71 of the Charter authorizing the Economic and Social Council to "make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence." The other, entitled *Humanity in Question: The Challenge of Moral Globalization*, was a draft

reflecting the current stage of a reflection of Richard Falk on how “to make the case for preserving “humanity” as a term designating both biological inclusivity of all persons and moral expectations of treatment of humans in accordance with international law and human rights.” The paper presented the argument that “moral globalization is a vital element in the response to a deepening crisis of global governance, and that a biological and normative framing of moral globalization by reference to humanity is integral to fashioning a coherent and widely acceptable response.” Richard Falk also wrote in this piece that “taking humanity as our compass provides a navigational tool needed if our species is to have any hope of yet negotiating a safe and satisfying journey through the treacherous waters of globalization.”

Civil society: an ambivalent concept and a great diversity of components

Participants were acquainted with the avatars of the concept of civil society. Whereas for John Locke, the term was the equivalent of civil government, Adam Smith identified it with an autonomous self-regulating economy separate from the political sphere and comprising, obviously, the craftsmen and merchants, the economic actors of the time. Taking exception to the liberal political doctrine and the capitalist economy espoused from Locke and Smith, Hegel and Marx saw the civil society as the sphere of specific and selfish interests and opposed it to the political society, the latter being the sphere of public and general interest.

Today, civil society tends to see itself as the third branch of a new tripartite structure, the first branch being composed of international organizations and governments, and the second comprising the private for profit/business/corporate sector. This tripartite structure is “new” in comparison with the model for international relations established by the Governments/Employers/Trade-Unions structure of the International Labour Organization. At least implicitly, this perception of civil society as a modern “Tiers-Etat” was shared at this gathering.

The extreme diversity of the components of civil society throughout the world was noted. Civil society consists of organizations and institutions and also of individuals, for instance academics and journalists, who take public positions on matters of public interest. Among the former are organizations of very different sizes and sources of financing—ranging from those financed by grants from governments and international organizations to

those surviving on contributions of their dedicated members. There are organizations with religious facilitations and/or foundations and others which are strictly secular. Actually, a significant proportion of those having consultative status at the United Nations have religious connections.

Some organizations have broad agendas, such as the development of the countries of the South, while others are focused on a single issue, for instance “pro-choice” or “pro-life.” Some groups are institutionalized and have a recognized place at the periphery of the “establishment”, as their representatives are regularly received by ministers and heads of international organizations. Others, whose nature is closer akin to social movements than to non-governmental organizations, and also closer to traditional revolutionary political parties and trade unions than to lobbies or interest groups, have a confrontational relationship with established authorities. Their members organize protests around sites of power, albeit with growing difficulty as “security measures” become increasingly strict. There are organizations of civil society operating in a single country or region, others having their headquarters in Europe or North America and operating in the developing world, notably Africa, and still others having a truly global vocation, for instance the protection of the environment or the promotion of gender equality across borders and continents.

A global civil society defined by its objectives

Is it possible and legitimate to identify “a” global civil society within this extremely diverse and evolving universe? Participants at this meeting took a substantive and political approach to this question. Were considered part of the global civil society, those organizations, movements and individuals that were working for a more just, more respectful of human dignity and more peaceful world order. Such work can take place in an African village, in the suburbs of an affluent city, in a university or in the corridors of an international organization. It can be conceptual or directed towards advocacy and active dissent. But what unifies these different initiatives and activities is their intentions, orientations, and objectives. The global civil society is helping to bridge the gap that separates developed from developing countries. More ambitiously perhaps, it aims to realize the moral globalization envisaged in the paper by Richard Falk. The global society seeks to promote universal respects for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It wants to regulate or, for some, replace global capitalism. It fights what was called the dragon of unrestricted market forces. These forces

are slowly building a political and moral framework for the good of humankind.

The meeting devoted a fair amount of time to a discussion on the state of the world. It was argued that a second cycle of ecological urgency had started, marked by the emergence of extreme weather and the need for a transition to a post-oil economy. These issues had risen to prominence for a short moment in the 1970's. Now, they are not being addressed properly, partly because of the dysfunctionality of the policies pursued since the beginning of the "war on terrorism." Security issues and wars are distractions from very urgent ecological problems. Among these, are the global warming and, also, the effects of biogenetic engineering on animal health and on biological diversity. Presently too much reliance is placed on the spread of global capitalism from the powerful countries to solve problems of global governance, including the deterioration of the environment. This culture of leaving world issues of public concern to global capitalism might be called Westphalian optimism: a powerful state and market forces will create a self-organized world system, with, when necessary, the use of force.

The global civil society: a major actor in a post-Westphalian world

The view that the world order initiated by the treaty of Westphalia in 1648 is coming to an end was generally shared by the participants. It follows that one of the main challenges of the times is to construct the political culture and institutions necessary to govern a world in which nation-states are no longer in control. This work would involve a large role for the international civil society. It was pointed out, however, that the domination of a nation sometimes identified with an empire was hardly "post-Westphalian" and that a diminishing role of states in socio-economic matters was often paralleled by a growing propensity to intervene in matters of law and order. Indeed, was the reply, but it remains true that the central Westphalian idea, the combination of territorial sovereignty and the ideology of secularization, is already being superseded: Iran is a theocratic state and the idea of secularization is under challenge in many parts of the world; and, the United States is no longer a single territorial entity, having bases in sixty countries and conceiving its security in global terms. Besides, history has shown that the greater use of one's power may be in part the "sunset effect" of the declining state.

In this fragmented and dangerous world, does the global civil society have the legitimacy and capacity to influence trends and events? Negative criticisms of NGOs and more generally organizations of the civil society are directed first at their Western origin, financing and ethos. Hence an *a-priori* Western bias considered a handicap in a world seeking unity within cultural and political pluralism. Other criticisms are: the frequent tendency of civil society members to be excessively normative without having the responsibility to submit their ideas to the test of implementation; the naivety and manicheism of organizations inclined to divide the world between the “good and victimized” developing countries and the “bad and greedy” Western powers and corporations; and, a perceived lack of rigor in the management of their resources accompanied in some cases with authoritarian methods and style of leadership inconsistent with their mission.

Even more serious, and related to lack of transparency and accountability, is the criticism that these organizations of the civil society have no legitimacy, because they represent only their members and because they do not have to take responsibility for their actions since they are exempt by nature from any election process. The participants made a number of remarks in addressing these criticisms and in attempting to place the question of legitimacy in its proper context. These are summarized below.

