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**Prof. XU Jialu Speech**

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## Inauguration Ceremony of the World Ethics Institute at Peking University

*Professor XU  
Jialu*

29. Oktober 2012

Your Excellency President Zhou Qifeng, Minister Hao Ping, Ambassador Michael Schaefer, Professor Hans Küng, Professor Engler, Professor Schlecht, Professor Tang Yijie, Professor Fan Zeng, Professor Tu Weiming, Professor Justin Lin,

First, allow me to extend my hearty thanks to President Zhou Qifeng and Professor Tu Weiming for inviting me to the inauguration ceremony of the World Ethics Institute. Peking University has made a wise decision to found the World Ethics Institute. This move is an apt answer to the age and goes far beyond worldly opinions. Hence, it is my great honor to witness the birth of the first World Ethics Institute in China, where extensive research will be conducted and international communication will be maintained.

At present, more and more people are conscious of and anxious about the unprecedented environmental and social crisis that mankind is faced with. Unfortunately, few have proffered a proposal to save the earth up to now. Several reasons may account for this phenomenon: some people fail to lose their glasses of “profit” when working on pressing issues such as the plan and adoption of clean sources and low-carbon lifestyle. As a result, I am afraid to say, they cannot solve our survival problem by getting at its root. Others believe that mere financial aid is sufficient to erase the painful memory of early commercial and cultural colonization. Apparently, this may not succeed either. For the majority of people, the solution to social crisis lies in economic rules of the market. However, based on current facts, this way has proved hardly effective. And still some people are dazed by the nightmarish reality and complex situation of human civilization. They thus find it difficult to build up their confidence for the future.

Here, I would like to refer to the ideas propounded by the philosophy Professor Michael J. Sandel from Harvard University. In his work *What Money Can't Buy* as well as in many speeches, Professor Sandel addresses a social reality that has become global today and says: “In our age, money trumps all. Almost everything can be labeled with a price tag and sold

on the market”. “Once monetary dealings corrupt moral duties, the old sense of responsibility will be hard to revive”. The prescription he writes for the world’s future is that we should stop whining and “construct a sound system for public debate”. Therefore, “not only can we pin down the proper role of markets in a democratic society, but also strengthen the role of public debate in more social affairs in the long term”.

Professor Sandel harshly points out the cruel fact that lies in front of us, which is, to put it in a nutshell, the traditional culture of different civilizations, particularly the ethical good, is hanging on a thin thread under the crush of materialism and Mammon-worship. The so-called “monetary thinking” in his speeches has sadly become the universal mainstream culture. Under such severe situation, whether Professor Sandel’s theory of a public debate system will achieve his desired effects remains to be tested in practice. At all events, “debate” is indeed beneficial to our present world.

Modern technology has improved our material conditions beyond limits. However, the problems it creates, including those caused by financial techniques—which perhaps can be considered as the negative side of technological development—cannot be solved by technology itself. Nevertheless, this is not an abstruse philosophical issue. Besides, different problems naturally require different approaches to tackle. In other words, the appropriate method should be based on the nature and features of the subject matter. As to ethical issues, it is incumbent on humanities such as sociology, philosophy (including ethics), and religious studies to contribute their insights and expertise.

In recent years, some scholars, both in the West and the East, have already called for close examination of world ethical issues. Prof. Hans Küng and Mr. Tu Weiming, who are present with us at this meeting, are two active participants in this movement. How can we make world ethics a central concern and field of practice for the bulk of mankind? Against this background, we should resort to Professor Sandel’s proposal of “sound public debate”. In fact, it is the same in essence with Professor Habermas’ theory of “public communication” and “public negotiation”. As far as I am concerned, theoretically, they are not merely referring to domestic legislation or community construction.

Persistent and deepening research, communication and publication about world ethics will lessen people’s material desires and awake their will to reconstruct a spiritual world for all human beings. This will be the first step to reverse the current situation of moral vacuum. Social elites and intellectuals from different nations should shoulder the responsibility of pioneers in this historic movement.

Gratefully, the World Ethics Institute is established at this juncture. I’d like to extend my hearty congratulations to this monumental event and truly hope that it will illuminate the future road for the stray lambs.