



# East-West Dialogue

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*Edited by*

LUJUN CHEN

KARL-HEINZ POHL



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Lujun Chen · Karl-Heinz Pohl  
Editors

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ISBN 978-981-19-8056-5

ISBN 978-981-19-8057-2 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2>

Jointly published with Dolphin Books Co., Ltd.

The print edition is not for sale in China (Mainland). Customers from China (Mainland) please order the print book from: Dolphin Books Co., Ltd.

0th edition: © Dolphin Books Co., Ltd. 2023

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd.

The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

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## PREFACE

From time immemorial, intellectual curiosity has been an inherent human trait. People pondered about the things around them, emotions and virtues and their own conduct. In the Western civilization, these coalesced into “the three philosophical questions”: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? In the Chinese civilization, they became self-introspection. In the *Analects of Confucius*, we are told Zengzi, a follower of Confucius, asked himself three questions daily to assess if his conduct had been honest and moral: “Have I been true to other people’s interests when acting on their behalf? Have I been sincere in my interactions with friends? Have I practiced what I have been taught?” In the West, Plato asked his mentor Socrates what love was, while in the East, Yan Yuan, another disciple of Confucius, asked his master what benevolence was. It is this intellectual curiosity that led humans to explore nature, pursue the truth, introspect and improve.

Today, the world is once again at the crossroads of history following a once-in-a-century pandemic and major changes unseen in a century. To focus on the positive interactions between China and the rest of the world, China News Service, the second largest state news agency in China, started a new column at the end of 2020, *W.E. Talk*, which exclusively interviewed more than 800 scientists, scholars, politicians, entrepreneurs and other opinion makers for an authentic and unprejudiced perspective on the major—and sometimes sensitive—issues between China and the

West. The objective was to promote exchange and mutual learning among civilizations.

In the eyes of many Western scholars, historical China and contemporary China are two separate entities. They don't deny the achievements of historical China, but they don't think that contemporary China is rooted in the lauded traditions of the Chinese civilization. But if you view China through a historical filter and try to deconstruct Chinese history without understanding how socialism with Chinese characteristics has created a new form of civilization, inevitably you will not get a comprehensive view.

In his dialogue with Japanese philosopher Daisaku Ikeda, British historian Arnold J. Toynbee made a prediction for the twenty first century: "The future of mankind lies in the East, and Chinese civilization will lead the world." As the civilization dominated by the West for 500 years undergoes profound changes, facts prove that China's re-rise is the most significant of them all. We hope this book, which contains select interviews from *W.E. Talk* that have been described by the media and academia as "a forward-looking and valuable exploration," will provide food for thought and help to build a platform for equal dialogue and mutual learning among civilizations. We welcome comments, criticism and insights.

*W.E. Talk* Editorial Department, China News Service, Beijing

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**Lujun Chen** born in January 1970, is a senior editor. Since November 2019, he has been the president of China News Service. He has won China News Awards several times and entered the list of China's Cultural Figures i.e. "Four Batches of Top Experts" released by the Publicity Department.

**Karl-Heinz Pohl** a renowned German sinologist, taught at the University of Trier in Germany until his retirement in 2010. He was the dean of the Faculty of Literature and Media at the university and head of its Department of Sinology, as well as a former professor of Chinese literature and philosophy at the University of Tübingen. His research interests include the history of Chinese philosophy, ethics and modern Chinese aesthetics and cross-cultural communication and dialogue between China and the West. He is the author of several monographs such as *Chinese Aesthetics and Literary Theory (in German and Chinese translation)*, *Chinese Thought in a Global Context, Intercultural Dialogue with China (in Chinese)*, and *Discovering China: Tradition and Modernity (in German and Chinese translation)*. Prof. Pohl translated *Peach Blossom Spring—The Poetry of Tao Yuanming* and eminent philosopher Li Zehou's *The Path of Beauty* into German.

PART I

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# Mutual Learning Among Civilizations



## CHAPTER 1

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# Western Individualism and Eastern Collectivism from a Transcultural Perspective

*Léon Vandermeersch*

French sinologist Léon Vandermeersch, called “the most respected sinologist” by one of the foremost Chinese scholars on philosophy and Chinese studies, Tang Yijie, was a former director of the French School of the Far East in Paris. He is known for integrating French, Chinese and Japanese Sinology to create transcultural Chinese studies. A scholar whose studies ranged from the social systems in ancient China and the history of Chinese philosophy to the development of Confucianism in modern times, he also explored the connections between cultural history and modern society in Asia, revealing the particularity and universality of Chinese culture from a transcultural perspective. Vandermeersch, who passed away in 2021 at the age of 93, was the author of several books on China.

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L. Vandermeersch (✉)  
Beijing, China





Léon Vandermeersch

**In May 2021, Vandermeersch's complete works were released in 10 volumes at an international conference on transcultural Chinese studies held in Beijing. This article is from his writings, comparing the Eastern and the Western cultures.**

From a transcultural perspective, what are the differences between the Eastern and the Western cultural values? Is there any complementarity between the two? How do we view the individualism of the West and the collectivism of the East? How can the Eastern and the Western societies realize their own problems by going through the experience of the other?

People know about the influence of the Greco-Roman culture on the world but overlook the extensive influence of the Chinese culture. The Western world should pay attention to the universal significance of China's collectivist culture that enabled the Chinese to adopt coordinated strategies in difficult times, and to be inclusive in times of prosperity.

## NO CULTURAL VALUE SHOULD BE PUSHED TO THE EXTREME

Humanism in the West is based on theology derived from Judaism, Christianity and Platonism, and the Western theological tradition evolved from the philosophy of the 13th-century Italian theologian Thomas Aquinas. In the East, especially in China, humanism sees man as a part of the universe like nature. Therefore, traditional Chinese culture conceives of a “unity of man and universe.” This is a fundamental difference between the Eastern and the Western cultures, which have different values and different understandings of human beings.

Equality is an important concept in Western humanism. Theoretically, everyone recognizes the concept of equality and uses it as a means to promote human rights; however, in reality, we all know that absolute equality does not exist and is subject to many subjective and objective conditions. Such equality in theory and inequality in reality is universal.

In the West, the concepts of equality and human rights have fostered individualism: Individual interest is more important than the collective interest. The proliferation of individualism has led to a general crisis in Western society—a crisis of “sociality”: Each individual has been given unlimited freedom, resulting in the destruction of social bonds and the social spirit. In China, too, we see a certain ideological flaw, as depicted in the 20th-century Chinese writer Ba Jin’s *Home*, a novel about four generations of a family whose life is a metaphor for the clash between the Old China and the forces of change that would usher in the New China. The individual is bound by family and social constraints, which is an Eastern problem.

I believe that the values of each culture are good and deserve respect. Both Western individualism and Eastern collectivism have their merits, which should be inherited, but those values should not be taken to the extreme or be distorted. No matter how great a value is, if pushed to the extreme or distorted, it will have many fallouts.

## WESTERN “DEMOCRACY” IS NOT ENOUGH TO RESOLVE ALL OUR PROBLEMS

The Western understanding of society has changed. For the 17th-century British political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, “Man is a wolf to man,” that is, men have the ability to act inhumanly toward other men. What

regulates the relationship between man and man is interest, and not the ethical principle of “fraternity” or “love for others” that is preached by Christianity.

Hobbes’s thinking was the opposite of that of the 4th-century BC Chinese philosopher Mencius. In Mencius’s view, “Man’s nature is good at birth.” If you see a baby fall into a well, you will instinctively try to save it, which is a sign of man’s inherent good nature. In Hobbes’s view, however, people are not born with such good nature, which develops only with the pursuit of personal interests. Therefore, society can rely only on interests, not on compassion, mercy or goodness. Hobbes advocated the establishment of an enlightened monarchy: A society should have an authority, and the executor of this authority should be an enlightened monarch. Individuals should yield their natural rights to this authority, and only absolute authority can guarantee the implementation of the social contract.

Hobbes’s political thought was later criticized by many, the 18th-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau being one of them. In Rousseau’s view, the social contract was not a transfer of natural rights from the individual to the authority, but a transfer of all individual rights to the collective. Rousseau did not deny the existence of individual interests (“All are guided by a consideration of what is in their private interest”), but the common good could bring all individuals together into a moral community, forming a public personality. In this way, the social contract established an equal identity among citizens, all of whom were subject to the same conditions and enjoyed the same rights. After the French Revolution, European society began a long process of democracy-building.

Western democratic thought is somewhat antithetical to the Chinese thought that focuses on harmony, where collective interests take precedence over individual interests. The Chinese believe this is the only way to achieve general social harmony whereas in the Western democratic process, we see the protection of individual interests, where everyone has to protect his or her own interests, which is the norm in Western democratic societies, and this of course gives rise to the supremacy of individual interests.

Why is there a crisis of democracy in Western societies now? It is because of the habit of treating democracy as the highest value, but democracy is not enough to solve all the problems that we are encountering today, such as the distribution of resources and environmental

protection. Every country and every company have their own interests, and when it comes to problems, they will fight to protect their own interests. For example, how could the 2008 financial crisis occur after so many years of democracy in the West? This shows that democracy is not sufficient to control and regulate the factors of crisis in the financial sector.

Some Western scholars, such as French sociologist Pierre Rosanvallon, have argued that today's society is fundamentally different from the 18th-century society, so the democratic system created in that era is no longer appropriate today. It is a question of how to respect democratic values and at the same time resolve the problems that our society faces.

### CHINA'S COLLECTIVISM CAN BE A REFERENCE FOR THE WEST

Western democracy is parliamentary democracy, where elected representatives make the laws. However, today parliamentary or representative democracy is in crisis, as manifested in the crisis of party politics.

Party politics is ostensibly about defending public interests, but in reality, it is a fight for power through a democratic process. In this respect, I think China has a different tradition. Chinese collectivism, or the idea of collectivity, may have some reference value for the West. When comparing the Eastern and Western societies, it is meaningless to say which is better or worse. All societies are imperfect and flawed, and we are so caught up in our own traditions that we do not see our own problems and shortcomings. We need to learn from the experience of others to see our own problems and correct our own shortcomings.

In the Western democracies, people think all problems can be solved by the democratic system. Satisfying desire is also seen as a humanist value in democracy. But this is a misunderstanding that leads individuals to constantly pursue the gratification of their own desires. The consequence is that people have no self-discipline.

Regarding desire and self-discipline, I would like to quote John Mill, the 19th-century British liberal thinker, who said, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." There is also Gresham's Law, the expression coined by British economist Henry Dunning Macleod, which says "Bad money drives out good." The same danger exists in the case of values. Many people do not take the good values of the West to complement

or modify their own culture; instead, they take the wrong or negative things of the West to drive their own ends. I think that when one looks at another culture, one has a tendency, or perhaps a defect, to look at the strange and curious things in that culture, without seeing its true value, and consequently thinking that one's own culture is superior. This is a misconception that comes from comparing what is good in one's own culture with what is odd and strange in other cultures.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# To Understand China's Success, First Understand Chinese Civilization

*Martin Jacques*

Martin Jacques is a British journalist, editor, academic, political commentator, author and China expert. Since 2013, he has been a senior fellow at the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge. His book *When China Rules the World*, published in 2009, is a phenomenal bestseller that has been translated into 15 languages so far.

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© Dolphin Books Co., Ltd. 2023  
L. Chen and K.-H. Pohl (eds.), *East-West Dialogue*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_2)



Martin Jacques

**According to Martin Jacques, to understand the success of China's development, we must understand the Chinese civilization since China is not just a nation-state, but a civilization-state, with many of its thoughts deeply rooted in Confucianism. Westerners have been brought up to essentially believe that their way of doing things is an exemplar for the rest of the world. One fallacy of that is failing to understand how human rights operate in China.**

**CNS:** Is the success of China rooted in its political system or in its unique political leadership?

**Martin Jacques:** I don't think either of those actually explain China's success. I would say China's rise is also associated with its historical performance over a very long time. You have got to ask deeper questions like what it is about Chinese culture and Chinese society that has enabled this to happen.

We should keep in mind American political scientist Yoshihiro Francis Fukuyama's theory on China's political system, in which he states that China displays more continuity than any other country in the world. In other words, if you trace the underlying characteristics of the governing system in China, it's remained surprisingly, or maybe predictably, very similar since the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BC). The Communist Party of China (CPC) has been the governing force in China since 1949. But even during this period, you can still see these very powerful lines of continuity with the imperial period, the dynastic period of China.

Now, on the question, specifically, I think that you obviously need a very good political leadership. And I think China has had an extremely good political leadership over a long period. Mao Zedong recreated China, reconstituted China and that paved the way for the developments that have happened since then. Then you have Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China's reform and opening-up. Deng, in my view, was an extraordinary leader who understood that China needed a very different kind of economic and political strategy. He had a remarkable impact on China and the rest of the world.

China's system worked extremely well by creating an extremely capable governing class and leadership. Starting from 1978, when the reform started, to the present, it's extraordinary what they have managed to do by any historical standards. And for a party to be extraordinarily successful, like the CPC, it has to keep reinventing itself. It's been very good at this so far. The Chinese leadership has way outperformed the American leadership in this regard.

**CNS:** U.S. President Joe Biden said that the mission of the U.S. troops in Afghanistan was not nation-building, but the CPC has been all about nation-building to prevent China from becoming a battlefield of warlords once again. Do you think it is the role of the CPC that makes China so different, especially if you compare China with any of its regional neighbors?

**Martin Jacques:** I think that's obviously very important but I don't think that's the only reason. China has had a very long existence. True it's been divided at times, very important times, but the extraordinary thing about China is that it's huge and it stayed together. This is an extraordinary historical fact about China. To me, this is about leadership, but it's also about the culture.

In this era, there's no question that the CPC has been extraordinary. And there's no question in my mind that this era is probably the best era China's ever had in its history. But you know, it stands on the shoulders of a long history. And I think the achievement of the CPC lies in its efforts to find a way of governing China, of relating to the history of China.

It is also attributed to the characteristics of the Chinese civilization, because China is not just a nation-state, it's a civilization-state. If you don't understand that, you don't really understand anything about China.

**CNS:** How do you look at the misunderstandings about China's fight against the coronavirus?



**Martin Jacques:** When it comes to the pandemic, the first external reaction was to condemn China. It was really a shameful exercise of diversion and distraction.