Reasons for the legitimacy of the elements of the global civil society

- Civil society would not have any *raison-d’etre* if governments, parliaments, and regional and international intergovernmental organizations were fulfilling properly their roles. If this is not the case, then a legitimacy “by default” is perfectly valid.
- Political legitimacy is a relative notion subject to many interpretations. When democracies turn into plutocracies, politicians have questionable legitimacy as representatives of the “peoples.” When a government represents a majority of the votes but a minority of the electorate, the voice of the “rest” has the right to be heard.
- At the international and global levels, there are no institutions and processes that are in a position to confer or deny legitimacy to organizations and individuals that wish to express their views on the state and future of the world. International intergovernmental organizations are to varying degrees accountable to the governments of their member-states, certainly not to the peoples of the world. Transnational corporations are, to an extent, accountable to their shareholders, certainly not to the peoples and their political

representatives. When they express their views, politely or forcefully, on the international scene, organizations of the civil society do fill this vacuum. Their legitimacy is to represent the beginning of a democratic global order, the first step in the establishment of a world assembly of the peoples.

- This is even more so since there are already forms of transnational governance. Apart from the transnational corporations and their various antennas, including most of the media with a global reach, there is the World Trade Organization and there are various forms of specific cooperation between governments and between private individuals and groups that progressively tie the world into a web of relationships that might be legitimate and useful but are certainly not approved and controlled democratically. Mention was made of the active cooperation that exists between the secret services of a number of nations. In contesting current arrangements and in working for a model of governance based on moral values and determined to seek the common interest of humankind, the global civil society meets an obvious need.
- The achievements of civil society during the last quarter of a century are impressive enough so that questions about its legitimacy could be set aside. Mentioned were the roles of worker's-unions (notably Solidarity in Poland) and of other organizations and individuals in the decline of the Soviet empire and fall of the Soviet Union itself. The apartheid system in South Africa was brought down by courageous leaders of states and members of civil society with the help of the United Nations and of a long and effective mobilization of numerous organizations of the global civil society. More generally and over a longer period of history, all great causes, from the abolition of slavery to the promotion of women's rights and the defense of civil rights have been taken up in the vanguard by private individuals and groups.
- At present, the dark and simply unfair or irrational sides of the globalization process and ideology are exposed essentially by members and organizations of the civil society. And, most importantly, the recent and dramatic weakening of the fundamental idea that basic human rights are applicable to all members of the human family is being countered by these members and organizations of civil society. Tribunals of the People, on the Nuremberg model but outside official channels and made essentially to collect testimonies and materials on the effects of wars on civilians (prominent examples

- being the Vietnam war and the current Iraq war) are also prominent initiatives of the civil society.
- To be the conscience of the world by exposing abuses of power of all sorts is not without danger. The meeting was reminded that in a number of countries and regions of the world, intimidation, threats, and murder remain common methods for silencing those who dare to expose facts on corruption and abuses of power. At the time of the writing of these Notes, the assassination of a Russian woman journalist brought a tragic confirmation of such a reminder. To be an activist for human rights and fundamental freedoms is rather different from being an ordinary lobbyist. Real legitimacy is, unfortunately, not always on the side of those with power.

Markers for the role of the global civil society in a conflicted world

The global civil society, it was said, has also the responsibility to combat the moral and intellectual conformism that seems to characterize the dominant political culture. Perhaps because of the general atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity, political debates on the way society could be better organized tend to be poor. The capacity for dialogue and confrontation of viewpoints appear to be regressing. It is up to the active members of civil society to have, in addition to moral courage, the political imagination that is sadly limited in circles of power. For example, the thinking that was captured and summarized some decades ago in the “Small is Beautiful” of Schumacher should be revived.

Economies and societies are harmonious when made of very diverse types of creativity and ways of living. And on the other hand, the global civil society ought to multiply the forums where universal values and norms of good behavior are debated. Even the current vulgate on Darwin and Darwinism ought to be revisited. It was pointed out that “Darwin was more clever than Milton Friedman regarding Darwinism...” He concluded from his observations in the Galapagos Islands that the finches having adjusted to their environment by using, for instance, a cactus spine to extend their beak and carve insects out of the bark of trees, would not have survived if exposed to the competition of the wood-peckers of the Latin American continent. Brutal exposure to competition and to the “law of the jungle” is not necessarily the ultimate refinement of a civilization.

At least in appearance, that part of the global civil society which is made of the non-governmental organizations continues to find its way into the deliberations of the major international organizations, including the United Nations, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. In the United Nations, the doors of the General Assembly and of the Security Council are not as hermetically closed to NGOs as they were a few years ago. Expressions of dissent, however, criticism of the values and strategies that underlie public policies and above all proposals to regulate, control and tax the agents of globalization, however, are less and less tolerated. If the world conferences organized by the United Nations at the end of the 20th century are pushed aside, it is partly because many states, including the most powerful, are not anxious to offer a forum to the rebellious elements of the civil society.

The meeting also had a serious discussion on the future of solar energy given the apparently foreseeable depletion of oil resources. This debate followed the projection of the film *Power of the Sun* conceived and produced by Walter Kohn. Jonathan Cleeves was the narrator.

4. Ougny, Burgundy, France: 10-11 June 2006

This was the first meeting of the Triglav Circle outside of the United States since the UN seminar in Bled, Slovenia, that launched the Circle. Conducted in French and in English, it was attended by twenty participants, a few of them members of the Triglav Circle, and with a significant number of nationalities represented, including Algeria, England, France, Japan, India, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and former Yugoslavia. The subject for debate was *Simpler Life Styles: Utopia or Reasonable Political Project?* Two themes were proposed: Why look for simpler life-styles? What is a simpler life-style and what type of economy(ies) would it imply?

Simplicity, humility and serenity

A number of remarks were made on simplicity and the meaning of a simple life-style. Simplicity is a...sophisticated concept. It is not the same as poverty and material deprivation. A simple life requires a minimum amount of money, this amount varying with places and circumstances. But frugality demands generosity and liberality, for a simple life ought not to be tense and self-centered. So much so that, for instance in the Quaker tradition, simplicity is the condition for and the equivalent of generosity and respect

for the other. It means attention to the needs of other human beings, especially the weakest. It also means rejection of violence. It is the opposite of selfishness, self-assertion, and self-centeredness.

Thus, simplicity is not a state, but a process, a continuous search conducted with humility and serenity. There is no ready-made guide or recipe for this attitude of the mind and heart. It demands efforts and leads to a joyful communion with others and with the world. It is a virtue that is never lived as such, for the simple heart has no incline to superiority and judgment. A simple life is a healthy and harmonious life. Simplicity is, *par excellence*, holistic and inclusive, as love and respect for nature is also love and respect for humanity. A life is lived simply not only in relation to the material world, but also in relation to the arts and cultures. There, simplicity means openness and capacities to appreciate and to wonder.

Simplicity as a social and relative notion

Perhaps because the idea of the retired and ascetic anchorite is resolutely alien to the modern mind, a simple life was never conceived, during this discussion, as implying some withdrawal from society and from public affairs. The monastic life was not evoked, even though there is seemingly a renewal of interest for it in different regions of the world. Simplicity, a life not burdened by the “things,” it was said, leaves time and energy for interesting and important pursuits, notably politics and the serving of the common good. And, going several steps further in the “socialization” of the notion of simplicity, it was argued that possession and consumption are social statements. They vary with societies and social classes, or strata. Sometimes, the seemingly superfluous is socially essential and takes therefore priority over basic necessities.

