

Three key ideas toward a new economic paradigm
by Chiaretto Yan

1. The Chinese experience of “**prosperous coastal provinces pair with and help poor provinces in western China**” can be shared and proposed at international level for the assistance and relationship between developed and developing countries.

Deng Xiaoping once famously said “to get rich is honorable.” That unleashed tremendous potentials for economic reform and opening up of China. More significantly however, the second part of his quote often left unnoticed. He said: “We permit some people and some regions to become prosperous first, for the purpose of achieving common prosperity.”¹ Therefore, common prosperity is the key and the main objective.

It has been a long tradition for China to pair rich coastal provinces with poor ones in the western region to offer assistance for poverty relief. A program initiated in 1996 was upgraded in 2015 with precise policies and diversified measures to reduce poverty through industrial development, labor transfers, resettlements and ecological protection projects. Over the years, the World Bank started to offer loans to targeted provinces, such as Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Shaanxi Province, to support cooperation between farmers’ cooperatives and agricultural enterprises and to develop the agricultural value chain.²

The Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church stressed that the transfer of clean technologies to developing countries is also the responsibility of developed countries, in order to solve the global environmental crisis and to safeguard our common home as humanity.³ The interprovincial experiences within China could be regarded as a reference.

In a recent symposium with business leaders, Xi Jinping launched a new Go West development plan to counter post-coronavirus geopolitical risks and obstacles posted by US-China decoupling.⁴ The idea is to form a new development pattern of a trio with a domestic cycle (国内大循环) between the prosperous eastern China and the less-developed western China as the main body, and the domestic and international cycles mutually promoting one another (国内国际双循环).⁵

A research spanning 13 years from 2003 to 2016 conducted by the Ash Center of Harvard University recently published reveals, although there might be complaints about local governments, Chinese people's overall satisfaction towards the Central Government exceeds 90%. Despite inequality, corruption, pollution, and regional disparities do exist between urban and coastal areas and less developed interior provinces, it is interesting to see that they support the direction the country is going and overall are satisfied with government performance over time. The possible reason analyzed by the researchers is that, for many in China, in their lived experience of the past four decades, their livelihood improves day by day.⁶

2. As Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* speaks of integral ecology, an **integral approach to a new economic system** can be proposed here, taking into

¹ Patrick Whiteley, “The era of prosperity is upon us,” *China Daily*, October 19, 2007.

² Ruicai Lu “Poverty Relief: Achievements in Five Years,” *China Today*, July 3, 2017.

³ Cf.: *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2006), n. 475.

⁴ Fank Tang, “China launches new Go West development drive to counter post-coronavirus geopolitical risks,” *South China Morning Post*, June 22, 2020.

⁵ Bill Bishop, “Xi chairs symposium with business leaders,” *Sinocism*, July 22, 2020.

⁶ Dan Harsha, “Taking China’s pulse,” *The Harvard Gazette*, July 9, 2020.

account the relationship with the environment and ecology, the relationship with the poor and social justice, and the relationship of respect for others and fraternity. **This new paradigm should also integrate economic models from the “chopsticks cultural sphere”⁷, Confucian ethics, and Asian value such as harmony.**

While a Chinese scholar and environmental activist Liao Xiaoyi⁸ rejoices at the encyclical and finds many similarities with the “ecological civilization” that China is promoting in recent years, a preeminent American scholar on process philosophy, John Cobb⁹, believes that China has the conditions and stands a good chance of achieving an ecological civilization.

3. A combination of the **“Targeted Poverty Alleviation Strategy,”** and an age-old practice, instead of **“give a man a fish and he will eat for a day, teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime,”** to achieve poverty alleviation.

The Chinese government officially adopted the Targeted Poverty Alleviation Strategy (精准扶贫) in 2014. In a government report, Premier Li Keqian urges local governments to take targeted measures integrating resources to ensure that assistance reaches poverty-stricken villages and households. Village work teams were sent to targeted area to analyze demand, make development plans and coordinate assistance resources. The government takes measures such as encouraging banks to give microloans to farmers, setting up rural cooperatives allowing farmers to put together their resources to raise production. Statistics shows that starting from 2012 an average of 1.3 million poor people cleared the poverty line per year.¹⁰

China has been putting into practice an age-old saying, “Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime (授人以鱼不如授人以渔).” As administered by a secular government, China has attained remarkable achievement in poverty alleviation. Two years ago, the World Bank data indicates it as unprecedented, China accounting for 70% of the world’s total poverty reduction figure.¹¹ However, amid the economic slow down due to Covid, Premier Li reported recently that 600 million Chinese citizens earn monthly incomes of just 1000 Rmb, and he welcomes the creativeness and the comeback of night market street vendor economies.¹²

⁷ The expression refers to the peoples of Japan, Korea, Vietnam and China with their common characteristics in their way of doing business, and work ethics such as diligence, frugality and high-saving rate.

⁸ Liao Xiaoyi, a former professor of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, founder of an NGO, Global Village of Beijing, in the 2008 earthquake aftermath of China. She proposed a new sustainable living approach and founded many rural communities projects called “Happiness and harmony” Homelands in collaboration with local provincial officials. She is also the recipient of prestigious local and international awards for her contribution to conserving traditional culture and the ecosystem. Cf.: Angela Moriggi, “Chinese Women at the Forefront of Environmental Activism: Wang Yongchen, Liao Xiaoyi and Tian Guirong,” *DEP (Deportate, Esuli e Profughe) Journal*, Issue 35, 2017, p. 206-227.

⁹ Cf.: J.B. Cobb – I. Castuera (eds.), *For our Common Home: Process-Relational Response to Laudato Si’*, 2015, p. i-vi.

¹⁰ South China Morning Post, “Grinding poverty in China – is Xi Jinping’s alleviation campaign making any difference?” March 25, 2018.

¹¹ Xinyong Liu – al., “China Focus: Reform, opening-up create new wonders in human history,” *Xinhua Net*, December 17, 2018

¹² South China Morning Post, “Return of street stalls with Beijing’ s blessing” editorial, June 11, 2020.