

Greetings

Ji Xianlin

MR. Chairman, esteemed guests, learned scholars, first of all allow me to congratulate you on making a very successful start to this symposium.

Today's symposium is I believe of great importance. Why? Because this year is the first of a new century, the 21st century, and the first year of a new millennium. In China we have a saying: "The year starts in spring, the day starts in the morning." Here at the dawn of the 21st century I believe we, the leaders and the people of the world, must think about how we want to spend the next century, and the next thousand years.

When we look at the problems in our world today, it is impossible to divorce those problems from reality. So what is our present reality? As reported in the press and elsewhere, the relationship between we humans and the natural world is rife with contradictions. Global warming, shortages of fresh water, destruction of the earth's ecological balance, the emergence of new kinds of disease, holes in the ozone layer...one could readily cite 50 or 60 such problems of immediate concern.

How has the world come to this? All these problems can in fact be traced to the advances in science and technology that have occurred from the industrial revolution onward. Personally, I fully support scientific and technological progress. Without it, we would not today be enjoying the benefits for example of electric lighting, telephones or high-rise buildings. All these things have been made possible by science and technology. Therefore I do agree with scientific and technological progress, most certainly.

However in this world, to everything positive there is inevitably a negative side. Advances in science and technology are desirable, but also have less positive aspects.

This is not something people have only come to realize recently. The question of how to manage the relationship between man and nature properly has been around for a very long time. The great German poet

Goethe said, “Nature will never make a mistake. It is human beings who make mistakes,” while Engels commented, “We humans must not become too intoxicated with our victories over nature. Why—because for every victory, nature is sure to have its revenge.” These comments are not from our time, but were already being made 100, 200 years ago. And I must acknowledge even after all this time that these great thinkers were absolutely correct.

In mainstream Western thought, the relationship between nature and man is one of conflict. Incidentally, open a Chinese to English dictionary some time and look up the word “conquer.” Underneath you will find the example “to conquer nature.” This is a central concept in Western thought.

What about Eastern thought then? Here I must refer back to the comment made by the director Dr. Yoichi Kawada, that in my current dialogues with Chairman Ikeda I use the expression “*tenjin goitsu*” (*tian ren he yi*) or “the unity of man and the universe.”

Gathered here today are many philosophers, experts in various fields, scholars and professors, and throughout the history of Chinese philosophy many different people have interpreted this phrase “the unity of man and the universe” in different ways. My own interpretation is I believe founded on that of someone by the name of Zhang Zai, from the Sung dynasty. One of Zhangzai’s writings was a work by the name of *Ximing*, and in this he wrote “*Min wutongbao wu wuyue*” (lit. “People are my comrades. Things are with me.”) This means “people (*min*) no matter where they are from, are my comrades (*tongbao*)”—in Zhangzai’s day they didn’t say things this way, so of course this is a modern translation—“all are my comrades and my brethren. And things (*wu*) be they animals or plants, are all my companions.”

As I mentioned earlier then, we humans are now confronted by numerous contradictions in our relationship with the natural world. Unless we resolve the problem of this contradictory relationship, the consequences for the future of mankind are ominous. We must therefore continue our drive for progress and development in science and technology, and, at the same time, find some way to eliminate the negative things that arise from science and technology.

What are our ideological foundations for eliminating these negative things? In my opinion, Eastern culture, and first and foremost, the idea of unity of man and the universe. This is not a Western idea. In ancient Indian philosophy there is a famous saying, written in Sanskrit as “*tat tvam asi*.” “*Tat*” is the English “that,” “*tvam*” is “you” and “*asi*” “is.” The saying therefore means “that is you,” more widely translated as

“That thou art.” Here “tat” refers to the cosmos and “you” to “mankind.” In other words, human beings are ultimately the cosmos, and the cosmos human beings.

From the perspective of Buddhist history, as you know Buddhism takes an opposing stance to Brahminism. While opposing Brahminism however, Buddhism does not reject it entirely. In my view there are elements of this idea of the unity of man and the universe shared by Brahminism.

If we then begin to divide Buddhism, we encounter the difference between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism. As we have many experts on Buddhism here today, I feel it my duty to explain the reasoning behind this split, so will discuss here what is generally understood to be the difference between these two branches of Buddhism. The difference is that in Hinayana Buddhism, the emphasis is on personal practice. In other words, one cannot transfer merit. For example if I practice Buddhism, I cannot transfer any merit acquired by doing so to my parents. The biggest difference between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism lies I believe in the fact that in Mahayana Buddhism, all sentient beings can be saved, and merit transferred to others. Bodhisattvas can save all sentient beings. In my view, this is the central idea preached in the Kanzeon Fumon Chapter of the Lotus Sutra. In China the Bodhisattva Kannon, or Kuan-Yin the Goddess of Mercy, symbolizes great mercy and great compassion, and also the salvation of all sentient beings. The Fumon Chapter gives many examples of this, telling us that whoever we may be, when disaster or troubles befall us, we should seek help from Kanzeon. Do this, it says, and your problems will be solved.

Earlier I saw the title of the lecture to be presented by Du Jiwen - “Peace, the global ecosystem, and the spirit of Mahayana.” I haven’t read the text right through, however I assume it covers similar or the same ground as I have here.

In short, on the one hand we must now work for the further development of science and technology. I do not believe this is a problem. On the other hand, we must compensate for the mistakes of Western culture, with Eastern culture. We must deploy Eastern culture and Eastern ideas to support Western culture in its current difficulties, to extend a helping hand.

Yesterday, a newspaper I was reading discussed a particular book. The book was written by a Belgian academic and Nobel Prize winner. This academic said that Zhongzi represented the very highest level of Laozi and Mengzi’s thought in China. As you know, the Spring and Autumn Annals and Warring States periods of Chinese history saw the

emergence of many “zi” (men of learning) and numerous thinkers—Laozi, Zhongzi, Kongzi (Confucius), Mengzi (Mencius) and Xunzi. While their doctrines may all have been different, as far as I can discern, whether Zhongzi or Kongzi, there is little difference between any of them in terms of this idea of the “unity of man and the universe.” As I mentioned earlier, this idea of “unity of man and the universe” is fundamentally the same in Mahayana Buddhism.

In any case, as we look forward to the first year of the 21st century, and the first year of a new millennium, I feel what we the people of the world need are peace, and understanding, and friendship. What we do not need are guided missile defense systems. Nor do we need to attack other countries with warplanes. Nor an international police force of any description. What we do need are peace, and understanding, and friendship. My hope is that Eastern ideas, including those of Mahayana Buddhism, will be promoted increasingly as a means for us to achieve these things.

As I mentioned earlier, the timing of today’s symposium could not be more appropriate, is extremely important, and deeply significant. I am no philosopher, nor a great thinker. My comments today have really been just what is on my mind, and I look forward to hearing your frank and honest views on what I have said. Thank you very much.