Then, in this perspective, simplicity becomes an essentially relative notion, unless it is identified simply with a certain distance and detachment vis-à-vis riches, however abundant or scarce these are. A simple life would be a life liberated from the tyranny of materialism which affect, notably perhaps in the West, rich and poor alike.

Still in the logic of this socio-economic insertion of the notion of simplicity, it was further argued that a type of production and consumption consistent with local traditions and practices should be considered as responding to the requirements of a simple life. Hence the frequent association of the simple

with the local and the rural (the “terroir”). Such an idea of linking simplicity with the use of local products and local ways of living is very much in line with the “décroissance” movement (of which more later) and very much at odds with the tenets of the globalization process and project. It is also an idea that runs against the perception of development as a linear process, with stages and clearly defined objectives (essentially “catching-up” with the affluent countries). Thus there is justification in calls for national and regional autonomy in development strategies and policies. Further, simplicity, so defined as faithfulness to one’s roots and conditions ought to be part of the reflection on multiple modernities.(see below, meeting in Beijing).

Voluntary simplicity and forced austerity

Simplicity should be of a voluntary nature. If a simple life is not chosen but imposed by circumstances beyond the control of an individual, or a group, resentment, anger and envy for those with more may ensue, and these sentiments are incompatible with the serenity that accompanies simplicity. If however, a life-style reduced to the bare necessities is imposed by external forces but accepted with equanimity, common sense would suggest that simplicity retains the virtue emphasized by the Stoics. Hence the confirmation that simplicity is closely related to moderation, steadiness, and wisdom.

There is no doubt that simplicity, so conceived, is practiced throughout the world by a significant number of individuals and families. More so than twenty or a hundred years ago? More in the affluent countries of the North than in the struggling or “emerging” economies of the South? More in societies marked by Buddhism and Confucianism than in regions that were or are under the influence of monotheist religions? The meeting did not address those questions. It had no reason to do so, because the focus of the Agenda was on the political feasibility and likelihood of a movement towards a simpler life than the one embodied in the dominant capitalist and materialistic culture.

Simplicity remains an individual quest

Has the search for simplicity a political expression in today’s world? Some “green” parties, notably in Western Europe, used “simplicity” in their platforms. Also in Europe, there are sometimes references in conservative

and/or Christian democratic political circles to the desire of peoples for a simple life, away from the noise and agitation of large cities. And there are intellectual movements and groups rejecting both global capitalism and planned socialism that are trying to influence the mainstream political debate. An example is the “décroissance” movement, which emphasizes local and organic modes of production, consumption and living and has linked with unions of small peasants fighting the attempts of large multi-national corporations to dominate the agricultural sector of the economy. One of the points made by this movement is that the availability of all products at all seasons in the supermarkets of the Western world is not only costly in environmental and other terms, but is source of unhappiness for the consumers. Abundance leads to satiety and indifference. The meeting, however, did not dispose of a serious study or survey, even limited to Europe, on the political relevance of the idea of simplicity in the current political debate.

It heard nevertheless an informed judgment from one of the participants who, referring to France, was rather dismissive of the significance of the indeed frequent references to simpler life-styles in the political discourse or in the conversations of socialites. “Pretence”, “hypocrisy”, “snobbism” were the qualifiers for this kind of talk. Peoples are not ready to change their styles of life and aspirations for their children, not more in France than in the United States. And yet, said the same participant, it is imperative that a dramatic change in mindsets should take place because the Western culture is running into an impasse with its excessive focus on the “having” and neglect of the “being.” But, again in political and collective terms, this will happen only when imposed by circumstances leaving no room for escape and excuse. Out of necessity, and only out of necessity, will emerge different attitudes and different policies. This is so because, most unfortunately, Western democracies have lost the capacity to identify, legislate upon and implement the common good of the time with a clear vision of a desirable future. Political debates and processes are replete with corporatist and short-term issues and interests. Pressure-groups and lobbies do not create informed citizens and responsible leaders.

With many nuances on the respective roles of necessity and choice (including through the power of education and the influence of public intellectuals and benevolent organizations of the civil society) several participants shared this judgment on the desirability and unavoidability of transforming the private virtue of simplicity into a collective political

project. Other participants, while being rather critical of global capitalism in its present raw form, were not convinced of the necessity, or, for that matter merits of transforming the virtue of simplicity into a political motto for the future of humankind. They were not persuaded by the three “plausible” set of reasons given in the Agenda for this gathering.

“Material” reasons for simpler life-styles are not convincing enough

As to the ecological reasons— global warming, exhaustion of oil resources and other man-made or natural phenomena may indeed impose changes in patterns of development, modes of consumption and life-styles— but there is nothing to suggest that such changes will necessarily be in the direction of greater simplicity. If a family trades its two “sports utility vehicles” for two “hybrids” does it mean that this family has adopted a simpler life-style? New and environmentally “friendly” technologies are not “simpler” than traditional technologies. It is simpler to throw out waste than to recycle it... One should not confuse a new form of modernity with simplicity.

Regarding the economic and political reasons also evoked in the Agenda it is true that the dominant model of development is based on the “relentless creation of needs and the rapid obsolescence of goods which once upon a time were made to last” and also true that the “rules of the market are spreading into domains of social life previously governed by non-mercantilist and even altruistic principles,” but correctives to these defects are to be found in public regulations, incentives, and disincentives rather than in a radical change of course for which there is little theoretical basis. Growing inequalities will not be reversed through a call for less production of consumer goods. And, above all, there are still hundred of millions of people throughout the world who have the right to aspire to the goods and amenities currently enjoyed by a few.

Thirdly, the philosophical and religious, or spiritual reasons for seeking simpler life-styles are perfectly valid and convincing. It is true that great philosophers, moralists and prophets have consistently linked wisdom, happiness and simplicity. It is also true, to quote the agenda, and as already stated above, that “there are many individual examples of deliberate rejection of the omnipresent competition that characterizes modern economies and societies” and that “it is not absurd to imagine that traditional forms of wisdom remain hidden behind the agitated surface of the contemporary world.” It can even be granted that there is probably a link

between the many forms of violence that plague the world and the excessive materialism of the dominant political culture.

But these observations, which are to be debated and researched, and which are at the roots of utterly legitimate individual choices, cannot without major risks, be transformed into political projects. To preserve freedom, including the freedom to accumulate wealth and enjoy it selfishly, or the freedom to live a solitary and ascetic life, the domain of public affairs should be carefully circumscribed. If the need for simplicity were to become a coherent political programme, self righteous politicians and ideologues will loom on the horizon, as they presently do on issues of morality and social mores.