Then how did China succeed so well? First, the government had a very good and clear strategy. Second, there was a very powerful tradition and sense of social cohesion and solidarity among the Chinese, something that is never discussed in the West. It goes back to Confucius and runs deep in the Chinese. That's why they did so well. And that's why the United States, for example, did so badly, because you know they don't have that sort of concept.

**CNS:** Confucianism and the role of the nation in the Chinese context are quite different from the concept in Europe. Does the West need more background knowledge to understand China in this sense?

**Martin Jacques:** I would say the West does not understand China, it makes precious little attempt to try to understand China. It tries to understand China in the present context but doesn't attempt a deeper understanding because Westerners have been brought up to essentially believe that their way of doing things is an exemplar for the rest of the world and the Western paradigm is superior to all others.

Take a really controversial issue as an example, like human rights. There's really no serious attempt in the West to understand how human rights operate in China. For the West, there's simply a totally different tradition and this really goes back a long time, probably to the time of Confucius. In Confucianism, the individual is not taken as the center. It stresses the concept of the group. The individual has meaning only in the context of the group and society. This is utterly different. It is the opposite in the United States. It is not completely opposite to European countries, but it's very different, still.

I think most of the argument circles around this issue of projecting a Western way of thinking onto China. That means they don't really need to understand China. They just want China to "do like us."

**CNS:** Why did the White House and U.S. politicians attack China on the origin of COVID-19, weaponizing it as a tool to attack China? Was it about science and real research or was it only rhetoric?

**Martin Jacques:** I think it was an attempted diversion. They needed to cover up the fact that they performed so abysmally. This was an international relations crisis for the West; they really had no shots in the locker except perhaps to go back to the question about the origin of the virus. I

think it's truly pathetic the way Western governments and media handled it, not all of them, but too many of them played this game.

I think from this period of history you've got to draw the conclusion that Western governance is in big trouble. It was a straightforward test of governance and the West failed. So the consequence is that the West can no longer easily boast about itself.

**CNS:** What's your opinion on the CPC completing its centenary in 2021? What role has it played in the Chinese rejuvenation?

**Martin Jacques:** This is the achievement of all Chinese. Everyone in China has contributed to this. But of course, to do something like this you need an extremely good political leadership. And the CPC has been a remarkable leader. To go from where they were in 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded, or in 1978, when the reform started, to where they are now is incredible. In the modern period at least, the CPC is the most successful political party in the world. I think communist parties have been getting bogged down, losing their way, and eventually disintegrating, which happened in the Soviet Union. But the CPC has been extraordinarily good at reinventing itself and regenerating itself and thereby, also reinventing China. There are no guarantees in political leadership. You have to keep moving with the times and always anticipate the possibilities. Of course, the Chinese culture is very good at this and the CPC has inherited that way of thinking ahead.

Deng Xiaoping made great reforms. Subsequently many people thought they were like Westernization. On the contrary, it was not Westernization. They created a system which was new, different, unique and remarkably successful. They helped China integrate with the world. It was a confident way of thinking because when you opened up you were competing with the capitalist world, which was richer and better educated at the time.

**CNS:** What's your take on China's common prosperity vision?

**Martin Jacques:** I think this is a very interesting development that is confounding Western thinking. They're not sure what to make of it because they're so congenitally sinophobic at the moment. The initial reflex action is to be negative about it. But the problems that China is confronted with, in this context, are exactly the same problems the West is confronted with.

Take the question of inequality, for example. Inequality is a huge problem in the United States, but also more or less everywhere in Europe.

It's grown steadily in the neoliberal era since 1980. And so China is trying to find ways to tackle it and confront it. This problem really needs to be addressed and it really needs solutions.

(Interviewed by Peng Dawei)

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## CHAPTER 3

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# Is There a Clash of Civilizations?

*Michael Szonyi*

Michael Szonyi, a renowned social historian of late imperial and modern China, was a faculty director of the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University and is currently Frank Wen-hsiung Wu Professor of Chinese history at the university. His books include *The Art of Being Governed: Everyday Politics in Late Imperial China*, *Practicing Kinship* and *Cold War Island: Quemoy on the Front Line*.

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© Dolphin Books Co., Ltd. 2023  
L. Chen and K.-H. Pohl (eds.), *East-West Dialogue*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_3)



Michael Szonyi

**Michael Szonyi talks about his relationship with China, disagreeing with American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” theory that predicts in the future wars would be fought between cultures, not just countries. Szonyi’s argument is that the East and West share more similarities than differences: “What we share as human beings vastly exceeds what distinguishes us and what differentiates us because of where we happened to be born.”**

**CNS:** As a Canadian, how did you develop an interest in China and decide to pursue a career in Chinese studies?

**Michael Szonyi:** I first became interested in China in the early 80s, when I was just a teenager. After I finished high school, I was looking for an opportunity to do something more interesting than go directly to university. I sent literally hundreds of letters looking for something interesting to do in a foreign country. To my good fortune, I got a job to teach English in Wuhan in central China. So I traveled there at the age of 17 and lived there for several months. It was just the beginning of China’s reform and opening up. There was such an extraordinary eruption of energy at that time and I became fascinated.

At that time, I didn’t know any Chinese, but somehow, I was able to travel all over China using different kinds of transportation, hiking, hitch-hiking and sometimes in the back of trucks. It was a fascinating time and I became very interested in watching this country develop and transform. When I returned to Canada to go to university, I started to study Chinese and eventually decided to be a China historian.

Initially, I hadn't deliberately planned to pursue a career in Chinese studies. I was just extraordinarily lucky that I became interested in China in an interesting time and the opportunities really grew from there.

**CNS:** In a previous interview you mentioned that the most intellectual experience you had during your Ph.D. years was collecting materials for your research in the southeastern coastal province of Fujian. Why was it important?

**Michael Szonyi:** I went to a village in Fujian and briefly lived in the village hall dedicated to ancestors, and then with a farmer's family. From a professional perspective, this experience made me realize how important it is to go to the places where history actually happened. Historians usually do their work in the library or in the archives. If we go to the places where history actually happened, we get a very different understanding of how it really developed. This knowledge has guided my historical work ever since.

At a personal level, if you live in a village, eat with the villagers and share the evenings with them, inevitably you learn a great deal just through casual conversations with them about their concerns, their interests and the challenges they face. It had a profound influence on me as an individual and deepened my interest in both historical and contemporary China. It was truly an unforgettable phase of my life.

**CNS:** When studying a historical problem, you said you like to use micro-historical experiences in order to explore macro-historical questions. What are the characteristics of the Chinese historically? How are they different from the West's?

**Michael Szonyi:** Most histories were told from the perspectives of the elite or states. We get a very different sense of history when ordinary people are the sources. This has always motivated me to work with a micro-historical approach. The essence of history is making sense of how people made decisions in a context different from the one we live in and understanding the differences. When we think about it this way, I don't really see much historical difference between the Chinese and the West. I think people in our two societies shared a humanity above all. This is why history is interesting. When we read about people living in China long ago, when people in China read about people living in Europe long ago, when we read about people who live in different societies today, we can actually see the similarities.

My book *The Art of Being Governed: Everyday Politics in Late Imperial China*, is a study of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). At that time, there was something called the *junbu* system—that some families had a hereditary obligation to provide a male member each to serve in the army. Not everyone had to be a soldier but every *junbu* household had to provide a male member. We can think of this military service as a kind of tax. The *junbus* were willing to pay this tax but they wanted the allocation of the tax to be fair. I think that’s pretty much how I think about tax. I don’t want to pay more tax than I have to and I want the taxing to be fair and I want to know how much tax I need to pay. The tax I pay to the U.S. Government today is very different from the service the soldiers provided to the Ming Dynasty but I think the way they tackled their problems is very similar. We may use different languages or different tools to address these problems, but ultimately, theirs and my problems are the same problems.

Both our civilizations and societies are shaped by tradition, but the way tradition shapes our lives and affects our choices is not automatic. Our choices are not dictated by the inheritance of tradition. I keep coming back to this basic point that what we share as human beings vastly exceeds what distinguishes us and what differentiates us because of where we happened to be born.

**CNS:** Huntington argued that the clash of civilizations would be the primary source of conflict in the future. Do you think there is a clash of civilizations between the East and the West?

**Michael Szonyi:** A simple answer, no. I think the notion of a clash of civilizations is meaningless. With due respect to Professor Huntington, who was a great scholar, I think the whole idea rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of how society works. There is conflict in human societies to be sure, but the evidence is simply not there for the idea that civilizations want different things. For one thing, civilizations don’t speak or act with one voice. Huntington identified a number of clashes. One was the clash between Islam and the West. There is certainly tension between certain Islamic groups and the United States, but I don’t think you can say every Muslim in the world is in conflict with the values of the United States.

I have devoted my professional life to help improve the understanding of China in the U.S. and the English-speaking world. I work at Harvard with very bright students and all these different types of students are

able to gain a strong understanding of China, which proves there is no fundamental obstacle to understanding China. But this is a very optimistic account of human nature. Part of the story is that people are also afraid of things they don't know well and sometimes have negative reactions. But I think when people meet, they figure things out. I'm a great advocate and supporter of people-to-people diplomacy.

I work with young people. One thing I encourage them to do is to go to China so that they get a better understanding of China and the Chinese. Another thing is, if they go to China and then return to America and decades later become leaders in business, politics or media, I hope that kind of experience will allow us to avoid the continuing deterioration of relationships. Person-to-person relationships are valuable in the present and essential for development in the future.

**CNS:** American historian John Fairbank, an esteemed China expert, played a critical role in educating the American public about China and the Fairbank Center is named after him. As a leading Chinese studies center, what kind of role can it play in deepening understanding between the U.S. and China?

**Michael Szonyi:** We can work with experts in various fields, in the corporate sector and the tech sector, to help them better understand the situation in China. At this moment, our most important task is to persuade the government that students seeking knowledge is a good thing. Whatever happens to the U.S.-China relationship, knowing more about China is good for America and knowing more about America is good for China. We play a second role as neutral, scientific and objective observers of each other's society. When American scholars talk about China, they do so not on behalf of the government, but based on their scholarship, based on what they think is right. I think this really needs to be understood by both sides.

Right now what we, the Fairbank Center and many other Chinese studies centers around America, are facing worries me a great deal. Many people in China feel we represent American Government interests. What makes this especially difficult is that now many people in the U.S. also think that we have been influenced or penetrated by the Chinese Government, so what we are doing is actually representing Chinese views.

**CNS:** U.S.-China relations are at a critical stage. The U.S. recently rejected hundreds of Chinese students' visa applications, including to study in Harvard. What is your opinion on this?



**Michael Szonyi:** We are at a very critical stage vis-a-vis education in both countries. Educational exchanges have been disrupted on both sides. For China it is primarily because of its ways of fighting COVID-19, for the U.S. it is due to security reasons. It is obvious that the U.S. needs to do a better job of managing intellectual property and sensitive technologies. To me it is also obvious that they are doing it wrong right now. Targeting Chinese visitors because they're Chinese, because of their connection to the CPC, because of their past experience, is the wrong thing to do.

We want the relations between our two countries to improve. We have common interests in battling climate change and enhancing economic prosperity for all. We have to figure out ways to improve the relationship and I think education certainly has a role to play.

(Interviewed by Sha Hanting)

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## CHAPTER 4

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# The Latin Bridge Between Chinese and Western Dialogue

*Leopold Leeb*

Austrian sinologist Leopold Leeb came to China in 1995 to do his doctoral research in philosophy. After receiving his doctorate from Peking University in 1999, he worked as a translator and researcher at the Institute of World Religions under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences till 2004. His research interests include Western classical languages, ancient and medieval literature, philosophy and religion. His major publications include *Zhang Heng, Science and Religion* and several Latin textbooks and dictionaries.

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© Dolphin Books Co., Ltd. 2023  
L. Chen and K.-H. Pohl (eds.), *East-West Dialogue*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_4)



Leopold Leeb

The dialogue between Latin and Chinese has a long history. The earliest teaching of Latin in China dates back to the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), when Italian missionary Giovanni da Montecorvino arrived in Yuan Dadu, today’s Beijing, in 1294 and began to teach Latin to 40 boys. Four hundred years ago, another Italian missionary Matteo Ricci began to translate the *Four Books*, the four classic Confucian texts, into Latin, and for the first time transcribed Chinese characters in Latin, which pioneered pinyin, the system of writing Chinese using the English alphabet. The seventeenth century saw a large number of Latin-Chinese translations, which led to the introduction of advanced Western science and technologies into China.

### LATIN AND CHINESE, AN AMAZING RELATIONSHIP

A few years ago, I wrote a comprehensive account of the introduction of Latin into China, including the early cultural exchanges, academic translations and the creation of new words in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. I also mentioned the Latin learners in China, from the earliest ones, such as Luo Wenzao (1615–1691) from Fujian Province and Zheng Manuo (1633–1673) from Guangdong Province, to those in the early twentieth century. I also touched upon the Chinese literati’s interest in classics at the end of the twentieth century, Latin schools in China,

as well as the writing and publication of Latin textbooks and bilingual dictionaries in China.

The relationship between Latin and Chinese is truly amazing. Few people know that the ancient Chinese word *lao* (酪), meaning “cheese,” was pronounced LAK, and the Latin for milk is *lac*. *Luobo* (萝卜), the Chinese word for “radish,” also reminds me of the Latin word for it, *rapum*.

Latin and ancient Chinese are both ancient languages, dating back more than two thousand years, and well preserved in many documents. When compared with ancient Greek, ancient Hebrew and ancient Chinese, Latin is regarded as the most modern ancient language because its vocabulary contains many modern words, such as “republic,” “suffrage,” “civil law” and “international law,” which were used by the ancient Romans. The Romans wrote textbooks on the law, grammar and logic, and encyclopedias that cover many fields of knowledge, and they also studied astronomy. Many words of the ancient Roman language are still in use today.

## MODERN CHINESE WORDS FROM LATIN

About 60% of English words and many words in modern Chinese come from Latin. The word “modern” (现代) in the phrase “modern Chinese” (现代汉语) comes from the Latin word *modernus*, which first appeared in Roman papal literature in 496 AD, meaning “near” and “just past.” The literati during the time of Roman emperor Charlemagne, who ruled around 800 AD, described their era as *modernum saeculum* (the modern period). Thus “modern,” first used by the Romans, became a word used by all European languages and other languages globally. The word “card” (from medieval Latin *charta*, meaning “a piece of paper”) is also derived from Latin. A large number of Latin words have been translated into modern Chinese. People use them every day but rarely think about their origin.

