

# Research on the Role of Esperanto in Cultural Communication Against the Background of the Belt and Road Initiative\*

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**Abstract**—Against the background of the Belt and Road Initiative, difficulties should be overcome to explore feasible ways and new platforms for foreign cultural exchanges. Through the activities of Esperanto meetings at all levels, regular international seminars, academic and cultural exchanges, etc., this paper promotes the integration of the strategic plan of the International Esperanto Association with the Belt and Road Initiative, to make Esperanto play an active role in cultural and economic exchanges.

**Keywords**—*Esperanto; the Belt and Road Initiative; cultural communication*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In September and October, 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping respectively proposed the cooperation initiative for the construction of the “New Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”. The Belt and Road Initiative is the abbreviation of “Silk Road Economic Belt” and “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”. In recent years, China has actively carried out exchanges and cooperation in political, economic and cultural exchanges with countries along the Belt and Road. Efforts should be devoted to achieve peace and development, and create a community of joint interests, destiny and responsibility for political mutual trust, economic integration, and cultural inclusion. The Belt and Road Initiative advocates extensive cultural exchanges and cooperation. It actively promotes academic exchanges and inherits the spirit of friendship and cooperation.

The Belt and Road Initiative advocates peace, friendship, cooperation and exchange. It is also in line with Esperanto, which is also a platform for countries to carry out equal and peaceful cultural exchanges and cooperation. Esperanto is an international language coined by the Polish ophthalmologist Dr. Zamenhof in 1887 on the basis of the Indo-European language. It aims to eliminate language barriers in international exchanges and achieve language equality. It is aimed at equality and neutrality. Esperanto has become the most widely used international language in the world.

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Esperanto is learned and used in more than 150 countries and regions. The people who learn and speak Esperanto are called Esperantist. According to the language learning website “Duolingo”, there are currently 1.17 million people registered to study Esperanto on this website. UNESCO has listed the International Esperanto Association as a UNESCO B-level consultancy and has established the official status of the International Esperanto Association in the United Nations and UNESCO. Because of the neutrality of Esperanto, Esperanto is born with a trans-regional, inter-racial, inter-religious, and inter-ethnic language representing peace. Therefore, in the course of 132 years of its development, Esperanto has made outstanding contributions to the progress of human society in cultural economic and trade exchanges.

## II. SITUATION OF ESPERANTO ACTIVITIES IN COUNTRIES ALONG THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

So far, there are 137 countries that have signed cooperation documents with China to jointly build the Belt and Road, which runs through three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. One side is the active East Asian economic circle, and on the side, the developed European economic circle. In the middle part, there are hinterland countries which have strong economic development potential. Esperanto organizations are also active in most countries and regions along the Belt and Road. Among these countries, Northeast Asia has four countries with active Esperanto organizations: Mongolia, Japan, South Korea, and Russia. The Esperanto movement in Northeast Asia is the most active in Asia compared to Southeast Asia, South Asia and West Asia. As far as culture is concerned, the culture in Northeast Asia has been influenced by Chinese traditional culture since ancient times. This is also conducive to the cultural exchange activities between China and the four countries in Northeast Asia. Esperanto movement is traditional in Central and Eastern Europe. One of the reasons is that Esperanto was born in Poland and spread from Central and Eastern Europe to the world. Therefore, Central and Eastern Europe has a deep Esperanto root. According to a survey of the knowledge of the Belt and Road in 2016, Northeast Asia Esperantists have known the “Silk Road” for

a long time. 59.34% of respondents learned about the Belt and Road Initiative. However, in Central and Eastern Europe, only 4% of respondents did. Up to 76% of respondents learned about this initiative through this survey. However, the two major blocks have a positive attitude towards the prospect of the Belt and Road Initiative.