Summarizing this position of the prudent and the skeptical, one of the participants asked repeatedly the following question: “If the material reasons (meaning ecological and economic reasons) for simpler life-styles did not exist (and at this point they are far from being obvious), what would be the other reasons for advocating simplicity?” Implicit in this question was the conviction that such “other reasons” were respectable but certainly subjective, debatable and culturally and politically rooted. One can hope to reach a political agreement – even eventually at the international and global level – on, for example, the need to develop such or such type of energy, but one should be very hesitant to have the same ambition with regard to the dissemination of the virtue of simplicity.

On this question of simplicity, as on other aspects of a “renaissance of the spirit,” the debate, within and outside the Triglav Circle, between idealists and realists, or between liberal humanism and spiritual humanism, is still in need of considerable elaboration and sophistication. It remains very difficult, and very necessary, to effectively mobilize and use different sources of knowledge and different sensibilities. At this particular meeting, an observer from planet Sirius might have concluded that instrumental rationality was not subjected to a big enough challenge.

II. Joint Harvard-Yenching Institute, Friedrich Ebert Foundation Seminar: 15-17 September 2005

This meeting was organized and supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation(FES) and the Harvard Yenching Institute through the Director of the FES in Washington, Dieter Dettke and the Director of the Harvard Yenching Institute, Professor Tu Wei Ming. Triglav Circle members had taken the initiative to launch this joint seminar. Participants were accommodated in Cambridge and met at the Arts and Science Center and Harvard University. There were twenty-three participants, including persons involved with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the United Nations, the World Bank, the Kennedy School and the Harvard Divinity School. The topic for discussion was *The Moral and Political Foundations of Social Justice in an Interdependent World*.

The four themes proposed in the agenda were: What are the causes of the current aggravation of social inequality and of the apparent neglect of the idea of social justice? What would be the consequences of a continuation of the trend towards more inequality in the distribution of income and wealth among social groups and classes and among countries? What is the rationale for advocating the pursuit of social justice in today's world? And, what are the means for pursuing social justice in an interdependent world and globalized economy?

An overall increase of various forms of inequality

The diagnosis of the overall aggravation of inequalities in the world, notably in terms of distribution of income and wealth within and among countries but also in access to work, employment, education and other social services, is well documented and was not questioned. This trend started in the mid 1980s and followed a reversal of trends in the narrowing of income and other differentials that had been prevalent since the end of the Second World War. That the cause of this reversal was and continues to be the ideological and political "revolution" that unfolded under the leadership of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, was also not questioned at this meeting. And today the prevalence of security issues on most national and international agendas pushes further aside matters of equality and equity.

Inequities, or the tension between liberty and justice

The question that begs to be addressed is at what point inequalities – which are inherent to the functioning of a free society and free world – become unfair and unjust? Is it not true that the champions of social justice, during the course of two centuries of struggle and upheavals, neglected that fundamental human right of individuals which is liberty, including the liberty to work, create and be rewarded for one's activity? The "revolution" of the 1980s has delivered the world to the forces of global capitalism but it has also given millions of individuals the sentiment that they were responsible for their life. There is always a dialectic tension between liberty and justice on national and global planes, but disequilibrium hampering freedom of the individual had to be corrected. Moreover, progress is being made in regard to "horizontal" forms of inequality – notably between women and men and among different ethnic groups – despite temporary setbacks and reversals. Equality in respect to other human rights is also progressing in a positive direction. More preoccupying therefore for the citizen of the world and the concerned public intellectual should be the growing inequalities among countries and the increasing difficulty to attain peaceful coexistence among peoples of different religions and civilizations.

Culture of competition and the neglect of social justice

It might be so, but there is a continuum, intellectually and politically, between inequalities within countries and inequalities among countries. The link is made by the dominance of a culture of competition and expansion which is focused on the acquisition of wealth and power. According to this culture, the one – individual, nation, or continent – that does not succeed and is left behind in the race for comfort and possessions, is seemingly guilty of incompetence, lack of openness, laziness, "structural" weaknesses and corruption. For a number of reasons, including the security of those who have wealth and power, these marginalized peoples and countries might be "assisted" – or coerced when necessary -- but their situation and claims do not put into question the basic tenets of a dominant culture representing progress and prosperity for all. Hence, among other signs of the time, is the rise, under the aegis of the United Nations, of humanitarian concerns and the quasi disappearance of activities justified by social development and the quest for social justice. In the international discourse, the notion of

development itself tends to be replaced by “integration in the world economy” and “sharing the benefits of globalization.”

Public policies to tame the power of capital

Most participants in this meeting expressed the conviction that this dominant culture of materialism and consumerism needs to be questioned, challenged, reoriented and enriched by a more complete and more realistic conception of human needs and aspirations. A continuation of present trends would stimulate more violence and result into increasing chaos and perhaps eventually the self-destruction of humankind. As an antidote, it should be considered that generosity is as “natural” as selfishness. Moreover, justice and liberty should and can be reconciled, notably through public policies seeking the common good as opposed to serving parochial interests. After all, a number of governments have maintained equitable market economies and decent welfare systems. The raw power of capital needs to be tamed at the international level as it was tamed in the materially most affluent nations before the 1980’s.

Love as an informant of Reason

Emphasizing Love as the informant of Reason is a way out of this contemporary abyss in global justice. This observation and similar comments that were made are along the line of what might be called spiritual humanism. Establishing bridges between spiritual humanism and liberal humanism is to be truthful to the Enlightenment tradition. One such bridge is the conception and practice of power – whether political, technocratic, scientific or corporate -- as a service to humanity. Ultimately, participants stressed, that there would be neither justice nor peace in the world unless the demonic drives for power were curbed.

III. International Symposium: Beijing, China: 23-24 June 2006

Organized jointly by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and the Harvard-Yenching Institute, this international symposium was devoted to *Seeking Harmonious Society and Multiple Modernities*. It was hosted by the Bureau of International Cooperation of CASS and the Institute of Ethnic Literature, also of CASS. Thirty participants, including five members of the Triglav Circle attended this meeting. The symposium had a substantive link with the Copenhagen Seminars for Social Progress conveyed in the aftermath of the United Nations World Summit for Social Development. The CASS had recently translated the book summarizing the findings of these seminars, *Building a World Community, Globalization and the Common Good*, published by the University of Washington Press. Conducted in Chinese and in English, the debates were organized around four themes: dialogue among civilizations, social justice, a comprehensive approach to sustainable development, and, multiple dimensions of modernity, including economic, social and cultural perspectives. These debates are summarized below under a few headings centered on the notions of harmony and modernity.

The concepts of harmony and harmonious society

Harmony with the self, with others, with nature and with Heaven is a concept and a quest at the heart of the Chinese civilization. In the Confucian perspective, such harmony is the aim of human flourishing. It gives meaning to the cultivation of the self, which, because of the fundamental human interrelatedness, can never be an egotistic exercise, and it gives a direction to politics, which, for Confucius, is in the realm of moral persuasion.