An emotional example is *muyu* (mother tongue) and *muxiao* (alma mater). *Muyu* comes from *lingua materna* (“mother tongue” in English, *langue maternelle* in French, and *Muttersprache* in German). In the Chinese dictionaries of the 1930s, there was no “mother tongue,” only “native language” or “national language.” Notably, the first Latin author to talk about “mother tongue” was ancient theologian and philosopher Saint Augustine. He was the first to describe in the autobiographical

*Confessions* how babies learn their languages from their mothers, and from then on, Europeans began to pay attention to the role of mothers in language education. The word *alma mater* comes from the medieval Latin *alma mater* (a kind mother) and refers to one's school, because a school, like a mother, gives children (spiritual) nourishment and enables them to grow.

Latin is the “most romantic” language in the world. At the same time, it is also the language of science. For instance, most of British mathematician Isaac Newton's works were written in Latin. *Elements*, the mathematical treatise by ancient Greek mathematician Euclid, which was translated by Matteo Ricci, defined many geometric concepts and created many terms in Chinese, such as *sanjiaoxing* (三角形, meaning triangle), *zhengfangxing* (正方形, square), *dian* (点, point), *mian* (面, area) and *ti* (体, volume). *Ti* originally meant the “human body” in Chinese and had no geometric connotation. We use the words *liti* (立体, three-dimensional), *wuti* (物体, object) and *qiuti* (球体, sphere) today because the Latin word *corpus* (human body/body) has changed the meaning of the Chinese word *ti* by giving it a geometric connotation.

Latin has enriched Chinese in many ways, and has given it many terms. For example, ancient Chinese did not have grammatical terms such as verb, noun, adjective, conjunction, preposition and pronoun, nor terms like civil law, criminal law, marriage law, commercial law, contract, international treaty, association and committee. But today every Chinese village has a village committee. Who knew that the word came from the Latin *committere* (to give, or give voice to a person by appointing them)?

Latin is also the most “powerful” language. Modern Chinese phrases such as *xiangxiangli* (想象力, imagination, derived from *vis imaginationis*), *jiyili* (记忆力, memory, *vis memoriae*) and *lijieli* (理解力, comprehension, *vis intellectiva*) all come from Latin concepts.

When I started studying Chinese in 1988, I did not expect to find so many familiar words. At that time I thought Chinese was a completely different system or another way of thinking. But today I know that the Chinese use the same vocabulary as the Europeans in many ways. We have long been brothers intellectually, especially since 1949, when “vernacular” and “Mandarin” were promoted and the old “semi-traditional” Chinese was abandoned.

The Chinese today are accustomed to using suffixes like *xing* (性) or “-ty” as in *chunjie xing* (纯洁性, purity) and *zhuyi* (主义) or “-ism,” but few know where they came from. By the thirteenth century, there

were many schools of thought and debates among scholars in European universities, and they began to use the suffixes “-ista” and “-ismus” (e.g., *nominalismus*, nominalism) to express a particular ideological tendency or ideology. However, because modern Chinese terms are written in Chinese characters, the Chinese don’t realize that these words have a foreign origin.

In fact, Latin has also “transformed” many traditional Chinese words. For example, in ancient Chinese, the word *shehui* (社会) referred to group activities such as festivals and temple fairs, but today it mostly refers to “society,” as in social relations, social class, sociology and socialism. The Latin language has helped us recover the original meaning of “society.” Latin *societas* (society) comes from *socius*, meaning “ally” and “friend.” Thus, society is the product of friendships. Moreover, in medieval Latin, *societas* also meant “association” and “civil society,” implying that people organized “societies” to lead a rich social life.

### STRIKING SIMILARITIES BETWEEN ANCIENT CHINESE AND LATIN

There are striking similarities between some ancient Chinese and Latin words. For example, the Roman word *pupilla* has two meanings: “little girl” and “pupil of the eye.” The Chinese word *tong* (瞳, pupil), is written by putting two characters together: “童” (child) and “目” (eye). What’s the reason for that? Is it because we see our own image reflected in others’ eyes—as a kind of shrunken child? How else can we explain the similarity between *pupilla* and *tong*?

There are other examples. The Latin word *fructus* primarily means “fruit,” but like the Chinese word *jiēguo* (结果) or “fruit/result,” it also has the abstract meaning of “result.” This may have been inspired by the “cause and effect” philosophy of Buddhism. The saying in Chinese, “*As you sow, so you reap*,” is equivalent to the Latin idiom *Sicut seminaveris ita metes*. However, the Latin word *fructus* can also mean “fetus” or “child,” as in *fructus ventris tui* (the child you give birth to). Because Latin words were influenced by legal thought in many ways, *fructus* also means “to enjoy,” “to benefit” and “the right to benefit.”

Both Easterners and Westerners use the word “flower” and certain animals as a metaphor for the beauty of women. For example, the Latin adjective *florens* (flowering) means “beautiful,” which is similar to the Chinese saying that a person is “a flower.” The original character used

to denote the Chinese word for “flower” (花)—*hua* (华)—meant “gorgeous.” Many Chinese girls have names like *Xiaobua* (little flower) or *Hongmei* (red plum blossom). The West too has a similar phenomenon: the Latin *rosa* became Rose, *lilium* Lily and the Hebrew *susanna* (lily) became Susan, and so on. The Latin word *margarita* (pearl; from Greek) also became a female name, Margaret, similar to the Chinese names inspired by gems, such as Daiyu (meaning jade).

The Chinese words *gao* (high), *ping* (flat) and *di* (low) not only indicate the height of a person but also a mood and attitude, such as “proud,” “easy-going” and “feeling low.” In Latin too, such words are used to denote a mental state: *Celsus* (high) can also mean “proud,” *aequus* (equal) can mean “calm” or “fair,” *humilis* (short, low) “insignificant” or “inferior.” In addition, the Latin word *sublimitas* (highly, sublime) associates “excellent” with “high,” like the Chinese word *gaoshang* (高尚) meaning “noble.”

The Latin *caput* (head) can mean “the main city of a country,” which is the root of the modern Chinese word *shoudu* (首都, meaning capital). At the same time, *caput* is also the “chapter” of a document and interestingly, the Chinese language also uses the word *shou* (首) to refer to a “chapter,” as in the case of *The 300 Tang Poems* (唐诗三百首), an anthology of poems from the Tang Dynasty (618–907).

The Chinese words *dingning* (丁宁) and *dingdang* (丁当) are both onomatopoeic but the first also means “repeated instructions.” The Latin word *tinnire* also combines these two meanings: *nummuli tinniunt* (the coins are clinking) and *nimum iam tinnis* (you have said and instructed too much).

There are many more examples of this kind and I have mentioned them in my book *Pons Latinus*. I want to encourage more Chinese readers to learn Latin, and so I have written and compiled several textbooks and dictionaries. Today, Chinese students give a lot of time to learning ancient Chinese, still very few learn Latin.

I began teaching Latin in Beijing in 2002, and 20 years on, my interest in teaching Latin has not waned. Instead, it has grown.

Latin also gives me a strong sense of belonging. For example, the tombstone of Zheng Manuo, the first Chinese to study in Europe, found in Beijing in 2018, has an inscription written both in Chinese and Latin side by side, connecting the two cultures. When I started reading Zheng’s

story, I felt that it was my own story in a way. Zheng Manuo's life and his bilingual inscription have given me a deep admiration and appreciation for Beijing as a *lingdu*, a spiritual capital.

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## CHAPTER 5

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# Confucius in American Supreme Court and Contemporary Culture

*Bryan W. Van Norden*

Bryan W. Van Norden is James Monroe Taylor Chair in philosophy at Vassar College, New York, and guest professor at the School of Philosophy at Wuhan University, China. He has authored 10 books on Chinese and comparative philosophy, including *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy*, *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han to the 20th Century* and *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto*. His books and articles have been translated into Arabic, Chinese, Danish, Estonian, Farsi, German, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish.

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© Dolphin Books Co., Ltd. 2023  
L. Chen and K.-H. Pohl (eds.), *East-West Dialogue*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_5)



Bryan W. Van Norden

**The east pediment of the American Supreme Court, designed and sculpted by Hermon A. MacNeil, has three marble figures representing three lawgivers from the history of civilization: Moses, Confucius and Solon.**

**What's a sculpture of Confucius doing there? Bryan W. Van Norden explains why, as well as the influence of Chinese philosophy on the United States and Sino-U.S. relations. According to him, philosophical education should move away from the Western-centered perspective and abandon prejudice and misunderstanding.**

**CNS:** Many Americans don't know that there's a sculpture of Confucius in their Supreme Court.

**Bryan W. Van Norden:** There is a cluster of sculptures both on the western and eastern pediments of the Supreme Court. On the western side, near the stairs to the main entrance, there is a female figure holding a smaller figure in her right hand. It's the Contemplation of Justice sculpture by James E. Fraser. Visitors often miss the eastern pediment because it is at the back of the building. Those who go to the Supreme Court on work or as tourists usually see just the western pediment. But the eastern one is very interesting. MacNeil, the sculptor, said the trio of ancient lawgivers, Moses, Confucius and Solon, represented the civilizations from which our laws are derived. It's significant that the symbol of the Eastern

origin of law appears on the eastern pediment of the Supreme Court of the United States.

According to records, MacNeil submitted a description of his work to the Supreme Court Building Commission, in which he said, “Law as an element of civilization was normally and naturally derived or inherited in this country from former civilizations. The ‘Eastern Pediment’ of the Supreme Court Building suggests therefore the treatment of such fundamental laws and precepts as are derived from the East. Moses, Confucius and Solon are chosen as representing three great civilizations and form the central group of this Pediment.”

**CNS:** How did Confucius and his philosophical thought influence early America?

**Bryan W. Van Norden:** In the early days of America, modern democracy and science were at a foundational stage. Confucius was regarded as the secular saint of Western enlightenment, and America’s founding fathers were deeply influenced by the European enlightenment. Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, Thomas Paine and John Adams all had a strong interest in Confucius and a favorable opinion of his thoughts.

The Supreme Court moved from New York and Philadelphia to Washington, D.C. It was not until more than 150 years after American independence that the present permanent office was confirmed. It was built only in the early twentieth century and the design reflects Confucius’s great influence on the founding fathers of the United States.

**CNS:** Why is Confucius described as a lawgiver instead of a sage or an educator?

**Bryan W. Van Norden:** For the Chinese, it is a bit strange to see Confucius described as a lawgiver. The problem is that most Americans, even those who revere Confucius, don’t know the difference between legalism and Confucianism. When they wanted to pay tribute to the Chinese civilization, the only Chinese icon they were familiar with was Confucius. They didn’t know the difference between “rites” and “laws” but they regarded Confucius as a moral model, and so they chose him to represent a part of the world civilization.

**CNS:** How does contemporary American society regard Confucius and Chinese culture?

**Bryan W. Van Norden:** American attitudes toward China and its culture are very complicated. Many intellectuals like Benjamin Franklin

and Thomas Jefferson respected Chinese tradition and the Chinese but many people look down on Chinese tradition and don't respect the Chinese.

In my opinion, most Americans have misunderstandings about Chinese philosophy. Americans are more likely to borrow some words from Confucius or other Chinese philosophers just to serve their purpose. Antonin Scalia, a Supreme Court judge, regarded Chinese philosophy as "mysterious fortune cookie messages," which reflects the common American perception of Chinese philosophy. In reality, Chinese philosophy has persuasive arguments and detailed analysis.

**CNS:** How is Chinese philosophy education doing in American universities?

**Bryan W. Van Norden:** Of the 100 universities in the United States that train doctors of philosophy, only about 13% offer courses on Chinese philosophy. I hope this will change. Although the older generation of American philosophers tend to have a very narrow view of Chinese philosophy, the younger generations, whether doctoral students or assistant professors, are much more open-minded. I am optimistic about the future. People will have more opportunities to learn about Chinese philosophy.

**CNS:** What is lacking in the current exchanges between China and the United States?

**Bryan W. Van Norden:** In Western political philosophy, individualism has far-reaching influence, and it emphasizes "self-serving motives." In contrast, the views of classical Western philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, are similar to Confucianism; they advocated communitarianism, emphasizing that people are part of society. Though Plato and Aristotle's political philosophies stress the importance of society, contemporary Western political philosophy ignores this fact. I think there is a misunderstanding of China in the West; that is, Westerners don't understand how the Chinese can solve problems through cooperation.

**CNS:** You have often written that the United States must understand and learn Chinese philosophy. What is the most important reason?

**Bryan W. Van Norden:** As the Chinese leaders say, Confucianism is an important part of Chinese traditional culture. It is essential for the United States to know more about Chinese culture and Confucianism because the U.S. and China are the two major powers, and they need to

know each other in order to achieve long-term and fruitful development in the future.

Cultural mutual understanding is very important for both the United States and China. In China, many people know at least a little about American culture, but there are still many Americans who are very ignorant of Chinese culture. Especially in the past few years, due to the negative attitude of American leaders toward China, fewer and fewer Americans are learning Chinese.

**CNS:** Which saying of Confucius do you think can enlighten Sino-U.S. relations today?

**Bryan W. Van Norden:** Do not do unto others what you do not want done unto you.

(Interviewed by Chen Mengtong)

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## CHAPTER 6

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# The Different Development Models of China and the West

*Fabio Massimo Parenti*

Fabio Massimo Parenti, an associate professor at Lorenzo de' Medici, the Italian International Institute in Florence, and a foreign associate professor at the China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing, has been engaged in contemporary China studies for 15 years. He teaches Chinese development and global shifts, globalization and social change, war and the media. He has a study on the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in northwestern China and several monographs in Italian, Chinese and English, including *Geofinance and Geopolitics*.

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© Dolphin Books Co., Ltd. 2023  
L. Chen and K.-H. Pohl (eds.), *East-West Dialogue*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_6)



Fabio Massimo Parenti

There is a big difference between China's development and the rise of Western powers. China's peaceful development does not harm the interests of any other country and has not been achieved by waging war or exploiting people. The "Chinese miracle" of becoming the second largest economy in the world did not fall from the sky, nor did it resort to colonialism or imperialism. China's transformation was realized through the efforts of its people and the Communist Party of China.