According to geographical division, Esperanto organizations can be divided into international Esperanto organization –Universal Esperanto Association (UEA), national Esperanto organizations, regional Esperanto organizations and urban Esperanto organizations. There are also Esperanto organizations affiliated with educational institutions such as universities and schools, such as the Esperanto Association at Zaozhuang University in Shandong Province, E-rondeto in the Mazeiku Merkelio Rackausko Gimnazio High School in Lithuania and the Esperanto Club in Srinakharinwirot University in Thailand. Such organizations are organized for the purpose of learning Esperanto. It is worth mentioning that Zaozhuang University set up Esperanto major in 2018. This is the only university in the world to offer Esperanto major. The first 25 students majored in Esperanto will study for four years in this university. In addition, there are also other organizations whose purpose is cultural and economic exchanges, such as the Jinqiao Esperanto Science and Technology Cultural Exchange Center in Gansu, China, and Nagoya Esperanto Centre in Japan.

In line with the openness of the Belt and Road Initiative, Esperanto organizations along the Belt and Road show a high degree of openness which is inevitably brought about by the communication with the language of Esperanto. The vitality demonstrated by the Chinese Esperanto organizations and Esperantists is increasingly drawing attention around the world. Since its establishment in 1985, Tianjin Esperanto Association has been based on the characteristics of Esperanto: without borders. Relying on the Esperantist friends, the association actively carries out activities of foreign cultural exchanges. It has established friendly relations with some cities in Poland, Japan, South Korea, Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc., and has closely interacted with the Esperanto organizations along the Belt and Road. It has been invited to visit foreign Esperanto organizations and meet experts and scholars from various countries for academic exchanges. At the same time, the association has visited relevant enterprises, universities and associations in some countries along the Belt and Road through Esperanto. These cultural exchange activities have achieved great effects on international cultural communications.

### III. CULTURAL EXCHANGE ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY COUNTRIES ALONG THE BELT AND ROAD WITH ESPERANTO AS A PLATFORM

#### A. *Esperanto Conferences at All Levels*

There are many Esperanto conferences around the world. According to the region, there are the International Esperanto Conference, the Continent Esperanto Conferences (such as the Asian Esperanto Conference), the National Esperanto Conferences, and the Esperanto Conferences in various

regions (such as the Three Northeast Provinces and the Inner Mongolia Esperanto Conference); according to the occupation of participants, there are teachers' Esperanto Conference at all levels, the International Railways Workers Esperanto Conference, Chinese Esperanto Merchants Annual Meeting, and so on.

The International Esperanto Conference is also known as the conference without translation. Although the delegates come from different countries, the participants speak only one language - Esperanto. Experts and scholars at the conference exchanged views on various aspects such as the history and current situation of Esperanto movements in various countries as well as the linguistic phenomena in the development of Esperanto through forums, lectures and seminars. The International Esperanto Conference is held in different countries every year to discuss and exchange on different topics. It is a grand gathering of Esperantists all over the world. Annually the Chinese delegation will participate in the International Esperanto Conference. In recent years, Chinese delegation organizes "China Day" at the conference. At this event, the Chinese delegation introduces the Esperanto movement in China and takes the opportunity to show Chinese traditional culture to promote cultural and business exchanges with other countries. For instance, in 2016, the 101st International Esperanto Conference was held in the historical and cultural city of Nitra, Slovakia. During the conference, the "Silk Road · Chinese Skills — China Day" and "Silk Road Hand-painted Long Roll" exhibition series were held. "The Silk Road Hand-painted Long Roll" and the 14-category silk samples provided by the China Silk Archives attracted attention from a large number of conference participants. Delegates from Pakistan, France, South Korea, Japan, Nepal and other countries have actively shown their willingness to exchange and cooperate in the field of silk. The history of Chinese silk is profound, and Chinese sericulture skills have become the intangible cultural heritage. The promotion of the construction and popularization of the World Cultural Heritage knowledge of the Silk Road, and the spread of China's 5,000-year-old Silk Road civilization have not only been recognized by the majority of Esperantists, but will gradually become the consensus of all mankind.