In the Chinese language, “*he xie*” or harmony, is represented by two characters. The first character combines the ideas of “harvest” and “mouth,” meaning that when there is a good harvest and people are well fed, harmony comes within the household, the society, and the world. The second character stands for “speech” or “music” and “all” or “everyone,” implying that harmony results from everyone speaking or playing in agreement. Harmony therefore requires shared prosperity and unity of purpose. Not unlike a symphony, or a painting, or a beautiful landscape, a harmonious society is made of different parts acting in unison, or placed in a symbiotic relationship.

This point that reaching harmony requires complementary skills and joint efforts is confirmed by the origins of the word in western languages. The Latin *harmonia* comes from a Greek word meaning “precise arrangement, delicate adjustment, careful putting together of pieces which then appear to “naturally” fit together.” Thus, the creation and maintenance of an harmonious society is equivalent to a work of art demanding education – or what is called “training” -- intelligence, imagination, and effort on the part of all its members. Harmony, in a society as in a person, is a process rather than the product of sudden change. There is a continuum in this creative process between private and public action, and between private harmony and societal harmony.

Harmony and shared values

Harmony presupposes diversity. Be it in a society, a family, or an orchestra, harmony is attained through the interplay of diverse actors with complementary roles and positions. Diversity, however, can also be a source of conflicts. An harmonious society demands common values, reciprocal codes and shared “rules of the game.” It demands acceptance of various sets of right relationships, among social classes or social categories, among women and men, among age-groups, among professions and trades, among cities and villages, among regions, and between people and nature.

In a given society, the perception of what is “a right relationship” varies with time. In China, the situation of women, for instance, is very different from what it was at the time of Mencius. An harmonious society is therefore not synonymous with a static society. At the same time, however, predictability is inherent to harmony. There are constant, invariant, so to speak eternal features of human behavior, such as civility, courtesy, respect, which are indispensable to a harmonious society. It follows that harmony is compatible with change and progress, but not change for the sake of it, and not progress conceived as a demiurgic attempt by Man to subjugate Nature and the Heaven. Harmony does not marry well with excesses of any type.

Do the shared values necessary to a harmonious society include religious beliefs? There was little discussion on this point, perhaps in great part because neither Buddhism, Taoism, nor Confucianism separate religion from the art of living. The Heaven of Confucius is more immanent than transcendent. And the Buddhist monks do not aspire to secular power. But, is social harmony in a nation compatible with the practice of different

religions, including monotheist religions based on revelation? Are harmony and tolerance friendly notions? One can assume that conditions for such compatibility are that religions remain in the private sphere and that their proponents refrain from proselytism. And, during the discussion on overall harmony in the world it was made abundantly clear that all types of aggressive fundamentalism are not only disharmonious but cacophonous in nature. In an orchestra, no single instrument or musician can pretend to possess and express the whole Truth.

Harmony and universal values

Need these same shared values be indigenous to the society seeking to keep, acquire, or restore its harmony? What about the concept of universal values, cherished by the advocates of a strong United Nations and so often alluded to in the debates of the Triglav Circle? Can a society see itself as harmonious and also be considered as such by an impartial observer even if some or many of its values are at odds with the some commonly accepted universal values? Full answers to such questions would require a great number of clarifications, including on their philosophical presuppositions and also on their political context. For instance, of crucial importance are the methods of work of the forums in which values that are “candidates” for universality are discussed. Yet, the tonality of the debate in Beijing suggests a few signposts.

Whether one attributes this to human nature or to the convergence of the teachings of great philosophies and religions, or to both, there is little doubt that the moral compass of peoples of different traditions and cultures is fundamentally the same. Perceptions of right and wrong, or of the beautiful and the ugly, do not dramatically differ from one continent to another. In that sense the distinction between Asian, or European, or American, or African values, and universal values is artificial. But such syncretism, to be at the same time respectful of freedom and diversity and exempt from moral laxness and relativism, implies a fairly short but rigorous “selection” of what are truly universal values. Difficulties with the notions of shared understanding of the human rights expressed in the Universal Declaration are partly due to a politically motivated interpretation and extension of such rights in the domain of political arrangements which should have no claim to universalism or in-temporality. But then, is this presumably shared core of values a sufficient foundation for the construction of harmonious societies?

Perhaps they represent an indispensable base, on which each culture and civilization has and should have the freedom to develop its own “harmonics.

Harmony, equality and justice

Harmony is definitely not uniformity. As already stressed above, it requires differences. And there are not only nuances between these differences, be it in social categories, social classes, social hierarchy, inequalities, or elitism. When everybody, however, accepts his or her position and when nobody abuses one’s power, there can be social harmony. Asian societies are not traditionally egalitarian.

Questions were therefore asked on the relationships between social justice and harmony. Does an emphasis on harmony imply tolerance of inequalities that would be considered unjust in a society privileging social justice? It might be so, was the answer, but justice means first that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, as proclaimed in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Justice and equality are, in that sense, constitutive elements of social harmony. Justice as a practice should permeate all institutions, and not only legal institutions. Regarding social justice, conceived narrowly as redistributive justice, its current low visibility in the world is related to the preeminence of the “free market discourse.” And, different societies might have different perceptions of the point at which inequalities become inequities. But it seems clear that the present aggravation of most forms of inequalities, including those in the distribution of income and wealth, is conducive to growing disharmonies on the world scene.

In this connection, it was emphasized that the role of the state and in general of public institutions is crucial. It is not by chance that the concept of a harmonious society has been developed in a culture that puts public service at the top of the social hierarchy. It was also emphasized, however, that a modern harmonious society requires a benevolent state but also an open public space where citizens and organizations of the civil society can voice their views. And those in a position of power have a particular responsibility for the observance, transmission and adaptation of the norms, values and virtues that bring harmony in society.

Modernity and multiple modernities

The concept of modernity and its use in a plural form generated some questions, reservations and explanations. First of all, the usefulness of the concept of modernity is not obvious. What are its advantages compared to notions such as a “pluralistic world,” or a “harmonious world society,” or, more simply “different styles of development” or “styles of progress”? If the purpose of the choice of the concept of “multiple modernities” is to have debates in China, about its society and its future, why not refer directly to issues as they are perceived and discussed, for example “market economy and inequalities,” or “wealth and its use,” or “the rule of law,” or “economic growth and the environment,” or “harmony in the modern Chinese society”? (at the time of the writing of these Notes, October 2006, the Government of China has officially proclaimed “social harmony” as its objective).

