



CHINA DAILY 中国日报

COMMENT

Dialogue offers timeless wisdom for today

By ZHAO XU

The Second World Conference of Classics in Athens, Greece, serves as a reminder that comparisons between civilizations are meaningful. Confucianism and ancient Greek philosophy developed separately, but during a period — from about 800 BC to 200 BC — that was marked by major intellectual transformations across the world, Confucius, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle sought to answer the same questions: how to live, how to know, how to organize and govern societies, and how to cultivate virtue.

The comparison is best explained through one striking image. Thales of Miletus, often regarded as the first philosopher in the Greek tradition, saw water as the first principle of all things. Confucian thought also turned repeatedly to water, though not as an object of cosmological explanation, but as a moral image of goodness, nourishment and non-contention. The contrast is revealing. Greek philosophy often began in wonder; Confucian thought tended to turn nature into an ethical teacher. Together, they show two ways in which people have learned from the world.

There is also a difference in the ancient Greek and Chinese approaches to knowledge. Ancient Greek philosophy gave enduring importance to debate, logical argument and dialectical inquiry. Confucianism, by contrast, often teaches through metaphor, analogy and moral exhortation.

In both ancient Greece and early China, poetry stood at the beginning of reflection on the world, carrying within it questions of cosmology, ethics, political order and human destiny. Epic and poetic traditions served not merely aesthetic purposes, but acted as one of the earliest vessels of thought.

This is why the dialogue between Confucianism and ancient Greek philosophy should not be treated as a narrow academic exercise. Both traditions remind modern societies that human life cannot be reduced to material production, technology or present utility. Ancient Greek and Chinese thinkers, in different ways, understood human beings as part of a larger order — natural, social or political. Their wisdom lies not in offering ready-made solutions, but in widening the horizon within which modern questions can be asked.

Curator looks to East Asia's insights to reinvent galleries

By HOU CHENCHEN

Paintings hang on white walls, each neatly framed and labeled. Some visitors stop, glance, then drift away. That is a typical scene in a modern gallery. Yet the experience of visiting a gallery can feel distant, turning art into an elite activity. For many, contemporary art remains far from everyday life.

For Lee Jin-myung, a professor of arts at Hongik University in Seoul, this sense of distance points to a deeper problem in contemporary art today.

"The system of Western-centric art has reached its limit in proposing new directions for humanity's future," he said. "The wisdom of East Asian civilization can help address this blind spot."

Lee says an alternative can be found in East Asian traditions, and his latest exhibition offers a concrete attempt.

The exhibition, titled *The Excursion to Nanpi*, at the Guangdong Museum of Art (Ba'etan) until June 30, brings together 16 artists from China and South Korea. Curated by Lee, the exhibition draws on a much older cultural tradition — one that predates modern museums by centuries — and attempts, quietly but deliberately, to bring it into the present.

The title Nanpi refers to a historic county in Hebei province,

Studies of classics called key to future



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Athens initiative advocates harnessing ancient wisdom for peace, coexistence. **Wang Huazhong and Zheng Wanyin report**

Classical wisdom should illuminate humanity's path and inform how key questions of our time should be handled, including how to keep our world in peace and order, according to an initiative announced at the closing ceremony of the Second World Conference of Classics in Athens on June 10.

Surrounded by frescoes depicting Prometheus stealing fire to enlighten the human world at the

Academy of Athens, more than 200 scholars from Asia, Europe, the United States and Africa discussed the role of classical studies in safeguarding the future of humanity.

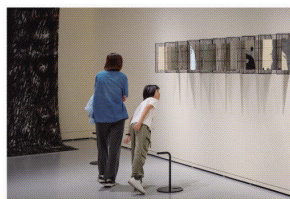
"Only by knowing where we come from can we understand where we stand today and where we are heading," the conference was told.

The initiative called for "harnessing the power of virtues in classical wisdom" to remain

steadfast on the right course of civilization, "promoting friendship and coexistence" to build a home for humanity, "safeguarding peace and order" to strengthen the foundations of security, and "cultivating humanistic values in the digital age" to guide technological progress.

"We are confident that classical studies will provide an inexhaustible source of wisdom and strength for humanity's peace, development and shared future," it said.

Visitors view exhibits in *The Excursion to Nanpi* at the Guangdong Museum of Art (Ba'etan) in Guangzhou in May. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



us to simultaneously discover the shared contemporary sensibilities and the hidden, inherent beauty of our contemporary art."

In the seminars, artists from China and South Korea engage in discussions that move between theory and practice, similarity and difference. Li Ruoxi, a Chinese artist studying at Hongik University, said she experienced a strong sense of resonance during the curatorial process.

"I was surprised by the similarities in visual language, and at the same time I could see how Eastern art expresses itself in different forms."

"In the past hundred years we have been learning from Western modern art," Lee said, but today the Western art world is struggling to offer meaningful direction for the future.

By comparison, he sees untapped potential in China's long cultural history and in broader Eastern intellectual traditions.