### THE UNIQUENESS OF CHINA'S DEVELOPMENT MODEL

A key word in China's diplomatic tradition is "coexistence," which means rejecting confrontation between political entities and continuing to advocate ideas and practices that oppose competition and conflict between nations. In seven decades, the People's Republic of China has become the world's second largest economy, an amazing development not only because of its speed but also because of the longevity of the Chinese civilization.

Although the Chinese civilization is highly modernized and has learned from the advanced cultures of the Western civilization in its process of development, the difference is that China has a unique and long history.

Continuity of history, philosophy and code of conduct, which is centered on the Confucian tradition and historically integrated with Taoism and Buddhism, pervades contemporary Chinese politics. As the British scholar Martin Jacques said, unlike other developing countries, China's political system has not been Westernized. One has to know the real China in order to build a benign, peaceful and visionary partnership. That is the minimum requirement. In China's vision, mutual understanding and respect should be a prerequisite for global governance and global governance should promote peaceful relations, which require commitment and dialogue.

## UNDERSTANDING CHINA'S PEACEFUL DEVELOPMENT

There are three main reasons for China's peaceful development.

First, peace has always been the mainstream of China's historical development. Intellectuals like American historian John King Fairbank and Italian economist Giovanni Arrighi emphasized that China had five centuries of peace from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, barring a few exceptions, but Europe had only about a century of sustained peace, from 1815 to 1914. In general, China was not an expansionist nation since ancient times, nor has it promoted an arms race like the West.

Second, peace and peaceful development are an important feature and vision of socialism and a prerequisite for national liberation and development. In modern history, China has been an important force against imperialism and a supporter of the non-aligned movement in the developing world.

Third, peace is the basic principle of contemporary Chinese diplomatic culture. Since 1954, China's diplomacy has been guided by the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, namely mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

## THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: A MODERN EXAMPLE OF CHINA'S PEACEFUL DEVELOPMENT

China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, which aims to build peaceful relations through exchange, dialogue and mutual understanding. Besides fostering commercial and financial interdependence, it is also a



platform to promote political coordination, people-to-people exchanges and mutual understanding among countries. It was proposed to address inter-regional connectivity issues and covers the whole world. The history of exchanges and cooperation along the ancient Silk Road provides an important cultural foundation for the creation of this initiative.

The Belt and Road prioritizes the real economy, people's livelihood over narrow interests and cooperation over competition. It replaces the bloc alliance with partnerships, where there is no political discrimination between countries. It also replaces confrontation with inclusiveness and requires no military alliances or investments. It is another example of China's peaceful development. The West has never had a similar program in history, not even in its heyday.

Expansion of capitalism, through commercial, financial or geopolitical competition, seizes and destroys the assets of rivals, increases inter-state confrontation and creates space for "endless accumulation." In the over-expansion, some of the overseas economic capital is actually acquired through financial or military operations where there is no fair competition, and the conditions are conducive to political corruption, so benefits are extracted at a very low price. This is the U.S. model.

China's approach, by contrast, is not military expansion or the creation of a suffocating credit system. Instead, it establishes sustainable loan limits with its partners on the basis of negotiations, without any political strings attached like interference in internal affairs, and supports multilateralism and peaceful coexistence. This is globalization with Chinese characteristics.

## FROM NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION TO GLOBALIZATION WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

The new systemic crisis triggered by COVID-19 has also exposed the structural flaws in the Western system that accumulated over the past few decades, errors and weaknesses related to the political and economic model of neoliberal globalization. Disinformation, social divisions, under-estimation and politicization of the pandemic by Western governments are a few examples.

Neoliberal globalization can be linked to the process of "counter-revolution to the Keynesian revolution" that began in the late 1970s when Western countries were suffering from stagflation and Keynesianism featuring government intervention failed. Over the decades, countries

have become more interconnected but socio-economic inequality and other factors of instability have intensified. Examples of this are the systemic financial and economic crises in the 1980s, 1990s and the first 10 years of twenty-first century, the false “war on terror” in the name “humanitarian war” (in actuality it supported regional terrorism for strategic purposes), and regime change.

Today, the nature of neoliberal globalization is becoming clearer. With diminishing state intervention in the economy (promoting the deregulation of the market) and the government becoming the voice of business groups and their special interests, Western neoliberalism has revealed deep structural flaws that stand out when compared with the Chinese vision of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind.

As I have said earlier, the history of neoliberal globalization, marked by systemic crises and “humanitarian wars,” has produced the most evil and destructive results since the 1990s.

On the other hand, China has accelerated the construction of infrastructure such as ports, railways, industry, digitalization and aviation, and strengthened international cooperation and research on global issues such as healthcare. The Belt and Road and China’s international influence continue to expand.

The Western model is aggressive and destructive. China’s peaceful development model is an alternative. Therefore, the United States and its allies have begun to disseminate “the China threat” theory to hinder China’s development. Their objective is to recreate and replicate the unipolar world system through joint military, financial, social and media actions, which is tantamount to playing with fire and losing their remaining credibility. While the West is subjecting itself and the world to constant turmoil and chaos, China is bridging the gap between nations in a constructive, reasonable and effective way for the benefit of all, not only for a few.

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# Uncle Hanzi Breaks Down Cultural Boundaries by Making Learning Chinese Fun

*Richard Sears*

Having spent two decades studying the earliest Chinese writings, American scholar Richard Sears is affectionately known as “Uncle Hanzi” in China, a reference to his research on *hanzi*, Chinese characters. It led him to found Hanziyuan.net, a website on the etymology of Chinese characters, which provides a wealth of information on different Chinese scripts and what the characters mean.

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Richard Sears

Language is like a mirror, reflecting a country's cultural and historical progress and its exchanges with other cultures. With China's rise, the world is keen to understand the culture behind it and the Chinese language is a bridge to the culture. Sears explains his dedication to searching for the roots of Chinese characters and sharing his findings with the world: "Chinese characters belong not just to China, but to the entire world."

### HOW THE SEARCH BEGAN

Richard Sears is one of the earliest scholars in the world to use modern technology to study the source of Chinese characters.

He learned Chinese when he was 22. He is now in his 70s and still at it. In the 1990s, he started digitizing Chinese characters and his website provides information on nearly 100,000 ancient Chinese characters. This keen interest in Eastern culture is a quantum leap from studying computer science in the United States, his Masters subject. "Chinese characters are very difficult for foreigners to learn," he admits, "but when I learned Chinese, I found it to be the most wonderful language."

Chinese characters are ideographic while most of the world languages today are phonetic, including English. Besides Chinese, Japanese and

Vietnamese are also ideographic, and they are both deeply influenced by Chinese.

How to understand this difference? Sears's explanation is that Chinese characters developed from primitive pictographs and had a more intuitive meaning. The early oracle bone inscriptions—divination inscriptions found on tortoise shells and animal bones dating back to the Bronze Age—are mainly pictographic. Although the form of Chinese characters changed over thousands of years, their ideographic function is still very significant. Therefore, to learn Chinese, we need to start by “discussing writing and explaining characters,” he says, quoting ancient Chinese scholar Xu Shen, who compiled the first comprehensive dictionary of Chinese characters, *Shuowen Jiezi*.

Chinese and English not only have morphological differences, the way they are learned is also distinctly different. According to Sears, in the Western phonetic language system, the meaning of a word is often indicated by its “morpheme” and “roots.” The deep difference between the two languages means that Westerners, when they learn Chinese, should not follow the way they learn Western languages. Instead, they should adopt a completely different “story memorization method.”

“Foreigners learn Chinese differently from the way the Chinese do.” The Chinese grow up in a Chinese language environment where the system of learning includes rote learning of Chinese characters. It is easy for the Chinese, but not for foreigners. So when foreigners learn Chinese, they need to have an interest and for that, it is important to understand the story behind the Chinese characters.

Rote memorization is painful. It's easier to master the characters if you understand their pictographic origins. Thus Sears began his long journey to find the roots of Chinese characters, leading to the creation of the website that explains the source of Chinese characters.

## MAKING LEARNING CHINESE FUN

“Every Chinese character is logical and has its own story.” This is something Sears says frequently. “Learning Chinese is not only mastering a mysterious Oriental language, but also understanding thousands of years of Chinese culture through words. Understanding is also the first step out of prejudice and toward recognition.”

Every foreigner has a different starting point for learning Chinese. With China opening up more and more to the outside world and the

rise in its international influence, many countries are now eager to learn more about China as well as learn from China.

According to Hanban, the Chinese institution promoting the Chinese language internationally, by 2020, more than 70 countries included Chinese in their national education system; over 4,000 universities and 30,000 primary and secondary schools overseas had Chinese courses; there were 45,000 Chinese language schools and training institutions abroad; and nearly 200 million people abroad had learned Chinese.

“When I started learning Chinese, China was still relatively closed. There are few channels to learn Chinese and understand China. But as China becomes more and more open and progressive, foreigners have more and more reasons to learn Chinese, learn the Chinese characters and come to China. The Chinese live and work all over the world. You meet them everywhere, which also makes foreigners interested in the Chinese language.”

These changes encouraged him to continue studying the source of Chinese characters. His perception is that Chinese characters and the Western alphabet not only have different origins, but also represent the different ways of thinking and behavior as well as the different scientific, moral and legal concepts of the two people. “Writing” is the carrier that passes down all these differences.

“If you understand the source of Chinese characters, you will understand the life and culture of ancient Chinese people. For example, some characters depict ancient textiles, some ancient astrology, and some traditional Chinese agriculture and livestock. Every word has a story behind it, and these stories are links to Chinese history. When we understand the evolution of the characters, we can clearly see their origin and the thoughts of the ancient Chinese.” According to him, this is the biggest difference from learning English, and also the most fun part.

Without a deep understanding of the story behind each character, it is difficult to truly understand traditional Chinese culture. “Of course, you can learn Chinese by rote, but the essence is lost.”

The different ways in which the same thing is expressed, for instance in Chinese and English, also reflect their cultural differences. In English, the word “cousin” is used to summarily explain various kinds of relations. But in China, there are more than 10 different terms such as paternal cousin, maternal cousin and so on. This shows that in China, the ancient concept of a large family still exists, and this strong bond of kinship continues to this day. This is very different from the Western concept of small families.

To learn Chinese characters from their roots is to translate the “most difficult language” into the most vivid story, so that people can learn and then better understand the cultural differences between China and the West. This can make cross-cultural communication more effective and smoother. In a sense, this is an important link in the people-to-people bond.

## BREAKING CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

Through Sears’s website, people around the world can learn Chinese on their own. It receives more than one million hits every month and the users are from over 170 countries and regions.

The integration of modern technology with traditional Chinese characters has given the Chinese language a wider audience and more channels. This is apt because in today’s era of globalization, culture should not have a “sense of boundary.” Sears sees Chinese characters as not belonging to China alone but to the entire world. He says, “Every time a Chinese tells me it’s unbelievable that I speak Chinese, I reply, Chinese is not only Chinese, but a valuable culture for the whole world.”

In December 2020, at the age of 70, Sears got his long-awaited Chinese permanent residence card. It means Uncle Hanzi can now live in China as long as he wants to. In September 2021, his Uncle Hanzi Studio was set up in the city of Nanjing in eastern China to apply the latest technology for studying Chinese characters.

Though Sears loves his sobriquet Uncle Hanzi, he can now claim a higher title, Grandpa Hanzi. What are Grandpa Hanzi’s future plans? “To continue working to break down the cultural boundaries, promote exchanges between China and the West, and share stories of the Chinese characters with more people.”

(Interviewed by Cheng Li and Yang Yanci)



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## The Path for Proximity Between the East and the West

*Zhang Guogang*

Zhang Guogang is a professor at the School of Humanities, Tsinghua University, and distinguished professor of the Changjiang Scholars Program of the Ministry of Education of China. A Humboldt Research Fellow, he studied the history of European sinology and the history of cultural exchanges between China and the West at Hamburg University and at Trier University, Germany. He was a member of the Chinese Ministry of Education's Steering Committee for History Teaching and vice president of the Chinese Society for Historians of China's Foreign Relations. His works include *General History of the Cultural Relations Between China and the West*, *The Historical Evolution of the Silk Road*, *History as a Mirror and the Rise and Fall of China* and *The Frontier of Civilization: From Ancient Times to Modern Times*.

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Zhang Guogang

In the Chinese world order, “the West” has special meanings—from the simple geographical reference to cultural connotations. From the ancient Silk Road to the spread of modern Western learning to the East, the development of the Chinese civilization has always been accompanied by exchanges and mutual learning between the Eastern and Western civilizations, willingly or enforced. Today, however, some people think that the Chinese civilization and Western civilization are incompatible, and the rise of China is a signal of hegemony. Zhang Guogang weighs in on the validity of the “clash of civilizations” theory and the way for Eastern and Western civilizations to get closer.

**CNS:** How did different civilizations connect in the history of human development? How did the early Eastern and Western civilizations meet?

**Zhang Guogang:** *Homo habilis*, the most ancient representative of the human genus, and *Homo ergaster*, the oldest known earliest humans with modern human-like features, traveled out of Africa three times and reached Asia and Europe. With the emergence of *Homo sapiens* in the Paleolithic Age 250,000 years ago, human beings were divided into different groups based on skin color and body shape, and gradually parted ways culturally. From 12,000 to 10,000 BC, global warming led to the first Agricultural Revolution, which promoted the birth of the ancient human civilization. Homologous human beings shared the same intellectual capabilities, so the material civilizations created by human beings in different places had fundamental and macroscopic similarities. At the same time, they also showed regional differences in technology and materials.

From 2000 to 1000 BC, there was a large-scale exchange between the Eastern and Western ancient civilizations in Eurasia, driven by the migration of nomads. The earliest interaction between the Eastern and Western civilizations originated from the ancient Indo-Europeans. Some entered Mesopotamia, some entered India, and others migrated to northern China via Central Asia. The great migration brought shocks and new changes. Civilizations had exchanges with one another, learned from one another, merged and grew up in war and peace.

**CNS:** The history of exchanges between the Chinese and Western civilizations is also the process of getting to know each other. What historical stages did this process pass through?