If, on the other hand, the context is a reflection on the path that China is taking, or should take in relation with other paths, especially the dominant one which is presently incarnated by the Western world, the danger with “multiple modernities” is to have a debate circumscribed and oriented by the characteristics of a dominant “model.” Words, concepts, desirable and undesirable features of the “other” modernity would have their reference point in this “main” modernity. This would make very improbable a critic or *a-fortiori* a deconstruction of the very concept of modernity. And it would limit the intellectual and political imagination necessary to the elaboration of a vision of the future of the Chinese society and of the role of China in the world. It might even hamper the capacity to analyze the present situation of China, and certainly the capacity to look in the past for useful lessons in wisdom. It was noted that a primary feature of the Western concept of modernity relies on a linear vision of history.

Such epistemological problems, without disappearing, are lessened if the consideration of the question of “multiple modernities” is placed within an international and global perspective with special reference, in this case, to China. The issues to be debated become, “are there in the world, or could or should there be countries, or regions, or coalitions of countries adopting different strategies, objectives and ways of being in relation to modernity and to the future? and where does China stands in this regard?” Or, more brutally: “Is there room for a plurality of civilizations on the eve of the 21st century and how could they coexist peacefully?” Part of the discussion in Beijing was from this global standpoint.

Modernity as process and as a project

It was argued that debates on multiple modernities would be facilitated by an understanding of “modernity” as both a process and a project, as was said in a previous meeting about globalization. Modernity as a process is a new phase in human history and human consciousness characterized by a progressive liberation of the human mind from various constraints and limitations. It is a long term process, with roots deep in the past – notably the European Renaissance of the XV and XVI centuries – and developments in the future that cannot all be foreseen. Through the use of Reason, it liberates humankind from conceptions of the sacred, of polity, of social and family relationships, and also of science that were brakes to autonomy and creativity. Although it is an historical process of great scope and magnitude, human action can alter and modify it, at least temporarily.

Modernity as a project takes one particular aspect of the modernity process and gives it a normative content, transforming it into an ideology. Comte did this with science, Hegel with the state, Marx with class relations, Hayek with liberal capitalism. In its current form, the dominant modernity project presents certain choices and policies as having a normative content. Then, for example, particular economic structures and choices are presented as expressing the “laws of the market.” Similarly, questionable facets of human behavior, such as greed, are attributed to inherent features of “human nature.” And specific political institutions and arrangements are claimed to represent the essence of democracy.

Modernity as a process has entered China. It ought not to be resisted. But it has to be guided responsibly in order to be a process faithful to the Chinese culture and its emphasis on harmony. It may then become a project expressing an authentic Chinese style of modernity.

Modernity and modernization

In a slightly different vein, it was emphasized that modernization is the participation of a society in the massive expansion of scientific knowledge and the accompanying equally massive technological innovations that were initiated a few centuries ago. Modernization, then, is not necessarily to follow the path of the Western world, as it is widely believed. Rather, it is the adaptation of the institutions of society to this trend of scientific and technological change and progress. Such adaptation requires a

transformation of many facets of society and also requires identification of the values that have to be protected and the values that should be abandoned in the process.

For this harmonious blending of permanence and change to occur, an effective and socially conscious leadership is needed, as well as an informed and politically active citizenry. The two institutions having a crucial role in determining success or failure in such endeavor are education and justice. The result, if harmonious, is a mix of the new and the traditional, and such mixes greatly differ, as can readily be seen in observing, for example, Japan and the United States. Part of the problem with the world is that a number of societies – the so-called developing countries – feel compelled to carry out their transformation and create their acceptable “mixes” of the old and the new practices too rapidly and under pressure. They have therefore scant opportunity to find a balance between excessive attachment to tradition and blind embrace of an imported form of modernity. Moreover, as the affluent countries continue and even accelerate their process of modernization, the “developing” world has the sentiment of being caught in an endless attempt to fill an ever-increasing “gap.”

Multiple modernities: reality or aspiration?

Are there multiple types of modernity at present? Or is there a unique paradigm? The opinion that there is a dominant model epitomized by the economically advanced Western world seemed somehow to have been more or less shared by most participants at this meeting. Participants, however, were aware that it is only by identifying modernity with globalization that it can be said that the United States represents today the dominant version of modernity. The official American political culture seems to have shifted “beyond” the concept of modernity. “Globalization,” “global markets,” “global democracy,” “freedom for all,” are frequent expressions of this culture, whereas “modern” appears to be as “passé” as “modern art.”

But, be that as it may, are there significant variations to this dominant global model? Brief and inconclusive remarks were made on Europe, Japan, and India, but neither the European region nor these countries were clearly perceived as offering an alternative to this global model. Together with the United States, they all are active participants in the process of economic and financial globalization. Russia is still considered as “in transition” towards a market economy. As to the countries of the “South”, including those of the

continents of Africa and Latin America, their self-perception and image of being “least-developed” or “developing” is proof enough that they are embarked on the long and arduous but familiar and well-tracked journey to development and modernization according to the dominant paradigm.

China, since its economic reform, is actively involved in the world economy through trade, investment, and various joint ventures. The weight of foreign investments in the Chinese economy is very significant. Among the 500 biggest corporations operating in China, two-thirds are supported by varying amounts of foreign capital. China is a member of the World Trade Organization, which is a very important actor and a light house for the world economic sea where global capitalism has free sailing. The central government and the provincial authorities still play a role in the management of the economy but China is no longer a fully planned economy. It has privatized a significant number of its activities and is progressively subjecting state-owned companies to competition and other “rules of the market.”

China is experiencing an extremely rapid rate of economic growth and the engine and composition of this growth are not very different from those of liberal capitalist economies. It is a type of growth generating an increase of inequalities in income and wealth among social groups and among regions, and inflicting heavy tolls on the environment. This big country, with its very large, industrious and resourceful population, coupled with an also large diaspora, is commonly perceived as a major and perhaps tomorrow the major economic and political power in the world. China is also an atomic power and a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations. Though its political structures and institutions remain in line with the Communist model, there is nothing in the above characteristics and policies which would seem, on the surface, to qualify this great country as representing a different or “alter” modernity.

Culture: the determinant to a style of modernity?

But perhaps economy and polity, especially when they are analysed with unsophisticated concepts, only reflect the most obvious and superficial aspects of a country. Other criteria would be needed to appreciate the extent to which relations of citizens among themselves and with their political authorities, as well as relations with other countries, with the world and, to keep the Confucian language, with Heaven, differ sufficiently from a sort of

world average or from the Western “way” to be worthy of the qualification of “other modernity.” This is about “culture.” Culture is to be understood in many different but complementary ways that, combined, create the soul and the ethos of a nation, or a region, or a continent. It includes family structures and relations, attitudes towards authorities, ways of interiorizing or displaying sorrows and joys, understandings of justice, freedom, responsibility and civic duty, as well as architecture, urban design and the products of all other arts. Culture is a matter of organization of daily life as much as the fruit of the best minds of a community.