China has successfully hosted two international Esperanto conferences and two Asian Esperanto conferences. In 2016, Quanzhou in Fujian province successfully hosted the 8th Asian Esperanto Conference. The theme of this conference is "How to promote Asian cooperation in Esperanto in the Internet age". Many countries in Asia sent delegations to participate in the conference. They are willing to establish good relations with Chinese Esperantists and are willing to promote business cooperation with each other. At the opening ceremony, Chen Haosu pointed out that President Xi Jinping had proposed the Belt and Road Initiative and hoped to build a "Silk Road Economic Belt" and a "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" between Asian, European and African countries to jointly work to build a community of shared interests, destiny and responsibility featuring mutual political trust, economic integration and cultural inclusiveness, allowing more countries to benefit

from economic and social development through this initiative in which Esperanto is the most appropriate language for equal communication. The Esperantists of all countries should take active actions and bridge the economic, cultural and social development. During the conference, 278 representatives from 21 countries and regions presented the unique role of Esperanto in international cultural integration and civilization through lectures, discussions, teaching demonstrations, Esperanto exams, cultural performances, and walks in Quanzhou. The conference also arranged special activities of “Chinese elements in the Belt and Road” with local characteristics.

Against the background of the Belt and Road Initiative, exchanges and cooperation between Esperantists in the countries along the Belt and Road should be strengthened. The international communication function of Esperanto should be continuously enhanced. Esperanto will be passed on from generation to generation, providing a source of development for the Esperanto movement and contributing to the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative.

### *B. Esperanto Academic Activities*

Esperanto plays a unique role in the fields of academic and cultural communication and international exchanges. Various Esperanto organizations in China are also actively conducting academic and cultural exchange activities through Esperanto. Through the peaceful medium of Esperanto, cultural, scientific, and economic and trade exchanges will help promote the Belt and Road Initiative. In 2015, Beijing Social Science Association organized an Esperanto Forum. The theme of this forum is “Esperanto helps promote the Belt and Road Initiative”. Participants come from different fields, such as the media, the education and the business community. They are from Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Jiangxi, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Inner Mongolia and other places. The contents of the forum include the investigation of the Esperanto organizations in the countries and regions along the Belt and Road, the role of Esperanto organizations, the status and cooperation with Iran in the Belt and Road Initiative, and the implementation of the new model of Esperanto teaching against the background of the Belt and Road, and so on. Wang Tianyi, president of Xi’an Esperanto Association and president of China Esperanto Merchants Association, tells about the cooperation between Iran (the Eden Garden of the Silk Road) and China as well as the situation of Esperanto movements in Iran with his own working experience.

In 2018, Tianjin Esperanto Association organized “Chai Festival” commemorative activities, and held an academic forum. On the forum, the launching ceremony of Esperanto edition Chinese Tea Songs was held. Experts and scholars dedicated to the international communication of Chinese traditional culture gave lessons, such as “How to make a cup of tea”, “Introduction to Chinese Painting History”, and so on. It is the most representative practice of the concept of “tea diplomacy” advocated by President Xi Jinping. According to Wang Xuyu, the author of Chinese Tea Songs, in terms of quality, tea and Esperanto are the same. Both of them imply love, peace, truth, goodness and beauty. In July,

2019, Chinese Tea Songs will be shown at the 104th International Esperanto Conference in Finland.

The world today is moving toward cooperation and integration at an unprecedented rate, and communication and exchanges between countries are more important than ever. The purpose of holding an academic forum is to provide an important platform for communication and discussion between experts and scholars at home and abroad. It is the mission of every Chinese to share Chinese wisdom and help foreigners learn more about Chinese culture.

### *C. Cultural Activities Through Esperanto*

The “Tea and Love” International Microfilm Competition hosted by China Radio International has been successfully held in 2015 and 2017. The microfilms have been continuously shown throughout the world. The “Tea and Love” International Microfilm Competition is based on tea culture and emotional resonance. The visual expression is the carrier. With the international Esperanto community as the center, it has formed cultural exchanges covering 29 countries including the United States, France, Poland, Cuba and Kazakhstan. It is a successful case of media public diplomacy and foreign cultural exchange and communication innovation. This competition uses Esperanto as a platform, “tea” and “love” as the theme, and adopts new media technologies such as microfilms, WeChat and Apple podcasts to conduct international cultural exchange projects. The organizers rely on Esperanto organizations to collect a wide range of entries, and draw nearly 50 pieces of work from 20 countries on four continents, of which 2/3 are produced in Esperanto. The Grand Prize Winners, the First Prize Winners and the 2 Second Prize Winners from 29 countries were invited to China to participate in the event held in Zhejiang Province and this is the first Chinese trip for most of them.