**Zhang Guogang:** Exchanges among human civilizations began in the wilderness era but due to the natural conditions, their scale and forms were greatly limited. But after entering the period of civilized society, especially after the birth of nations, the exchange was influenced by multiple factors such as political power, the economy and society. In this process, China's perception of "the West" also changed gradually.

In different historical periods, China had different degrees of passion and paths for foreign exchanges. They can be roughly divided into three periods.

The first period was before the fifteenth century and can be called the classical period. During this period, China was ahead of its neighboring countries in economy and science for a long time, and was in a more active and stronger position in the cultural exchanges with the West. From the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD), the East and the West opened up direct communication channels, and material and cultural exchanges followed.

The three centuries from 1500 to 1800 can be counted as the second period, namely, the late Ming Dynasty and the early Qing Dynasty period. The opening of a new sea route expanded the exchange to religion, science and technology, art, ideology and politics. During this period, China and the West were in an equal position politically; the spread of Western culture to the East and Chinese culture to the West was reciprocal.

The period around the first Opium War (1840–1842) to 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded, can be regarded as the third period, that is, the modern times when China was in a passive and weak position.

**CNS:** You said the Chinese and Western civilizations were truly two heterogeneous civilizations. Do different civilizations have similarities?

**Zhang Guogang:** During ancient Roman times, there were well-established sea and land routes around the Mediterranean; Western Eurasia, even South Asia and North Africa had close contacts since ancient times. Only distant China, separated by mountains and deserts, was in a relatively isolated geographical area and thus developed a unique Chinese civilization. For the Western world, China on the east of the Tianshan Mountains is the East with the “otherness.” All the civilized entities to the west of the Tianshan Mountains share some common connections in history, religion, language and war, which together reflect the uniqueness of the Chinese civilization. But that does not mean there are no similarities.

In fact, the commonality of all civilizations lies in that they work out a relationship between man and nature, man and God, man and society, and man and man. The interests in the world are both conflicting and related, so governance is needed. In the process of governance, the West emphasizes individual rights, autonomy and freedom, while China stresses group interests and collective rights, and restricts individual rights. This difference is the result of a long historical tradition. China and the West have chosen different paths, and their priorities are different. But the ultimate goal is to ensure human survival and development, improve the quality of life, and make the relationship between man, nature and society more harmonious.

**CNS:** You have frequently said that there was distortion and misinterpretation in the process of mutual learning among civilizations. How did this interaction, driven by self needs, influence the history of exchanges between the Chinese and Western civilizations?

**Zhang Guogang:** Selective interpretation or “misreading” abounds in history.

Need is an important aspect affecting cultural exchange. Take Buddhism for example. The element of filial piety in the life story of the Shakyamuni Buddha has been strengthened in China. In the late Tang and Five Dynasties (907–960), Chinese Buddhists compiled the *Twenty-Four Stories of Filial Piety*; Indian Zen developed into Buddhist Zen in China. *The Orphan of Zhao*, a Chinese play attributed to 13th-century playwright Ji Junxiang and regarded as the Chinese *Hamlet*, was adapted by Voltaire because its moral appeals of benevolence, royalty and justice

met the needs of the European society, and Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* also reflected such moral appeals.

The same is true of commodities. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, there was a demand for Chinese porcelain in the West. So porcelain and its production technology were introduced in the West, which were then mastered and improved to produce higher quality porcelain. The compass was invented in China, but Westerners transformed it into the mariner's compass; in the Qing Dynasty, China introduced the compass again.

An exchange among civilizations is possible only when the recipient needs it. After the different experiences of different civilizations are interpreted, a civilization usually adds its own actual needs, which is a kind of reference and transformation for localization. Simply copying the West doesn't work; the Western experience needs to be reformed for our own use.

**CNS:** The world today is a global village. As the Chinese saying goes, "All people under the heaven are one family." If there is a common value in today's world, what could it be? Can there be mutual recognition and integration among civilizations through exchanges and mutual learning?

**Zhang Guogang:** As the West took the lead in industrialization, Western civilization has remained strong for hundreds of years. However, the developing countries are still struggling with poverty and backwardness, which shows that the Western civilization cannot completely solve humanity's development problems.

Different civilizations have their own characteristics, they coexist and complement each other; the world cannot be unified by any one civilization. Realistically, apart from the Western civilization, another civilization is needed to break the asymmetry that has existed for some time. Whether from a historical or realistic perspective, the Chinese civilization can help achieve a balance. The development of civilization requires more ideas and inclusiveness.

China pulling its 1.4 billion people out of absolute poverty and moving toward modernization is a great achievement of the human civilization. China's dream of national rejuvenation has never meant seeking hegemony, but addressing the unbalanced development in the world and helping to achieve common prosperity.

To respect other civilizations, we must change our mindset. The world is changing, so there's no room for complacency. We need reform. The West needs to solve its ideological disputes and stop populism while China

needs to improve the rule of law, marketization, internationalization and modernization of its governance capacity. However, China's core socialist values also contain the concepts of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, so it is possible for China and the West to complement and balance each other. This is the significance of exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations.

(Interviewed by Qiu Yining)

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## CHAPTER 9

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# Creating New Dialogue Between the East and the West to Improve Global Governance

*Wang Huiyao*

Wang Huiyao is a counselor to the State Council, China's cabinet. He is also the president of the Chinese think tank Center for China and Globalization (CCG), vice president of the China Association for International Economic Cooperation under the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and vice president of the China Public Relations Association. He is the author of over 80 books and his research areas include globalization strategy, corporate internationalization, U.S.-China relations and talent development.

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© Dolphin Books Co., Ltd. 2023  
L. Chen and K.-H. Pohl (eds.), *East-West Dialogue*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_9)





Wang Huiyao

**As the world undergoes unprecedented changes, it is increasingly evident that the existing global governance system is failing to keep pace with global needs. In the context of globalization, in the face of pandemics, climate change, resource scarcity, war and conflict and other issues that affect human survival and development, it is an urgent task to seek common ground while reserving differences, reform the global governance system and maintain peace and stability through the joint effort of all countries.**

**CNS:** You have said that the existing global governance system has failed to keep up with the times. What are the shortcomings of global governance vis-à-vis the current problems such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change?

**Wang Huiyao:** Globalization has entered a new historical turning point. The development of globalization has brought about new changes in infrastructure, data security, technology development and business models, which have created new requirements for global governance. The rise of emerging countries such as China has also changed the balance of power in the international landscape. The old global governance system

dominated by the United States and other Western powers is not representative and inclusive enough for developing countries. Although the U.S. and Europe have declined in power, they still have the ability to control the system. Developing countries have limited influence and rule-making power, and their interests are not well represented, even ignored or sacrificed.

Climate change, environmental pollution, rampant international terrorism, and the outbreak of global pandemics have demonstrated that we live in an interconnected world where sustainable human development can be achieved only through the cooperation of all countries. However, the existing global governance mechanisms are lagging in terms of reconstruction and reform. They clearly lack effectiveness as they are unable to promote cooperation among all countries.

The root cause of the current dilemma in global governance is the incompatibility and contradiction between the existing global governance system and the current global political, economic and social developments. Due to this, the governance mechanisms can't function well as their reform and improvement have been restricted, nor can new global governance mechanisms be created or innovated. Lack of leadership is the main shortcoming of the current global governance mechanisms, causing their repeated failure.

The times call for multilateralism, and the leadership of all the major powers is the key to successful multilateralism. The United States and China can establish a healthy competition if the former returns to multilateralism and the latter plays a greater role. The establishment of a new type of great power relationship between China and the United States that goes beyond zero-sum game and keeps their competition manageable will be an important contribution to the stabilization of U.S.-China relations and peace and stability in the world. It will create more mechanisms for bilateral and multilateral communication, dialogue and cooperation on global issues.

China, the U.S. and Europe, as the three important world powers, can establish a coordination mechanism among themselves. Through a permanent, institutionalized, multi-level and broad-ranging dialogue and cooperation mechanism, they can conduct regular dialogue on outstanding issues in international relations and global governance, thus enhancing mutual understanding, trust and cooperation. It will also improve the efficiency of global governance and better maintain harmony, stability, prosperity and development in the world.

**CNS:** Given the differences in the interests and ideologies of the East and the West, how can they seek common ground while reserving differences and jointly promote changes in the global governance system?

**Wang Huiyao:** The differences and similarities between the East and the West are not static. It is necessary to take a systemic and developmental view of their differences and the relationship between cooperation and competition by promoting dialogue and cooperation. The basis of seeking common ground while reserving differences is mutual understanding and trust as well as common interests.

China's development path has broken the "end of history" concept (the theory that the development of a particular form of political or social system may be the end point of human sociocultural evolution), but this does not mean that China is different from the West in terms of its development model, ideology, political system and interest demands. In addition to the economy, the concept of democracy is now deeply rooted in people's minds in terms of political philosophy and the development model, but the model of democratic development is different in China and the West. The West advocates election-based parliamentary democracy, while the Chinese environment is suitable for consultative democracy. At the same time, people's choice in the development of the market economy and new technology development can also be seen as a kind of market economy democracy and modern technology democracy.

Today, deepened globalization has increased the common challenges and interests between the East and the West, which can revitalize international leadership, bind interests, consolidate the basis of cooperation and lead nations to face challenges together by reforming the existing mechanisms and establishing new international institutions. It is relatively simple and reasonable to start with concrete practical cooperation and then gradually find, expand and build up mutual understanding or recognition of concepts and acceptance of the differences in models. Perceptions, though deep-rooted, change constantly. The East and the West can learn from each other's strengths and improve each other's weaknesses. China can strengthen the construction of free trade zones, raise the level of its opening up to the outside world, and establish extensive, deep and close ties with the West through the "invisible hand" of the market, so that seeking common ground while preserving differences between the East and the West becomes a spontaneous and market-oriented choice made by the public.

Compared with the existing international free trade agreements (FTAs), China is lagging behind. It has only 19 FTAs and 26 trading partners, which make up 36% of its trade volume. In contrast, South Korea, Japan and Canada have more than 50 FTA partners, which account for 75 to 85% of their trade volume. Also, China is lagging in making rules to regulate labor, state-owned enterprises, e-commerce, fair competition and environmental protection.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, China ranks 43rd out of 46 countries in the service trade restrictiveness index and 76th out of 84 countries in the investment restrictiveness index.

International FTAs cover issues such as e-commerce, intellectual property rights and the environment, and are subject to dispute settlement. In contrast, China's FTAs are based on exchanges and cooperation, with many principles and sensitive issues that are not subject to dispute settlement, such as state-owned enterprises and e-commerce. While China's institutional opening up is accelerating, it is still a relatively slow process, taking into account the need to improve the domestic support system and the impact of institutional changes on Chinese society.

**CNS:** How can China and the West establish a value-based dialogue? Can China's governance experience be disseminated more widely? Is there anything in the Chinese approach that needs reflection?

**Wang Huiyao:** The West's misinterpretation of China in terms of ideology and values is a main reason why some Westerners have been hostile to China for a long time. But many of them may not have actually been to China, while foreigners who have studied, worked and lived in China are often friendly toward China. From the perspective of institutions and rules, China's economic and social practices highlight the advantages of its political system and development model. China's globalization has entered a phase of institutional reform to build a unified domestic market, further connect with the international community, and participate in the reconstruction of international rules. In this new era, strengthening international communication capacity and establishing a dialogue between China and the West is a systemic and multi-faceted project that requires bottom-to-top participation.

The analysis and interpretation of each other's values in China and the West mainly comes from the opinion leaders and related organizations in the academic, political and business sectors that have authority and

influence. To establish a dialogue between China and the West in terms of values, the first step is to establish a dialogue between the intellectual elite and authorities on both sides who have a degree of discourse power. Dialogue is a two-way, equal, moderate and rational exchange of information between two sides for enhancing mutual understanding. This requires listening and speaking in detail on an equal footing, enhancing mutual knowledge and understanding through mutual interpretation and frank sharing, and establishing empathy.

In the omnimedia era, the dialogue between Chinese and Western values has expanded to all fields of public work and life. Therefore, to establish a dialogue between Chinese and Western values and to disseminate China's governance experience, it is necessary to carry out diversified exchanges via multiple groups as well as different classes, modes, channels and calibers. In 2020, Dr. Miao Lv, Secretary General of the Center for China and Globalization and the Academy of Contemporary China and World Studies launched the Global Young Leaders Dialogue to promote cross-cultural communication, which has proved to be a success. There is great potential for civil society organizations to develop international communication. They can combine their own fields and resources to bring about a broad and far-reaching impact on international communication through multiparty cooperation.

Changes in the times are accompanied by changes in technology, industry, social practices, institutional mechanisms, concepts and ideas. During the transition to new ideas, China's foreign relations and communication should also involve new and more inclusive ideas and styles. To promote the reform of the global governance system in the post-epidemic era, new global governance concepts and narratives are needed. This requires people from various countries and spheres to create and disseminate new global governance narratives through knowledge innovation, exchange and dialogue, and practical cooperation.

(Interviewed by Ma Xiuxiu)

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## CHAPTER 10

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# How Cultural Communication Bridges the East and the West

*Jay Xu*

Jay Xu, an academican of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Massachusetts, has worked at the Shanghai Museum, the Seattle Art Museum and the Art Institute of Chicago. In 2008, he joined the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, becoming the first Chinese-American director at a major American art museum.

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J. Xu (✉)  
Beijing, China

© Dolphin Books Co., Ltd. 2023  
L. Chen and K.-H. Pohl (eds.), *East-West Dialogue*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_10)



Jay Xu

**The Asian Art Museum has a collection of nearly 20,000 Asian cultural relics spanning 6,000 years, with Chinese artifacts dominating. Jay Xu, the museum’s director and CEO, talks about the museum’s role as a bridge in cross-cultural communication. The key to setting culture free from political limits is to find “the greatest common denominator.” Museums can transcend politics and highlight the communication between peoples and cultures.**

**CNS:** You have work experience in both Eastern and Western museums. What was the biggest difference you found when you joined a Western museum?

**Jay Xu:** I began to work for American museums in 1996 as a curator in the Chinese art department at the Seattle Art Museum. At that time, what impressed me most was the difference in the Chinese and American management styles. Chinese museums work in teams, while American museums emphasize individuals. In comprehensive museums in the United States, it is often impossible to have dedicated personnel for every cultural category, one person has to do many jobs. This mechanism has great advantages. When you work on your own, you have many opportunities to utilize your talents. But the challenge is that no one can



do everything, so American museum personnel have to cooperate with Chinese experts outside the museum.