The conference, with the theme "Dialogue between ancient and modern: Contemporary inspirations from classical wisdom", was jointly organized by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Greek Ministry of Culture and the Academy of Athens. The inaugural World Conference of Classics was held in Beijing in 2024.

Scholars said that it was the right time for Chinese and Greek academies to co-host the conference in Athens, which is also a symbolic city of dialogue in ancient history, as the world experiences fundamental changes and rising conflicts of interests and ideologies.

Roger Ames, humanities chair professor at Peking University and vice-president of the International Confucian Association, said the world should congratulate China for helping to shift the world's conversation from geopolitics to civilization.

"What China has been doing for the last 20 years is promoting a civilizational dialogue where we talk not about money and military power, but about family, values, shared histories and what we want for our grandchildren," he said.

Amphilochios Papatthomas, a professor of ancient Greek literature and papyrology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, said conflict can be avoided through dialogue.

"What we have learned from classical authors like Thucydides is that we have to be very cautious to avoid a military and political escalation."

A peaceful shift in the balance of power between the United Kingdom and the United States in the early 20th century showed it was possible to avoid the Thucydides Trap of military conflict because the two countries had mutual respect, he said.

"If we achieve that between East and West by studying Eastern classics and Western classics, we will be able to get rid of this Thucydides Trap and construct a very peaceful and prosperous future."

Hu Yujuan, a researcher in the Institute of World History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said war cannot end war, something that must be left to love and benevolence to accomplish.

The ancient Roman Empire once revered Mars, the god of war, and achieved a temporary form of peace through war, she said. However, after turning to worship Venus, the goddess of love, it entered a period of lasting stability, known as the Pax Romana, an era of peace and stability lasting about 200 years.

"The power of wisdom tells us that violence cannot resolve all conflicts. Only the power of love can eliminate conflict and lead to harmony."

they invited viewers to respond intuitively, allowing meaning to emerge gradually rather than being imposed.

In recent years China's public art institutions have shown increasing vitality, supported by growing investment and a willingness to experiment. These museums are not only shaping domestic cultural life but also opening new spaces for international exchanges, Lee said.

The choice of Guangzhou as the exhibition site is also telling, Lee said. As home to the Guangdong Museum of Art, the city has long served as a gateway for China's engagement with the outside world. Today it remains a place where traditional Chinese culture meets the world.

Lee called for deeper cultural exchanges between China and South Korea. In his view, collaboration should move beyond short-term exhibitions or symbolic exchanges of artworks.

"Rather than exhibitions that simply trade artworks, we need to activate long-term joint projects where artists from both countries select shared topics — such as the climate crisis or the Eastern spirit in the digital age — research them for several years, and present their findings."

"We should increase opportunities for artists to immerse themselves deeply in each other's cultural landscapes. It is only when local living and dialogue accumulate that true co-creation — moving beyond superficial exoticism — becomes possible."

Jingdezhen dishes up unforgettable memories

By ZHAO RUINAN

For centuries Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province has provided some of the world's finest porcelain. Today, it is drawing the world back to its kilns.

Adjumov Ayubkhon, 20, from Uzbekistan, arrived in the city expecting little more than a museum. What he found was living, breathing history and artismanship baked into the rhythm of everyday life — not locked behind glass, but resting on dining tables, glinting in shop windows, lining old stone streets and spinning in the hands of young potters, shaping clay into everyday art.

"The city was amazing," Ayubkhon said. "Porcelain is everywhere." Ayubkhon, who now lives in Nanchang, Jiangxi's capital, said he has visited Jingdezhen three times. During those visits he has shaped his own cup and plate from raw clay, wandered through Jingdezhen Ceramic University and stood atop the city's treasures at Jingdezhen China Ceramics Museum.

"When I visited the university in November I saw many students learning how to make porcelain by hand. I also tried it myself, and loved it." At the ceramics museum the weight of centuries settled around him. "I saw many beautiful pieces there — vases, ancient works and blue-and-white porcelain from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The exhibits were breathtakingly beautiful."

By January the pull of the porcelain capital brought him back a third time — this time as a collector, filling his bags with souvenirs for his family and friends. In today's Jingdezhen, faces like Ayubkhon's are no longer a rare sight. The ancient ceramic production center is transforming into a destination in which overseas visitors do not just come to admire porcelain, but also to touch it, shape it, paint it and carry home as their own piece of the story.

Last year Jingdezhen welcomed 150,800 inbound visits, 40 percent more than in 2024. Inbound tourists spent \$8.96 million yuan (\$13.27 million), 45 percent more than in 2024.

For many the magic lies in moving beyond mere sightseeing and stepping into the craft. "Nepal also has ceramics, but the porcelain here is much richer and more colorful," said Arjun Gurung, a tourist from Nepal standing inside the Ancient Kiln and Folk Customs Museum. Under the guidance of local artisans, Gurung and fellow travelers from a Nepali tour group sat at the potter's wheel.

"It was only after experiencing the process of making porcelain myself that I truly understood more about Chinese culture and history," he said.

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