The President of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Christine Lagarde once said that tea is the carrier that best represents the spirit of the Belt and Road Initiative and is an important medium for the countries along the Belt and Road to know each other. She said, for hundreds of years, tea has brought different cultures, groups and people closer together. Lagarde emphasized that the Belt and Road Initiative is like Chinese tea, which originated in China and benefited the world. The “Tea and Love” International Microfilm Competition is also issued in China and belongs to the world.

### *D. Cultural Exchange Activities Organized by Individual Esperantist*

Those who learn and use Esperanto are called Esperantists. In addition to participating in various Esperanto meetings and activities, Esperantists will also spread Esperanto through personal efforts and cultural exchanges with Esperantists in other countries. They also make important contributions to the cultural exchanges of the people. Chinese Esperanto Huang Yinbao is a lifetime member of the International Esperanto Association, editor of Esperanto edition of UNESCO magazine *Courier*. He founded the Jinqiao Esperanto Science and Technology

Cultural Exchange Center. In 2016 he was invited to work at the International Esperanto Association headquarters in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. During this time, he made recommendations to the International Esperanto Association's publication *Esperanto* to use the monkey zodiac in the cover of one issue of the publication. For the first time in 110 years, the publication used the Chinese traditional monkey zodiac as the cover design, and published his article *La Novigoj en Simia Jaro* (Changes in the Year of the Monkey), detailing the Chinese Zodiac, effectively spreading Chinese culture. In 2016, Huang Yinbao made a proposal to the International Esperanto Association to create the Esperanto edition of the magazine *Courier*, using this magazine as a platform to facilitate the exchange of science and technology and culture among countries. The International Esperanto Association accepted his advice and authorized him to be responsible for the translation, editing, proofreading and publishing of the magazine. The first issue was shown in the 102nd International Esperanto Conference in Seoul, Korea in 2017. It was highly praised by the representatives of various countries.

Like Esperanto, music is without border. Jozef Haazen is currently the best master of the carillon in the world. He is not only a musician, but also an outstanding master of languages. He can speak 7 languages: Dutch, French, English, German, Russian, Chinese, and is an internationally famous Esperantist. Born in 1944 in Hasting, the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, his native language is Dutch, and his second language is not the main language of French—the three official languages of Belgium (French, German, Dutch), but Esperanto. For a long time, he has insisted on speaking in Esperanto on many important occasions, hoping to let more people learn about the language he loves. In 2018, in the ancient clock museum of Dazhongsi Temple in Beijing, the "Russian Bell Tower Picture Art Exhibition" was grandly opened. At the opening ceremony, he insisted on speaking in Esperanto. He hoped that more people would understand the carillon culture he loved through his favorite language. After attending the exhibition, he visited the Chinese Esperanto Association. When visiting Beijing Language University, he took a vivid course for the students with a musical approach. Then he arrived at Zaozhuang University to visit Asia's largest Esperanto Museum, through a wealth of exhibits, he got a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Esperanto movement in China and the efforts of the Chinese Esperantists. In Zaozhuang Esperanto Forest Park, he planted three trees, which are the "Green Star" tree of the Belgian Royal Antwerp Esperanto Association, and the "Carillon" tree of the St. Petersburg Esperanto Association in Russia, the "friendship" tree of the friendship between China, Belgium and Russia. These activities have made due contributions to the promotion of Chinese and foreign cultural exchanges.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

"For thousands of years, the Silk Road Spirit 'peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit' has been passed from generation to generation, promoted the progress of human civilization, and

contributed greatly to the prosperity and development of the countries along the Silk Road. Symbolizing communication and cooperation between the East and the West, the Silk Road Spirit is a historic and cultural heritage shared by all countries around the world." The inner ideals implied in Esperanto fit in with the spirit of the Silk Road, which is "peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit". Today Esperanto organizations are spread across the countries along the Belt and Road. They made contributions for peace and friendship among people from different countries through various Esperanto cultural, economic and trade exchanges and other activities. Esperanto is a language that pursues peace, friendship and mutual understanding, and carries the common ideal of human equality and unity. Esperanto has built a bridge of friendship between the countries of the world, promoting exchanges between people of all countries, enhancing mutual understanding, and jointly promoting economic prosperity and development, and social civilization and progress.

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