

19th CPC NATIONAL CONGRESS | International perspective

Master of language sees power of words

Sinologist believes the world can deal with modern issues by learning from traditional Chinese culture

By WANG KAIHAO

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Joel Bellassen has long been a keen observer of China and Chinese culture. A Sinologist, he was the first inspector-general of Chinese language teaching at the French Ministry of Education.

"My motive in learning Chinese was to discover a culture that was distant from its Western counterpart," he said, referring to the four decades he has spent studying Mandarin.

Regarding the changes he has seen in China, particularly in the past five years, Bellassen, who first visited the country in 1973, said he had witnessed many positive things.

"For example, China has paid a great deal of attention to environmental issues, like improving the air quality, in recent years."

He added that many changes had also occurred in China in the academic field in the past five years.

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French Sinologist and president of the European Association for Chinese Teaching

time," he said. "This shows a respect for traditions and diverse cultures."

"Many forums and symposiums advocating cross-cultural dialogue have been organized by the government and academic institutions, which is crucial and encouraging."

Bellassen predicts this revival of traditional culture and the enhancement of cross-border communi-

cation will continue to be a trend in China.

As for other changes, he pointed to Chinese etiquette as an example. "When I talk about etiquette, I not only refer to traditional manners in interpersonal communication, but also rules on official occasions," he said.

"For instance, we've seen the Chi-

nese hold some key international meetings in the past few years in which there are mature formats (in receiving guests). The West, however, now makes such occasions look casual."

He said the modern world still needs rituals in international communication, and it is easy to find them in Chinese culture.

Bellassen also has some unconventional explanations for common cultural phenomena seen in the country, which Chinese people often take for granted but foreigners are unfamiliar with.

As an example, he cited China's public square dancing. "It actually reflects the Chinese people's tradition of regimen, which is good for a harmonious society and people's mental health, and should be learned by the rest of world."

As someone familiar with ancient Chinese philosophy, he also advocates that the world should look for solutions to some modern issues in old Chinese wisdom.

Bellassen is also the president of the Paris-based European Associa-

tion for Chinese Teaching, which he founded in 2015.

Looking to the future, Bellassen said as more people in Europe begin to learn Chinese, their understanding of Chinese society will increase.

"Knowing Chinese is a trump card for job hunters from overseas because it is now an international language," he said.

But economic growth is not the only impetus for the development of Chinese. "For instance, in France, many parents see learning Chinese as a way to develop the intelligence of their children."

Bellassen also expects that cultural similarities between France and China will help boost the popularity of Chinese in his homeland.

"Both China and France have always attached great importance to historical studies and literary pursuits, since ancient times," he said.

"Learning Chinese is similar to studying philosophy, which involves metaphysical thinking and thus builds the foundation to understand other aspects of Chinese culture, like cuisine and poetry."

Growing confidence on world stage

China is taking the lead on international issues such as green finance

By CECILY LIU in London

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China is becoming more confident in addressing international issues appropriate to its place in the world, according to former British trade and investment minister Stephen Green.

Green, now a member of the House of Lords, is chairman of Asia House, an organization set up to drive economic and political engagement between Europe and Asia.

"China has a leadership that thinks long term," he said. "That's an extraordinary thing given China's complex long-term changes."

Green, a former group chairman of HSBC Holdings, has been a regular visitor to China since the early 1980s and has witnessed the country's economic transformation.

He said the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has addressed many issues,



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including the environment, economy, and continued financial reform and external engagement.

Green said he is pleased to see China already addressing environmental challenges, as well as taking a leadership role on this issue globally.

At the 2015 Paris climate change conference, China committed to cutting carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by 60 to 65 percent from 2005 levels by 2030.

Meanwhile, the Belt and Road Initiative is a reflection of China tak-

ing its rightful position on the world stage, according to Green. "This will modernize the whole of Eurasia, providing a boost to economic growth and world trade," he said.

First proposed by President Xi Jinping in 2013, the initiative seeks to strengthen trade and investment links between Asia and Europe by boosting infrastructure connectivity. It has attracted tremendous interest from the United Kingdom's financial services community, with many professional services companies looking to advise on projects along the Belt and Road routes.

Green said Xi, who is also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, is a leader capable of taking China's economy forward despite challenges such as the development of the rural economy, the aging population, and pollution.

"He is a strong leader, he has a clear vision for the way China needs to develop, and I believe he will take China forward on that journey suc-

cessfully," Green said.

China's increased confidence abroad is a reflection of its strong leadership and growing economy, which puts it in a strong position to lead on issues common to emerging and mature economies alike, such as green finance, he said.

Last year, China put green finance on the G20 agenda for the first time, giving it unprecedented prominence.

"The way all economies transform themselves to become more environmentally sustainable creates shared learning between China and Europe, as it is a shared challenge," Green said.

He said it will be important for international businesses and political leaders in the coming years to understand China, its economy, and its rich heritage and culture.

"Learning about business and investment opportunities only make sense if you understand the wider background of the history and culture of China," he added.