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The Confucius Institute in Sofia Organises the 5th
Edition of “The Silk Road” International Conference

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On May 30–31, 2019 Confucius Institute in Sofia organised the 5th edition of “The Silk Road” International conference. The Institute has been organising this conference since 2011 and this year has attracted scientists and researchers from Russia, China, Ukraine, Germany, Armenia and Sudan. The Bulgarian academic community was represented by lecturers from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”, Veliko Tarnovo University “St. Cyril and Methodius”, the New Bulgarian University, the University of National and World Economy and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences who all took part in the conference.

“The Silk Road” conference is named after the famous ancient trans-continental route, connecting Asia, Northeast Africa and Europe, that has become a symbol of the wide range cross-cultural exchange between China and the world. The conference is aimed at bringing together sinologists, orientalist and other specialists, involved in different aspects of Chinese studies, to share new concepts and ideas, and discuss issues related to various fields of sinological research.

The main panels of the conference are as follows: Chinese language and literature – traditions, modernity and perspectives; current trends of Chinese studies in Bulgaria and Bulgarian studies in China; spiritual tradition, philosophy and culture of China – development, influences and interactions; the Silk Road as a link between civilisations – history, archaeology, routes for exchange of material and spiritual values and achievements, economic, social and cultural processes;

contemporary China and the world – social-economic dynamics, domestic policies and international relations, trends, ideas and development perspectives; historical and cultural heritage of China, cultural exchange and tourism; Chinese traditional and contemporary art – features, influences and perspectives; the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the People’s Republic of China and Republic of Bulgaria.

This year’s conference consisted of an opening plenary session, three main plenary sessions in two sections each, as well as a closing plenary session. The conference was open to both the academic community and the general public. The opening and closing plenary sessions were conducted in the main hall of the Confucius Institute and all participants had the opportunity to listen to the lectures. During the opening ceremony, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yang Wu from the School of Chinese Classics in Renmin University of China, presented his lecture “Who is ‘I’ – A Question from Interpreting the Courtship Songs in the Book of Songs” and famous Russian sinologist Prof. Dr. Habil. Alexander Storozhuk from the Saint Petersburg State University presented his lecture “Peculiarities of Pu Song-ling’s prose (on the sample of his short story ‘Wang Liu-lang’).

The three main plenary sessions comprised nearly thirty lectures from different scientists and researchers on five main topics: language and culture; historical traces along the Silk Road; spiritual traditions and culture; diplomatic, cultural and economic relations; and tourism, spiritual and physical culture. Some of the lectures included: “Games and puppets: false reality and pretense in Chinese cartoon representations of world affairs in mid 1930s (presented by Dr. Mariia Guleva from St. Petersburg Polytechnic University and Saint Petersburg State University); “The policy of Han dynasty emperor Wudi and the Silk Road” (presented by Aksinia Koleva, Director of the Confucius Institute in Sofia); “Positioning China as a Tourist Destination: Dynamics and investment in organizing mega events” (presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sonya Alexieva from New Bulgarian University).

Topics related to economy and politics were an essential part of the conference due to the important place China occupies on the world economic and political scene. Some of these lectures included: “China’s presence in the Balkan energy sector” (presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Antonia Habova, University of National and World Economy); “The Sino-Soviet rapprochement – causes of change” (presented by Plamena Koeva, PhD candidate at Sofia University); “China versus India and Japan in Central Asia: contrasting strategies in the light of the region’s new dynamism” (presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Yoneva from the University of National and World Economy).

Topics related to Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism were also well-represented among the presentations as these are the three essential philosophical and religious systems in both ancient and modern China. The lectures included: “Some Remarks on Momentariness in Buddhism” (presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gergana Ruseva from Sofia University); “Daoism as an Art of Living” (Assoc.

Prof. Dr. Antoaneta Nikolova from University of Leipzig); “The Statements of Confucius about Board Games” (presented by Konstantin Bayraktarov from Vocational School ‘Aleko Konstantinov’ in Svishtov), etc.

The closing plenary session consisted of five lectures on different topics, including “‘One Belt and One Road’ Initiative: From China Scheme to World Consensus” (presented by Prof. Dr. He Lan from the Communication University of China); “Traditional Chinese Visualisations of “Dream of the Red Chamber” in Late Qing China” (presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Dmitri Maiatckii from St.Petersburg State University); “Sustainable Education: teaching eastern languages and cultures in 21st century” (presented by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gergana Petkova from Sofia University), etc.

After the end of the “The Silk Road” international conference, Prof. Storozhuk gave two additional lectures at the “Prof. Emil Bonev” hall at the Centre for Eastern Languages and Cultures at Sofia University. The topics of these lectures were “Concepts of Buddhism in Chinese culture” and “Manifestation of Buddhist ideas in Chinese literary works”.

In conclusion, the Confucius Institute in Sofia believes the conference was successful and fruitful. Sinologists and other specialists from different countries had the opportunity to learn new things from each other, discuss various topics in their fields of interest and research, and last but not least, get to know each other and spend some time together both during and after the event.

The 5th edition of “The Silk Road” International conference was part of a series of events to mark the 70th anniversary since the establishment of the diplomatic relations between China and Bulgaria. As an educational and cultural centre at Sofia University, the Institute is making every effort to popularise the Chinese language and culture and deepen the bilateral relations between China and Bulgaria. Thus, a cultural and scientific exchange like the “The Silk Road” International conference holds an important post in this relationship.

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