Apart from the richness and extraordinarily poetic sort of “concreteness” of its language, China and its peoples appear to possess a unique and vibrant culture. For example, the hospitality and civility displayed towards foreign guests is certainly not in conformity with the dominant style of modernity. Yet, with culture, as with the economy and the political institutions, superficial impressions and judgments can be rather deceptive. Moreover, the Chinese and Asian intellectuals participating in this meeting were discreet and modest when evoking the merits and achievements of their culture. It was said that Chinese intellectuals understand better other cultures than their own, and that they have the capacity to appreciate and assimilate selected aspects of other cultures. Discretion and modesty are again virtues which are not part of the dominant modernity and with fewer of these virtues these intellectuals might have clearly stated their belief that, in spite of some very visible appearances, China has a unique approach to its own modernity.

Two main reasons for seeking different types of modernity

First, is the conviction that a pluralism of cultures and civilizations is better for the world—for its richness and its dynamism. Human beings flourish when their curiosity is stimulated and also when they can deepen and eventually modify their views as they grow in familiarity with other cultures. Uniformity seems to be the enemy of creativity, and also of freedom. Languages have to be preserved and nurtured. Ways of thinking and of being that have enabled communities to survive and sometimes thrive for centuries should not be destroyed but allowed to adapt to modern times as they see fit.

A second reason for seeking different approaches to modernity stems from the discontent with the dominant global market model. Mediocre utilitarianism, unrestrained materialism, excessive reliance on competition, predatory attitudes towards nature and the environment, and, perhaps above

all, aggressiveness and lack of respect for other cultures, are frequent criticisms of the current global way of being modern. Such criticisms and concerns are particularly audible within the Western world itself, including the United States, and economic and political failings and excesses are attributed to “globalization” rather than “modernity.” But, openly reactionary ideas and movements are on the rise in the West as they are in other parts of the world. Religious fundamentalism, for example, is a comprehensive and aggressive alternative to modernity. For all those who cherish freedom and believe in the perfectibility of human society, it is imperative both to defend modernity and to correct its imperfections.

These two sets of reasons – need for diversity and problems with the dominant model -- were addressed by this gathering. The prevailing sense was that the roads to multiple modernities that were suggested, rather than representing a new vision, had the attributes of correctives to the dominant model.

Some elements for different types of modernity

Firstly, a nation, as in the case of China, and perhaps a continent as in the case of for example Africa, needs to be aware of its cultural past and at the same to draw inspiration from universally recognized great thinkers. To a certain extent, in China the reforms launched at the end of the 1980s have been paralleled by a rediscovery of Confucianism. These political and philosophical movements, reformism and Confucianism, are both inspirations and driving forces in China’s search for a specific type of modernity. Confucianism is being “re-appropriated,” “rehabilitated” and “re-thought” in the present “modern” context. At the same time it seems that its appeal crosses again the borders of the Asian world. The latter phenomenon, particularly evident in Europe, is a form of “globalization” that has existed in the past but is greatly facilitated by modern means of communications. Similarly, it was noted that reflection on Chinese modernity is benefiting from familiarity with the heirs of the European Enlightenment, including Derrida and Jurgen Habermas. China is seeking “connecting points” with the West and is anxious to identify the best parts of other discourses.

Secondly, culture, in the sense of ways of thinking and relating to the others and to the world, is an integral part of a specific path to modernity. This point has already been made above, as the related point that, on the road to modernization, some of the values and norms constitutive of this culture

have to be kept and nurtured, while others have to be adjusted and still others have simply to be abandoned. More generally, the idea of mobilizing the different intellectual, artistic and spiritual resources that exist throughout the world, an idea often advanced in Triglav meetings, is totally compatible with the search for multiple modernities. It has been argued that this form of universalism is a condition for cultural pluralism.

Thirdly, a related and more general way forward is the acknowledgement of the necessity to respect multiple forms of knowledge in order to comprehend, enjoy and develop the self, the community, nature and the universe. In addition to empiricism, knowledge derived from intuition, imagination and pure reason is eminently valid and crucial to society.. This is a theme that has been very present in the recent work of the Circle. Mention was made of the need for an ethical intelligence. The use of rational reasoning ought to be combined with kindness, courtesy, generosity and hospitality. A “good” culture, favorable to human flourishing, is marked by the serenity and happiness of its people. And the beauty of the world ought to be celebrated. Such celebration is hampered by a focus on the observable and the measurable. The avoidance of “commodity reification” is a condition for creating a different approach to modernity.

Fourth, also related to a larger and more profound perception of the useful and to celebration of life in its richness, is the recognition of the beauty of forms of art that are considered “folkloric” because they are associated with ways of living and cultures that the dominant modernity is pushing aside. The example of the recording of the songs of an itinerant folk singer from inner Mongolia was mentioned. The songs of this elderly man are contained in a few volumes of manuscripts and represent an epic poem of great beauty. Throughout the world, there are such examples of oral literature which are in danger of being lost forever. When the past is treated with love and respect it stays alive in the present and informs our lives. Thus, another form of modernity bears a relationship with history and manifests a different conception of time.

Fifth, again in a related way, the ambition to seek a different path to modernity implies breaking the dominance of a singular economic discourse which is rapidly transforming the world into a market where everything can be traded, measured and priced, and everything can be discarded and replaced. A market economy is in normal times a necessity, whereas a market society is an impoverishment of human relations and human

creativity. Economics, which has become an end in itself and which is presently conceived under a type of instrumental rationality privileging aggressive competition and excessive profit, has to be placed into the framework of time honored moral philosophy, as it was for the founders of modern economy including Adam Smith.

Sixth, this dominant economic discourse and model remains, in spite of a recent much improved consciousness of the damages inflicted to the environment, fundamentally predatory towards nature. The fundamental changes in patterns of production and consumption called for by the United Nations at the time of the Rio Summit on Environment and Development have not occurred. The dominant mentality and discourse is still that “development” (meaning economic growth) is the absolute priority and that technologies prompted by necessity and human ingenuity will “fix” environmental problems when they become so acute as to jeopardize the possibilities for growth. This is very short of the harmony with and respect for nature demanded by Confucius and, among others, St Francis of Assisi. In the vast domain of sustainable development, much can be done to invent a form of modernity reconciling human creativity and respect for other living creatures and for the universe.

Seventh, there is the domain of political institutions and arrangements. It was pointed out that to be “modern” does not necessarily imply copying the most well-known political institutions. Regarding the evolution of the Chinese political system, a government structure with six pillars was evoked. These pillars are a neutral civil service, an independent judiciary, an anti-corruption agency, the rule of law, a process of consultation of the people, and the application of the principle of meritocracy. Plutocracy is to be rejected. In this perspective, correcting the gross inequalities that are currently afflicting the Chinese society and treating private wealth as a source of social obligation rather than a mere privilege, are steps towards an harmonious modernity.