**CNS:** As a Chinese-American, what are your advantages when working in American museums? And what are the challenges?

**Jay Xu:** My identity gives me considerable advantage when participating in a cooperation project with China. It's because I have worked in China and share the views of my Chinese colleagues. In addition, I worked as secretary to the museum director at the Shanghai Museum for seven years, which was a great opportunity to learn how to operate a museum. It helped me a lot when working in the United States.

At the same time, my identity also creates challenges. There is a Chinese saying, "See more than you've seen and learn more than you've learned." We Chinese-Americans need to know more about Chinese culture and broaden our horizons so that we can think of Chinese culture and art from a global perspective. We need to know both Chinese culture as well as the diverse cultures worldwide profoundly.

**CNS:** Western museums generally display Chinese historical artifacts in all China-themed exhibitions. Visitors are always shown "the ancient and old China." When will they present the modern and contemporary China to visitors?

**Jay Xu:** The Asian Art Museum will always protect and promote traditional art as well as embrace the future. We pay attention to both traditional art and modern art. We exhibit modern art and also display ancient art from a contemporary view. The emphasis on tradition is not at all contradictory to modernization.

**CNS:** How can museums maintain a balance between elitism and popular culture?

**Jay Xu:** We live in an era of diversity, not duality. Elitism is not contradictory to popular culture. We conduct our work based on first-class academic studies, and we are pretty willing to work with scholars in the ivory tower. On the other hand, our visitors are from all walks of life, so we need to present the most profound academic studies to them in an easy-to-understand and interesting way.

For example, our museum's most popular exhibit is a ritual vessel in the shape of a rhinoceros. It is a bronze object estimated to be from the period 1100–1050 BC. It is also our mascot. We conducted an online poll asking for a name for the object and someone even suggested a Spanish name, Reina, meaning "queen." As an expert on bronzes, I am familiar

with this ritual object but I have not yet figured out its sex because the ancient artisan did not add any sex features to it. The voting showed that someone in the public regarded it to be female, even a noble queen.

**CNS:** How can we tell the story of Asia, especially China, to the West?

**Jay Xu:** The key to telling the story of Asian and Chinese culture in the West is “communication” and “connection.” You need to find a point of introduction that is familiar to the Western audience to lead them into unfamiliar cultures.

The first point is to connect the ancient with the modern.

We once held an exhibition where half of the exhibits were ancient artifacts from our collection and the other half were works by contemporary artists. Putting them together enabled the audience to see how contemporary artists were inspired by ancient art. Such exhibitions shed light on ancient art from the perspective of contemporary art and harness the vitality of ancient art.

The second point is to connect Asia with the rest of the world.

A few years ago, we organized an exhibition, “China in the Middle of the World,” with world maps as the theme. The maps on display included the *Kunyu Wanguo Quantu* or the *Map of the Ten Thousand Countries of the Earth*, a woodblock print on fine paper printed in the late Ming Dynasty, and the *Kunyu Quantu*, the *Complete Map of the World* developed by a Jesuit priest, Ferdinand Verbiest, during his mission to China in 1674, the early Qing Dynasty. Both maps were customized for the Chinese emperors by Western missionaries who worked together with Chinese printers and engravers and both placed China in the center of the world. Maps are an important means for people to understand the world, and with them as a medium, this exhibition reflected China’s position in the world as well as the exchanges between it and other countries at that time.

The third point is to connect art with life.

This connection is particularly important. All of our exhibitions need to have something to do with American life today. In 2013, the Asian Art Museum organized an exhibition on the Terracotta Warriors and their horses (sculptures denoting the army of the first Chinese emperor, Qin Shi Huang, which were buried with the emperor in 210 BC in what is today the city of Xi’an in central China). The exhibition was themed “Immortality.” We hoped the visitors would better understand the theme when they saw the exhibition. Everyone is capable of immortality. If

a teacher produces good students, if a community volunteer helps the elderly, or a scientist makes an important discovery, they have all achieved immortality. And this pursuit is universal. The theme was to make the audience understand why Qin Shi Huang had so many terracotta warriors and horses made and left so many wonderful relics.

**CNS:** What can Chinese and Western museum professionals learn from each other?

**Jay Xu:** In the United States, all museums enjoy autonomy and different museums have their distinct features. This is something that Chinese museums can learn from, especially considering the rapid development of China's museums in the past 20 years. The architecture of the museums around China is not the same, but most museums are similar regarding the forms and even the contents, with the exception of a few leading ones. Each region has much room for highlighting its uniqueness in its museums.

One major dilemma for Western museums is operation, which has been particularly acute since the pandemic. Their major source of funding is not the admission fee but donations from individuals, associations and corporations, which puts considerable fundraising pressure on the curators. In contrast, the Chinese Government provides Chinese museums with a lot of support in terms of operating funds. I hope the U.S. Government can learn from this and give more support to cultural endeavors.

**CNS:** What is the role of museums in cross-cultural exchanges?

**Jay Xu:** People have different interests and hobbies, even those from the same cultural background, and there are greater differences between different cultures. If the political systems of two countries are different as well, then the divergences will be even greater. How to achieve cultural exchanges that go beyond the limitations of politics? We need to find the greatest common interest between countries. Museums transcend the political level and emphasize people-to-people and cross-cultural communication.

When countries celebrate friendly relations, cultural and sports activities are held, showing the role of cultural exchanges as the icing on the cake. When there are serious contradictions between countries, cultural activities are organized to defuse the crisis, which, as the Chinese proverb goes, is like "offering fuel in snowy weather" or breaking the ice. For example, China and the United States successfully established diplomatic relations following "ping-pong diplomacy," playing table tennis together,

and cultural exchanges. Hence, regardless of the state of political relations between countries, cultural communication must not be stopped, especially for countries with poor political relations.

(Interviewed by Liu Guanguan)

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PART II

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## Hot Issues



# How to Address the Crisis of Global Modernity: Through Competition or Cooperation Between the East and the West?

*Prasenjit Duara*

Prasenjit Duara, an American scholar of Indian origin, is the Oscar Tang Family distinguished chair professor of East Asian Studies at Duke University, Carolina. A Ph.D. in Chinese history from Harvard University, he also has an honorary doctorate from the University of Oslo. A former director at the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore and president of the Association for Asian Studies in the U.S., his first book *Culture, Power and the State: Rural Society in North China, 1900–1942* won the American Historical Association’s John King Fairbank Prize in East Asian history in 1989 and the Association for Asian Studies’ Joseph Levenson Prize in 1990. He is also the author of *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China, Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East*

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P. Duara (✉)  
Durham, North Carolina, USA

*Asian Modern* and *The Crisis of Global Modernity*. His books have been translated in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and European languages.



Prasenjit Duara

**Prasenjit Duara** sees three global changes as the main features of our times: the development of non-Western powers, the crisis of environmental sustainability and the demise of transcendent sources of authority (including ideals, beliefs and ethics acquired from religion). “Competing models of political and ideological hegemony have led to the global crisis of climate change and the destruction of the planet’s environment. It is time for the nations of the world and other institutions to work together to save the planet.” Duara reflects on Asia’s historical experience and contemporary practice to answer the question whether there should be competition or cooperation between the East and the West to solve the crisis of global modernity.

**CNS:** How did you become interested in China?

**Prasenjit Duara:** When I was in university in India in the 1970s, I was deeply influenced by Chinese idealism and poverty alleviation policies, such as the integration of “barefoot doctors” (farmers in rural areas who were given basic training to work also as healthcare providers). This is why I first turned my attention to the study of modern Chinese history. Then I went to the United States to study Chinese history. I wrote my first book, *Culture, Power and the State: Rural Society in North China, 1900–1942*, to study and compare the conditions of modern transformation in China with the Indian experience.

I am fundamentally a historian of China and Asia, and I like to focus more on China and India as these two countries are leading the way to the great changes that are to come.

**CNS:** You have a deep knowledge of Chinese history and have traveled extensively in China. How do you see China's development and changes?

**Prasenjit Duara:** Before the COVID-19 epidemic, I used to visit China once or twice a year, a habit I maintained for almost 30 years.

China's modernization in many areas, especially poverty reduction and economic development, has been remarkable. But this rapid development has also come at a great cost, especially in terms of the environment and for many inland rural areas and migrant workers.

The nature and pace of economic growth, population growth, and urban sprawl in China and India, particularly in China, are continuing a pattern of development that began in the West two centuries ago, and the nature and pace of that growth is a cause for concern, despite the efforts being made in both countries to protect the environment.

**CNS:** *Culture, Power and the State*, which has been translated into Chinese, covers the period of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC). A century later, under the leadership of the CPC, China has built a moderately prosperous society. How do you see the development of the CPC?

**Prasenjit Duara:** Over the past 100 years, the CPC has been one of the most surprising and powerful organizations in the world. I don't believe there is any other political organization that can influence such a large society and reach so deeply into people's lives.

China's development is accompanied by a need to gain the understanding of others and to present a vision of the world that is universal and does not replicate the previous global order.

**CNS:** While discussing nationalism, you quoted Hungarian economist Karl Polanyi's description of how capitalism works: It first flourishes and then declines, and the countries that had been opening up suddenly close their doors when undergoing depression, and then protectionist and ultra-nationalist tendencies emerge. How do you look at this view?

**Prasenjit Duara:** I totally agree with Polanyi about open and closed societies operating in a global capitalist economy. Today, it is true not only in the West but also in the East. For example, tens of millions of Chinese workers have had to return to the countryside in the last few



years when factories closed. But perhaps China's rural societies are better able to absorb them because their social and economic ties still exist.

**CNS:** Is the world witnessing an upsurge in “beggar-thy-neighbor” nationalism with the rapid development of non-Western powers and the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Prasenjit Duara:** Yes, nationalism has indeed worsened globally since I wrote *The Crisis of Global Modernity* (in 2014). But the global failure of populist nationalism is also beginning to emerge, not only cyclically (as Polanyi suggests) but also in the context of the current climate change and pandemics.

Of course, all of this is related to global capitalism and its self-accelerating engines. Most nationalists feel they are anti-globalization. But I have always believed that nationalism is inextricably linked to the global allocation and control of resources and markets. I can't predict whether nationalists will recognize this potential connection, but people around the world will have to deal with it.

**CNS:** The modernization theory has always had a Eurocentric bias. German sociologist Max Weber, for example, thought that modernization was Westernization. What do you think of Weber's question as to why Eastern societies like China and India didn't take an alternative path of rationalization independent of the West in politics, economics, science, and even art? Do you think there is only one model of modernity and that is the Western one?

**Prasenjit Duara:** Weber originally saw rationality as a method for achieving different goals and values (e.g., harmony between man and nature). He later argued that in the West, rationality as a method has become the goal of modern society itself, because it is most effective in maximizing the interests of individuals and societies to a level unattainable by other contemporaneous societies. He also spoke about the limits that rationality as a goal may impose on human agency. It is time to reconsider the goals and values (such as sustainability and democratic participation) and see if we can use the rationality model to achieve them.

**CNS:** Do you think the historical experience and contemporary practice of Asia can offer solutions to the crisis of global modernity caused by competing nation-state constructions?

**Prasenjit Duara:** I have written that the dialogical transcendence of Asian societies, which emphasizes plurality and openness, represents a

historically non-exclusive and non-absolutist tradition. Today, the nationalism and competitiveness of Asian societies is eroding these traditions. But new forces have emerged within “civil society,” poor and indigenous communities fighting for social justice and sustainability based on old concepts and practices. I believe that in this crisis of the Anthropocene, the present geological age, these movements can exert some influence on politicians and intergovernmental institutions, especially through the new generation that has to eat the bitter fruits of our irresponsibility.

**CNS:** Should the East and the West compete or cooperate to address the crisis of global modernity?

**Prasenjit Duara:** The instinct for competition is certainly present in nature and in human society. In the last 300 years of nationalist-capitalist development, competition has become the dominant force in global society. But with the right conditions and institutions, it is also possible for human beings to develop a collaborative and cooperative nature. The political and ideological hegemony of the competitive model has led to the global crisis of climate change and the destruction of the planet’s environment. It is time for the nations of the world and other institutions to work together to save the planet.

**CNS:** You have suggested that we need a universal world now more than ever, and you say that the Chinese ideal of the “world” is perhaps the last of the old universalist concepts of the late nineteenth century to exist in institutional form. In recent years, China has repeatedly referred to the “common values of all humankind” in many important bilateral and multilateral contexts.

**Prasenjit Duara:** China’s concept and rhetoric of common values for all humanity and the “world” is a very positive step. But many other societies also have a universal vision, especially the United States, which sees democracy as a universal good. The real test, of course, is how a universal vision emerging from a political center can encompass the diverse values in the world. I believe that the Western vision of hegemony is not the only way to govern the planet. Even within the current framework of the United Nations and its related institutions, collective problems can be more effectively addressed in a cooperative mode if nation-states are given some real (sovereign) power.

(Interviewed by Luo Haibing and Niu Xiumin)

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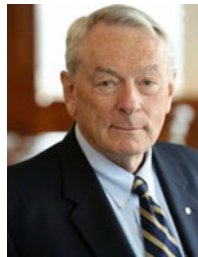
## CHAPTER 12

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# Olympic Boycotts Are Short-Sighted and Negative

*Richard W. Pound*

Richard W. Pound is a former vice president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and chair of the IOC Marketing Committee.



Richard W. Pound

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R. W. Pound (✉)  
Beijing, China

Richard W. Pound was one of the first IOC members to speak out in 2020 in support of postponing the Tokyo Olympic Games as the preparations for the Games were “clearly sliding into an abyss” due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some people suggested that the Tokyo Olympics should be canceled, but Pound felt delay was a better option than cancellation. COVID-19 was not the only crisis the IOC faced. On July 9, 2021, the European Parliament passed a non-binding motion, calling on EU member states to boycott the 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Beijing. Pound says history shows that the Olympic boycotts in the past have never achieved their objectives. This interview was taken on July 23, 2021, a day before the delayed 2020 Tokyo Olympics opened.

**CNS:** On the eve of the Tokyo Olympics, an opinion poll showed that more than half of the Japanese were still opposed to holding it. What did the IOC think of the voice of the people?

