

## Moral development leadership

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A few days ago, I had the opportunity to listen to a lecture by the Chinese Ambassador Sun Weidong, when he was a guest at the Oxbridge Society in Islamabad. Not only is he a towering figure in his own capacity, but his official presentation of the Pak-China relations was also impressive and indeed interesting, just a week after the Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan.

Sun Weidong is a teacher turned diplomat, and he certainly knows the skills of both, including the diplomatic jargon and niceties, to be taken with a pinch of salt, of course. The audience was certainly polite, even giving the speaker applause after each question he answered, an honour that would probably not even be bestowed upon the American ambassador. But then, this is *Asia's century* and the *China's decades*, too. Sometimes, we should allow ourselves the afterglow of a state visit, and the successful of a neighbour. But we should soon also change our Sunday dress for working day clothes – as the hardworking Chinese do.

One wonders, will China take over leadership of the world soon, outmaneuvering USA and EU? Not quite so, if we were to believe Sun Weidong, and he reminded the listeners that China only ranks as number 80 among all countries for GDP per capita, as per World Bank statistics. Yet, China has the world's second largest economy, but is still a developing country with two hundred million people living below the poverty line; that is the second largest number of poor in the world after India.

However, China has made a tremendous *leap forward*, to use a term from the communist time, over the last few generations. Hundreds of millions of the country's total population of 1.3 billion people having moved upward and out of poverty. That means that the collective human rights have been improved for many, but violated for others, even structurally, for example as a consequence of urbanization and the movement of people from rural to urban areas, in the family planning, and other fields. Corruption and gains for some mean that others lose. Development does have a price.

Sun Weidong said that the *Chinese dream* is quite modest, just that every citizen should live well and in dignity, yes, work hard and focus on his or her family and children.

In future, we should not only buy things '*made in China*', but also things '*created in China*', the ambassador said. In other words, the Chinese should not just be copy cats, even if improving and make cheaper what is already there – like Japan was doing earlier, and South Korean manufacturers may still do in some instances. China too is graduating, and continues breaking the monopolies of the West and its neighbours.

And then: will China also become a leader in the world in other fields, not only in economic and industrial fields – alongside the West and other major powers in an emerging multi-polar world?

Since China is still a developing country, it shouldn't be a surprise that it also has to improve its performance in many fields. That lies in the term. But at the same time, we are all impressed by China's progress and indeed its economic growth, although it is not quite as robust as before, currently 'only' aiming at about seven percent – that would be a dream for most countries, indeed for the stagnant economies in Western Europe, but then development should perhaps have an upper ceiling.

In Sun Weidong's lecture, attention was drawn to *quality*, not only *quantity* of development. However, many if not all countries, including those in the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China and

South Africa) would compare notes and want fast quantitative growth. Below qualitative development lies quantitative development. Without growth, there is little surplus to share and it becomes difficult to include more people at a higher development level; one wouldn't better health, education, and other social services for all, only have it for the few as in the past.

In the West, which was often social democratic or socialist-oriented, it was economic growth that gave it the opportunity to redistribute wealth, reduce class differences and create greater equality among people. (Today, there is a reverse trend in the West, especially in USA, where economic and therefore also social inequality is growing, and more people end up below the poverty line.)

China's development model – from communism and a planned economy, through state capitalism and today a market economy, well, with quite some government control and leadership, is a model for many developing countries. Yet, it cannot be copied wholesale due to many factors, including the high degree of rigorous discipline accepted by the Chinese and the fact that the time for authoritarian and centrally directed development is over. China could get away with it a generation or two ago; but in other developing countries, it is quite impossible today. Besides, the West has spread its influence and propaganda to the developing world, advocating a reduced role for the state, replacing much of it by market economy and multi-party political systems.

But China has an interest in expanding its economic cooperation with a large number of countries, and establish close cooperation with many in its geographic proximity, including the whole of South and Central Asia, East Africa and beyond; the new 'silk roads' will be both by land and sea. China's influence in these areas will be massive, and the countries may borrow many of China's ways of doing things, which have led to its development success.

China has not yet defined its role as a superpower in general in any geographic areas or globally. The West still has the upper hand as the moral and political leader. It is not likely to last unchallenged, but I believe it will remain the moral and political leadership longer than the economic leadership. China, with its economic success, and its growing social success, is likely to demand its space globally. In that way, China's standards will develop and be adjusted to our time and the future. We will realize, too, that many Western standards were not good for all, but first of all good for them. The current refugee and migration crisis in Europe has brought to light how difficult it is to universalize moral and political standards – not just make them good for the strong. But I do believe that most moral standards are global, with local variations, and I believe that they must also grow from within, not only be sanctioned from outside.

And then, still just a week's time after China's President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan, I believe we should be very hopeful as for the Pak-China cooperation. Above, I have reflected on some aspects, mainly based on the lecture by Ambassador Sun Weidong a few days ago. We should be hopeful, but the debate must go on. Both countries are old cultures, sometimes with shared past, too. It is important that they are not only pragmatic and technocratic in implementation of projects, but also build on and share own cultural traditions, values and opinions. Then the moral development leadership will emerge, and that will not only belong to one country.

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