Lastly, and this is more about the actors than the roads to another modernity, a number of comments were made on the role of public intellectuals, or global intellectuals, as Mencius said. In inventing and implementing a new path to modernity intellectual and political elites should take the lead and gain the trust and adhesion of the “peoples.” It was pointed out that intellectual forces have, across borders and cultures, two main challenges: (1) to reduce the dominance of the economy over other important institutions

that sustain and enrich life and society, and (2) to celebrate life in all its bounty and generosity. Words of caution were also heard. It would be rather absurd to think and act as if societies were infinitely malleable. Even during reforms and revolutions constraints over human intervention in the course of history are enormous. To ignore those constraints is a recipe for catastrophes. Modernization is like a very heavy boat on a sea which is sometimes calm and often agitated. It is possible to steer this boat towards a new direction, but skill and caution are required to maintain this course. And dialogue, with partners, with competitors, and even with adversaries, is imperative. The search for multiple modernities is the antidote and response to the “clash” of civilizations.

Is the world moving towards greater harmony? The meeting was not convened to establish some “harmony index” and see its evolution over time. But there seems to be a shared view that the world was facing imminent global crisis. Dark clouds are piling up on the horizon of humankind. To talk about harmonious travel towards modernity at such a juncture may seem supremely irrelevant. Yet, it is a duty of all public intellectuals and good willed citizens to pursue this discourse and to be relentless advocates for reason, wisdom, and human decency in the affairs of humankind.

IV. Forum for Social Development, Bamako, Mali, 26-30 January 2006

Barbara and Jacques Baudot were invited to participate in this official event organized and hosted by the Government of Mali, and, more specifically by Adama Diarra, Director of the National Solidarity Fund and a member of the Triglav Circle. There were two events. The first was a meeting of the Ministers for Social Development of the West African region who, for the first time, were establishing a basis for active cooperation on social issues. This process is supported by UNESCO, in the context of its program MOST (Management of Social Transformation). The text adopted, in the presence of a representative of the African Union, is an interesting example of a mix of universal values and principles (directly inspired by the text of the Copenhagen summit, which is much more alive in Africa than at the Headquarters of the United Nations) and of African traditions and specificities. Mali was given the responsibility of ensuring the secretariat of the structure that will ensure a continuing cooperation between the countries of the region.

The second event was a Salon du Developpement (sort of “Development Fair”) which brought together for three days a large variety of representatives of the Malian society. There were officials from the Government, academics, members of the business community, members of organizations of the civil society, ordinary citizens, and a few foreign guests or visitors. Well organized, well attended, consistently immersed in an atmosphere of joy and kindness, this was a truly remarkable event.

Apart from a great variety of exhibits, there were extremely serious meetings where members of the local NGOs and academics engaged in open, friendly, informed and frank debates with Ministers and other government officials on subjects ranging from inequalities in Mali to the difficulties of a water project in a province. Papers were prepared and distributed, questions were asked, criticisms were formulated, suggestions were made, and officials did not leave the room for “previous engagements.” They participated with this mix of equanimity and liveliness which seems to be a trademark of African style of democracy at its best. And the participation of NGOs was equally admirable, avoiding both submissiveness and gratuitous aggressivity.

Barbara and Jacques Baudot gave speeches at this Salon and at the Institute for Social Workers. The speeches were on a Triglavian perception of

poverty and modernity. In the audience at the Institute were students, professors and members of the Parliament. These, as well as one or two junior ministers were attending courses at this Institute, on social welfare, social protection, and other aspects of social development. This was another example, to illustrate the fact that assistance and cooperation ought to be a two-way street between the North and the South.

V. U.N. Commission for Social Development: 8-17 February 2006

A speech was given before this Commission on Thursday 9th February. It was delivered by Jacques Baudot on behalf of the Triglav Circle, which is a non-governmental organization accredited with the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies. The statement was on the “priority-theme” of the session which was the question of poverty. Three points were made to illustrate the contention that poverty ought to be seen in all its dimensions and in its various contexts. First, poverty is a universal problem. It affects all societies and it has multiple dimensions and manifestations. There is material poverty, social poverty, moral poverty, cultural poverty, and spiritual poverty.

To approach poverty at the exclusion of affluent societies is to limit the understanding of the causes of the phenomenon, notably as they pertain to the dominant model of modernization and to the functioning of the world economy. Secondly, the struggle against poverty ought not to be separated from the struggle to protect and promote human rights. The divorce that occurred in the United Nations between “development” and “human rights” has historical origins – essentially the Cold War – but has no more justification or excuse, and it jeopardizes the effectiveness of the United Nations on both accounts. Thirdly, poverty has to be seen and analyzed in relation to its presumed opposite, which is wealth. The principle that has to prevail is that wealth implies obligations and responsibilities, at least at three levels: the adoption of fair and progressive national systems of taxation; reduction of inequalities; and the elaboration of a model of development based on simplicity and respect for the self, the Other, and nature. A new perception of what it means to be rich and successful is needed.

Also at this Commission, the Circle organized a workshop entitled *Many Facets of Poverty*. The themes proposed for debate were: what are the non-material dimensions of poverty?; and, should the non-material dimensions of poverty be matters of public concern? Five members of the Circle and a dozen of members of the Secretariat of the UN and of other NGOs attended this workshop.

VI. Other contacts of interest for the work of the Triglav Circle

- After the meeting in Beijing, Barbara and Jacques Baudot went to Vietnam and spent a week in Hanoi and in the northern part of the country. Barbara renewed her contacts with the Institute of Chemistry of the Vietnamese Academy of Sciences. Ideas were explored on cooperation on concrete projects relevant to sustainable development. Contacts were also taken with the Institute for Human affairs.
- In May 2006, two persons living currently in Slovenia contacted the secretariat of the Circle to express their interest in the work of this organization and their willingness to participate in this work. A meeting with these persons took place in France after the gathering of 10-11 June and the possibility of organizing a conference in Slovenia was evoked (for those who are not aware of it, the Triglav circle owes its origins – and its name – to a UN seminar which took place in Bled, Slovenia, in 1994). A specific project will be elaborated in the coming months and presented to the Board of the Triglav Circle at its next meeting.
- After the meeting at Santa Barbara, Jacques and Barbara Baudot had a conversation with Vyacheslav Ivanov on the future work of the Circle (Vyacheslav had attended the meeting in Santa Barbara). The sentiment of Vyacheslav was that the different pieces of the work of the Circle during these past few years had to be put together, oriented, made more relevant, more practical and “dynamised” by a unifying theme, thread or objective. A theme has to be found which will “unify” reflections and ideas that have been so far interesting but disparate. A unifying theme would also increase the visibility of the Circle and enable it to have more concrete relationships with other organizations pursuing a similar or comparable objective. Vyacheslav thought that such a possible theme could be the culture and institutions for a world community. This was a brief conversation and more elaboration of the idea would obviously be needed, but it should certainly be pursued.