**Richard W. Pound:** There are always different voices. There was also a lot of negative information about health risks in the run-up to the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. Some media and researchers claimed that the athletes would die in the Olympic Village because of the smog. But the success of the Olympics proved that such talk was just crazy.

For the IOC, with the best scientific and medical knowledge available to us, we made a commitment to the Japanese Government that holding the Games would not significantly increase the health risks to the athletes and the Japanese. The government told us that they would handle the public opinion. Therefore, we no longer tried to explain to the Japanese public why they should not be concerned any more.

I think the public will change their mind eventually. Negative opinions will disappear once the Games starts and people find it so well organized. Five billion people around the world are expected to watch the Games, and there will definitely be an Olympic fever.

**CNS:** Some professionals like IOC member Kevan Gosper have said that the United Nations or World Health Organization (WHO) may decide to postpone or cancel the Olympic Games under special circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Is it feasible?

**Richard W. Pound:** The Olympic Games are held by the IOC. It is the IOC that invites athletes from all over the world to participate, not the WHO or the UN. These invitations are non-governmental. In fact, the only official involvement at the government level is when the head of state

or government of the host country speaks at the opening ceremony and declares the Games open. Of course, the government is also responsible for providing security and other routine services for the Games, but they are not the organizer.

As the organizer of the most complex event on earth, we work closely with professionals in sports science, medicine and other fields. Our job is to guarantee the participation of over 200 countries and regions as well as over 40 individual sports organizations. It involves more than 10,000 high-level athletes, and there's never a do-over. You can never say to an athlete, "You ran a great 100 meters, but would you mind doing it again as our timing system just went down?" It is appropriate for the IOC to have the final say.

**CNS:** Given the challenges faced by the Tokyo Olympics in terms of cost, the pandemic and public opinion, do you think the IOC should consider choosing a permanent host city to solve these difficulties altogether?

**Richard W. Pound:** The IOC has discussed this issue many times with the conclusion that the Olympic Games does not belong to any one country. If a permanent host city is chosen, it will most likely be in a developed country. Some countries, such as Guatemala or Honduras, may never have the chance to host the Games due to their size or poor infrastructure. It's also hard for the world to accept that the IOC will spend money in a particular country forever.

Besides, as the emerging countries develop, they also ask to participate in international affairs, including hosting the Olympic Games. When we started the IOC's global marketing program in 1988, our work was based on the market size rather than the number of Olympic medals. That's why we didn't consider Brazil, Russia, China, India and other big Olympic countries as their markets were not developed. But suddenly, many countries have become important economies in the world, changing the Games. In the past, 90% of the Olympic Games were held in Europe, but now it is also held in Asia, South America and other regions.

With the development of technology, the world is becoming smaller. The first modern Olympic Games was held in 1896 with only a dozen countries participating, when international cooperation was a new invention and the meaning of "international" was very narrow.

Nowadays, with more convenient transportation and developed communication, we are able to keep the IOC functional during the

pandemic. The invention of radio and television has made it possible for the world to watch the Games in time; close-up footages and slow-motion playbacks also make the global audience part of the Games.

To sum up, the Olympic Games has benefited from the development of human society, and the whole world is now able to share the Olympic experience of the athletes. This is a two-way relationship. I am confident about the future of the Games.

**CNS:** In the 1980s, Western countries boycotted the Moscow Olympics and the East European states of the then USSR boycotted the Los Angeles Olympics. Now, some Western politicians are once again using boycotts as a political tool. Do you think a mass boycott will happen again?

**Richard W. Pound:** I'm optimistic on this issue as I know boycotting the Olympics just doesn't work, especially when the purpose of boycotts is to change the behavior of the so-called "target countries." In 1980, some countries boycotted the Moscow Olympics because of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. What was the result? The Soviet Union continued to occupy Afghanistan for another decade.

The Olympics is not influenced by politics. Our choice of Tokyo and Beijing does not mean we support any politics. What we consider is their abilities to organize the Games well. There is no doubt that both the Japanese and Chinese governments have the capability.

Our focus is on the young athletes. They had been preparing for the Olympics for a decade or more, but boycotts would keep them out. When a politician says, "We must boycott an Olympic Games," he is not saying "we," but "You athletes must boycott and give up your dreams as we are not happy with the policies of the host country." This is in fact a violation of athletes' human rights to participate in sports competitions voluntarily. It is very short-sighted and negative, and will destroy the dreams and hopes of athletes all over the world. There are lots of things a government could do to express its ideas without ruining its own athletes.

**CNS:** Can politicians who advocate boycotts be persuaded by this view when the IOC talks to them?

**Richard W. Pound:** Now that history has shown that boycotts don't work, would a government still stick to it? Historically, Olympic boycotts have never achieved their political goals, and if a government is stubborn about this, then there must be something wrong with it.

Of course, there will always be disagreements between governments and tensions between big countries. But it's worth noting that when some U.S. politicians started talking about boycotting the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, some of the more experienced said that it would not work.

The IOC stressed that boycotts are not the only viable diplomatic option in a complex international environment. In today's world with all kinds of complex relations, some special channels of communication are very precious, and the Olympics is one. Why destroy the unique channel of communication that has been built up since 1896? During the Olympic Games, athletes from different countries, religions and different political positions come together and compete peacefully and amicably. In a complex and increasingly polarized world, the Olympics is an oasis of co-existence.

I went to the 1960 Olympics at the height of the Cold War with the stereotype that the Soviets and we were two worlds apart. But when we saw the Soviet swimmers practicing as hard as ours were and competing as intensely as ours did, we realized that they were human beings just like us. We don't share the same language or background, but we would like to seek common ground while shelving differences.

**CNS:** The IOC has always been an independent non-governmental organization, but under the current international situation, does it rely more on cooperation with governments?

**Richard W. Pound:** We are a sports organization existing in a political world. It is very important for us to understand that the Olympic Games or the IOC cannot control the world. But our view is that at the international level, the Olympics is a means of communication, and at the domestic level, it could promote economic, social and sports development. We're trying to explain to the world that the Olympics is a useful tool, and that we're willing to do whatever we can to help the world with it.

That's why IOC President Thomas Bach goes to the G20 Summit, and the IOC attends the UN General Assembly as an observer and addresses the assembly at least once a year. It's all part of our missions. Although we are not political, we are fully aware that we live in a political world.

(Interviewed by Cao Ran)



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## Why the UAE Wants to Be China's Best Partner

*Ali Al Dhaheri*

Ali Al Dhaheri, the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to China, is the UAE's former governor for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and headed the OPEC's board of governor in 2014. He holds an honorary doctorate in maritime laws from the University of Tasmania in Australia and an MBA from the South Eastern University, Washington, D.C.

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A. A. Dhaheri (✉)  
Washington, D.C., USA



Ali Al Dhaheri

**The UAE and China are comprehensive strategic partners with high-level exchanges, deepened political mutual trust and bilateral cooperation in various fields. They share similar development paths, philosophies and goals, and together, are a useful reference for developing countries to seek an independent path of modernization development.**

**Ali Al Dhaheri talks about how to find a balance and win-win results in cross-cultural exchanges and multi-field cooperation between China and the UAE from the perspective of mutual learning among civilizations. As an example of win-win cooperation, he mentions the results from the UAE joining the Belt and Road Initiative and other projects with China. He hopes the bilateral exchanges and cooperation will give vitality to the UAE's strategic vision for the next 50 years and benefit the common aspirations of both.**

**CNS:** The recent cooperation between China and the UAE has been called “a model of global cooperation in the twenty-first century.” In 2012, the UAE became the first Arab country in the Gulf to establish a strategic partnership with China. In 2018, the two countries established a comprehensive strategic partnership. When Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE and ruler of Abu Dhabi, visited China in 2019 as the crown prince of the emirate, he said deepening the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership was the UAE's diplomatic priority, and it would always be a reliable strategic partner no matter how the international situation changed. Why does the UAE value its relationship with China?

**Ali Al Dhaheri:** The UAE values China as a friend as we have common goals and shared visions. First, the closeness between the two peoples. Both the nations are ancient and great nations that have made immense contributions to human development and progress. We have great respect for each other's achievements in history.

Also, the two countries support each other on issues concerning each other's major interests. In modern history, the Chinese nation and the Arab nation went through a similar fate. China has given unswerving support to the just struggle of the Arab nation. The UAE and China have developed bilateral relations on the basis of mutual respect and understanding. The UAE is committed to maintaining regional stability and prosperity, while China is playing an increasingly important role in international affairs. The two countries share the same visions for the future of mankind.

Since the establishment of their diplomatic ties in 1984, the UAE and China have made significant achievements and breakthroughs in their exchanges in many fields including politics, economy, culture and science and technology. At present, the UAE is committed to transforming itself from an oil-based economy to a knowledge-based and innovative economy, and China has leading technologies in new energy, infrastructure, life sciences and artificial intelligence. This is also an important factor for the UAE to attach importance to developing friendly relations with China.

In 2021, the 50th anniversary of the founding of the UAE, we launched "Projects of the 50," the national development strategy for the next 50 years, and "Operation 300 Billion," a 10-year comprehensive industrial strategy plan to raise the industrial sector's contribution to the GDP to AED 300 billion (\$81.6 billion) by 2031 from AED 133 billion (\$36.2 billion) and build the UAE into a world-class industrial country. These goals have much in common with China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025). These common goals will create abundant opportunities for our cooperation.

**CNS:** When Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the UAE in 2018, he said that although China and the UAE are geographically distant and have different national conditions, their people are both creative and have dreams of their own. Sheikh Mohamed also said that it is not only oil that brings progress but also the efforts of the people. How can China and the UAE learn and benefit from each other?

**Ali Al Dhaheri:** The people of both countries are hardworking and intelligent. Both the countries have developed from poor and backward ones into strong and prosperous global and regional influencers through their own efforts. The UAE values tolerance, equality, generosity and innovation, which has something in common with many traditional Chinese ideas.

As the representatives of two important civilizations, the UAE and China are both promoters of peaceful coexistence among the countries in the world. The establishment of diplomatic ties between the UAE and Israel in 2020, a symbol of the normalization of relations between the two countries, reflects the UAE's firm commitment to upholding human values, coexistence and solidarity on the basis of tolerance. China, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has also spared no effort to promote regional and global peace and stability while firmly following the path of peaceful development. On the Middle East issue, China follows the same principle of promoting regional peace, stability and development and safeguarding the interests of the people in the region.

Both the UAE and China are open and free economies, which are complementary in the fields of the economy and trade. China is now the UAE's largest trading partner, and the UAE is China's second largest trading partner in the Middle East and North Africa. The UAE is willing to work with China to deepen economic and trade cooperation to achieve the goal of raising the bilateral trade volume to \$200 billion by 2030.

Political equality, mutual trust, economic and trade benefits and historical and cultural exchanges make our exchanges a win-win one.

**CNS:** The Belt and Road Initiative is a highlight of China-UAE cooperation in recent years. The UAE is one of the first Arab countries to join the initiative. From the ancient Silk Road to the Belt and Road Initiative, why does the Arab world value trade and cultural exchanges with the East? How has the partnership between the UAE and China been strengthened through the Belt and Road?

**Ali Al Dhaheri:** Arab countries have maintained good trade relations with China since ancient times. The Silk Road, which was opened 2,000 years ago, served as a bridge for exchanges between the Arab world at the western end of Asia and China at the eastern end, bringing them close. In the seventh century, the Maritime Silk Road was opened and Chinese silk and porcelain were sold in the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa

and Europe on this route while Arabian spices and pearls were shipped to China through the Indian Ocean. Through the ancient Silk Road, our ancestors exchanged goods and came to know each other.

China is an ancient civilization with a splendid history. In modern times, China encountered many turbulences, but since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, it has achieved many milestones and is now the world's second largest economy. As a comprehensive strategic partner of China, the UAE is proud of China's success and happy to see it make greater achievements. China's development benefits not only itself, but also brings huge opportunities to the UAE.

As one of the first countries to join the Belt and Road Initiative, the UAE has maintained sound trade and business partnership with China, which is also one of the factors contributing to the outstanding progress made by the UAE in recent years. The close trade and commercial relations have promoted closer cooperation and exchanges in politics, culture, science and technology and many other fields, and deepened the friendship between the two peoples.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I was impressed by the mutual support between our countries. The UAE government and people provided China with medical supplies on many occasions. The Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, and other UAE landmarks lit up in the color of the Chinese national flag to show support for Wuhan, where the pandemic was first reported, and the rest of China. In November 2020, a number of government officials, including the vice president of the UAE, were the first to receive shots of Chinese vaccines, and in December 2020, the UAE became the first country to approve Chinese vaccines for marketing.

In the first half of 2021, G42 Healthcare of the UAE and Sinopharm Group of China jointly launched the first COVID-19 vaccine production line in the UAE. The first "made in the UAE" COVID-19 vaccine boosted the UAE's vaccination program in 205 medical centers across the emirates. On December 27, 2021, the UAE Ministry of Health approved the emergency use of Sinopharm's novel recombinant protein vaccine. This shows the UAE's confidence in China's vaccines. I think the relationship between the UAE and China is a model of state-to-state cooperation.

**CNS:** How will the multi-faceted cooperation with China, including the Belt and Road Initiative, contribute to the UAE's development vision for the next 50 years?

**Ali Al Dhaheri:** On the basis of the 2071 centennial national strategy for the next 50 years we are working to build a more capable government with an emphasis on scientific and technological innovation and education. The goal is to make the UAE one of the best economies in the world and to build a happy and cohesive society.

China is not only the UAE's largest trading partner; it has also maintained long-term, close cooperation with the UAE in science and technology. In the future, our two countries will inject more impetus in the fields of scientific research, technology and innovation.

For example, the UAE and China have similar ambitions in space exploration. The UAE is the first Arab country to have a space program. China has made remarkable achievements in this field, especially the recent successful space exploration by Chinese astronauts, which shows the country's increasingly mature technology in manned spaceflight. I think there will be a wide range of space cooperation between the two countries in the future.

There's another example. The UAE is working with Chinese telecom company Huawei to become the first Arab country to deploy 5G. Our goal is to achieve 100% 5G coverage by 2025. We can also jointly tackle more global challenges, such as climate change, desertification prevention and control, and environmental protection.

Looking ahead to the next 50 years, the UAE is willing to work with China to deepen cooperation in various fields within the framework of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries. We are ready to take the Belt and Road cooperation as the core platform and make greater contribution to common prosperity.

(Interviewed by Xiao Xin)

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## CHAPTER 14

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# The International Order in the Future

*Zheng Yongnian*

Zheng Yongnian is the presidential chair professor and founding director of the Advanced Institute of the Chinese University of Hong Kong's Institute for International Affairs in Shenzhen, south China. He is also a former director of the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, and a former research director and professor of the China Policy Institute, University of Nottingham. His research interests include international relations, foreign policy and China's internal transformation and its external relations.

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© Dolphin Books Co., Ltd. 2023  
L. Chen and K.-H. Pohl (eds.), *East-West Dialogue*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_14)



Zheng Yongnian

In 2020, China's economic aggregate passed the 100-trillion-yuan mark (\$15 trillion), accounting for more than 17% of the global economy.

China's role in the world has undergone immense change. Once a backward country, it has now become an important influencer in the international power structure. This transformation, however, is regarded with suspicion by some. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, for example, has repeatedly accused China of undermining the international order.

**Zheng Yongnian assesses if China's rise will have a fundamental impact on the current international order and who is actually destroying the international order.**

**CNS:** How do you regard the accusations by some Western media that China is sabotaging the international order.

**Zheng Yongnian:** The so-called international order mainly refers to the international rules established after World War II. But who is actually disrupting the order? The United States. When Donald Trump was president, the United States withdrew from a series of UN organizations and international agreements, including the World Health Organization, UNESCO and the Paris Agreement. Moreover, the United States has always refused to join the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

China has always been a protector of these rules, certainly not a destroyer of international rules or a revolutionary. It has been cautious even in its own reforms. According to the Western logic, China's rise to

power is bound to lead to a Chinese camp. For years, the U.S. has been talking about forming a “world team” against “Team China.” But China has no camp, no team. China stays within the system without forming cliques.

But some Westerners have been projecting their own logic on China. For example, some people say the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) were launched to break the existing order. But the AIIB, which follows the most advanced rules in the world, was established to finance infrastructure projects in Asia, something that the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have not done. Therefore, the AIIB does not take away the “rice bowl” of others, it supplements international rules.

China is not a destroyer of the international order, but a reformer trying to make the system complete.

**CNS:** What is the starting point of China’s reform and how does it complement international rules?

**Zheng Yongnian:** In the early days of colonialism and imperialism, Western countries established colonies in Latin America, Africa and other regions to plunder resources and support their own domestic development. But today, the West is stigmatizing China’s investment and construction assistance in Africa and Asia as plundering resources, and even “neo-colonialism” and “debt imperialism.” But this is the West’s own experience, not the Chinese behavior. China has been helping countries in Africa and Asia build railways, highways, hospitals, stadiums, schools and other infrastructure. Why? Because such infrastructure development is a necessary condition for any country’s economic development, and China itself has done the same.

**CNS:** Will China have a greater role in the making of international rules in the future?

**Zheng Yongnian:** China doesn’t make up rules behind closed doors or impose its own rules on other countries like the United States. China learns from the West’s rules first and then formulates its own rules. China has borrowed many good rules from the West during its development as the world’s second largest economy.

Going forward, China needs to continue to digest and absorb the good rules in the world, and at the same time, improve, strengthen and supplement the existing international rules in light of its own conditions.

China's real contribution to the world may come from the contribution of standards and rules. Of course, in this process, China needs to consider the interests of other countries. For many developing countries in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere, China's rules and programs offer a non-Western alternative, not an anti-Western one.

**CNS:** You have said that the world has entered an era of "limited globalization" after the pandemic. How does this differ from the "super globalization" that preceded it?

**Zheng Yongnian:** Since the 1980s, the world has experienced a wave of "super globalization." The concept was developed by Harvard economics professor Dani Rodrik. In this wave of "super globalization," Western countries, especially the United Kingdom and the United States, have promoted privatization and financial liberalization with neoliberal economics as the leading force, enabling a relatively free flow of production factors such as capital, technology and talent around the world.

Along with the flow of capital from the Western developed countries to developing countries, Western countries have also moved their low-technology and low value-added industries to developing countries. This has led to a global reallocation of industrial and supply chains.

The global flow of production factors has created a huge amount of wealth. Both the developing countries, represented by China, and Western developed countries are beneficiaries of this wave of globalization. But many negative effects have also surfaced. Although we are in an era of globalization, its national units are still sovereign states, and sovereign states cannot lose all economic sovereignty. But the biggest problem is that in super globalization almost no sovereign state still has full economic sovereignty.

Take the UK, for example, which pursued Thatcherite neoliberalism (the political and economic policies of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher characterized by privatization of state enterprises, free markets and greater individual independence from the state) and got a City of London, its financial district, but gave up an entire manufacturing sector. Brexit is actually related to that.

The U.S. boasts the most advanced medical system, but according to U.S. statistics, it relies on China for more than 80% of its medical supplies and more than 90% of its antibiotic production. This has become a sharp security issue after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Another

consequence of this loss of economic sovereignty is that since the 1980s, the U.S. middle class has fallen from about 70% to about 50%.

China has not just benefited from super globalization but suffered, too. On the one hand, China has been able to introduce many advanced Western technologies at home and become a major technology application country, but on the other hand, it lacks original technology and R&D motivation. Under the influence of neoliberalism, many people assume that the world market will always exist and if you want something, you can go to the world market to buy it. But now, under the restriction of the sale of advanced technology and equipment to China by the United States, Huawei and other Chinese companies are facing difficulties.

In the long run, it would be normal if the world market goes out of existence. It is just luck that it has continued to exist. The world is entering an era of “limited globalization,” which is likely to return to the characteristics of the period from 1945 to the 1980s. In this stage of globalization, capital and technology will still flow, but they will be restricted. The degree of trade will be reduced, and the economic sovereignty of each country will be strengthened.

**CNS:** Will globalization really return to the way it was over 40 years ago?

**Zheng Yongnian:** It will be similar to the period from 1945 to the 1980s, but with a difference. At that time, the industrial and supply chains of each country were relatively complete. The so-called “Made in America,” “Made in Japan” and “Made in Germany” brands basically manufactured entire products; but since the 1980s, it’s hard to tell exactly which country is the manufacturer. What people call “Made in China” is more likely to have been assembled in China. Parts and materials may come from Japan, other Asian countries or regions, or even Western countries. All kinds of parts and raw materials come to China and are assembled there and then exported elsewhere.

For example, the United States has basically shifted the manufacturing of relatively low value-added and low-technology products to other countries, including chip manufacturing. People say the United States controls the chip industry, but in fact it controls the chip design. U.S. chip manufacturing has gone to countries and regions like the Chinese mainland, China’s Taiwan, South Korea and Japan.

Can countries still produce entire products on their own? After the previous wave of super globalization, it is hard now. The United States

cannot move all its production chains back home, nor can Japan or Germany, so it is difficult to completely change the interdependence between economies and production. In short, it is now hard to imagine a world economy that is completely decoupled.

**CNS:** How will this limited globalization affect the global supply chain and industrial chain?

**Zheng Yongnian:** Historically, economic logic will eventually defeat political logic, so the shape of the industrial chain will not be completely changed. After globalization and opening up, no country can ever return to an autarky economy. In the COVID-19 outbreak, the industrial chains in Europe and North America have been significantly affected, but the industrial chains and productivity in Asia have strengthened rather than weakened.

The formation of industrial chains has its economic principles, roughly in line with Adam Smith's comparative advantage. Once comparative advantage is lost and the industrial chain moves away, it is difficult to move it back. Once the industrial chain is formed, it is not so easy to force its adjustment artificially. In the United States, for example, it is hard for the White House to force Wall Street to do exactly what it wants. The White House may influence the industrial chain in the name of so-called national security, but it is difficult to change the overall pattern.

In the past, the three major global supply chains were centered in Europe, the United States and East Asia, especially China. This pattern will not change greatly, and the three major supply chains will not be completely self-sufficient in the future. Both in terms of comparative advantages and division of labor, they still have their own characteristics, such as originality and design, which are predominant in the United States. But in terms of manufacturing, the United States is unlikely to move the manufacturing capacity of Germany, Japan, etc. to its own soil.

Competition is inevitable. Whether the United States, Germany or China want to go up the industrial chain, the competition will be greater and more fierce.

**CNS:** Will the global supply chain restructuring be de-sinicized? What are the opportunities for China in the future?

**Zheng Yongnian:** De-sinicification is too extreme. Globalization is the logic of capital; capital is open, it goes to lucrative places. Therefore, the flow of Western capital to China will not be interrupted, and China will

not be completely decoupled from the United States or other Western countries.

China has the most complete industrial chain in the world, with various industrial sectors. At the same time, China is the largest single market in the world, with a middle class of 400 million people, which is expected to more than double in the future, and huge consumption potential. In many areas, the simple consumption choice of the Chinese can determine the price of many products in the world market. So we can be confident that China will retain Western capital and technology. In 2020, China was the world's largest recipient of foreign investment.

In technology, China will inevitably face a Western blockade, especially from the United States. But since its reform and opening up, China has accumulated more than 40 years of experience in technology. British sinologist Dr. Joseph Needham's *History of Science and Technology in China* shows China's science and technology prowess was brilliant in the past as well. Since the 1980s, China has been a big country in applied technology, but now it needs to turn into a big country in original technology, and there is still much room for development.

At present, China's domestic market is still basically segmented, and the domestic rules are not completely unified. For example, the rules in the Pearl River Delta are different from those in the Yangtze River Delta, and the Yangtze River Delta has different rules from the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. Therefore, internal circulation should be used to unify the domestic rules. The labor productivity that uniform rules can create will be immeasurable.

**CNS:** Faced with the phenomenon of limited globalization, what will happen to the world pattern in the future? Will the role of the so-called "central state" change?

**Zheng Yongnian:** In the past, the world was known as "one super, many powers," the "one super" referring to the United States and the "many powers" referring to economies such as China, Russia, the European Union and Japan. But now the world has changed so much that multipolarity is not enough to describe the change. The future world is deeply diversified. Simply put, the United States is still a great power, but not in all areas. It is declining in some areas but still leading in some. The same is true for China, Russia and Japan. Each country is a diverse and interlaced complex in the political, economic, cultural and social fields.

The so-called “Thucydides trap” theory, in which one country replaces another, is an either-or view. People should get out of this Cold War mentality and look at the world from a truly diverse perspective.

In terms of the economic center, the world economic center has been in Europe and North America since modern times. Since the twenty-first century, with the rise of China, India and other Asian countries, coupled with the state of Japan and other traditional powers, the world economic center has shifted to Asia. This situation will not change for the next 20 to 30 years or more.

**CNS:** What role will China play?

**Zheng Yongnian:** China has arguably been a source of stability in Asia since Emperor Qin Shi Huang, the founder of the Qin Dynasty, unified China more than 2,000 years ago. Objectively, China has long been a stabilizer of the Asian economy. It played a huge role in stabilizing the economy during the 1997 Asian financial crisis. After that, China acted as a stabilizer once again during the 2008 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020. It will also play a leading role in the future as its domestic market continues to grow and it moves up the technology chain. Stability and leadership will be China’s main contribution to the world economy.

(Interviewed by Pang Wuji)



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# Globalization Is Not Dead, and the Thucydides Trap Theory Is Groundless

*Zhang Yunling*

Zhang Yunling, a Chinese expert on international issues, is a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He is the director of the Discipline Development Committee of the School of Northeast Asia Studies of Shandong University and the director of the Institute of International Studies at the university. Recognized as a “National Outstanding Expert” by the Chinese government, he is the author of several books, including *China and the World since the Reform and Opening up* and *Building a Harmonious World: Theory and Practice*.

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Zhang Yunling

With the world undergoing profound changes, which are creating both challenges and opportunities, what is a way out of the chaos? Is globalization dead? Will there be a power shift in the global order? Zhang Yunling shares his analysis based on his study of China and the rest of the world.

**CNS:** Is globalization dead?

**Zhang Yunling:** Globalization is a typical feature of today's world, and few countries can remain aloof from it. But in recent years, anti-globalization and reverse globalization voices, forces and actions have sprung up and some claim that globalization is dead. In my view, globalization is not dead, but has entered a new period of adjustment as there's something wrong with it.

First, there's regional imbalance and industrial structure imbalance. Interdependence, opening up, industrial chains and supply chains are conducive to division of labor and participation as well as economic growth. However, over-migration will lead to imbalance. For example, a large wave of out-migration will lead to the problem of industries "hollowing out"; that is, after an industrial out-migration, the original industrial belt will decline if there is no new industry to replace it. Industrial restructuring and transfer is necessary, but it needs to be supported by policies that will promote the development of new industries and fill the "hollow." The Chicago area of the United States is the base of traditional industries. After the industrial transfer, there was no replacement

and renewal, and it became a declining “rust belt,” where the voice of anti-globalization is loud.

Second, the security of development. According to the economic theory, the longer the supply chain, the better since a finer division of labor improves efficiency. But the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic created the problem of supply cuts. Industries with the most detailed industrial chains, such as the automobile industry and electronic products, bore the brunt of the disruptions.

In this situation, enterprises and governments began to rethink, fearing that they could not rely on external support in everything but needed to ensure the basic supply on their own. To this end, a series of measures and policies were introduced. The United States politicized development and security issues and tried to decouple China’s participation in supply chains and advanced technologies. This is a typical anti-globalization measure. All countries, governments, enterprises and individuals should undoubtedly pay attention to their own development security, but going to extremes is also harmful.

Third, the polarization of wealth. In an environment of open competition, it’s always the strong and the powerful who win. Therefore, wealth is concentrated among the strong and the powerful. The more globalized the world is, the more polarized wealth accumulation becomes. Therefore, there is skepticism and opposition toward globalization. In 2008, the subprime mortgage crisis in the U.S. led to a movement against Wall Street, which represents the gainers from globalization. There has also been a surge in anti-globalization sentiment in Europe and elsewhere.

Globalization thus has entered a period of adjustment, but openness, division of labor and the refinement of supply chains will not end, and new technologies will boost the development of new globalization.

**CNS:** How is globalization being adjusted?

**Zhang Yunling:** At the policy level, governments will pay more attention to the safe supply of basic necessities, reduce their external dependence on essential necessities, and support the return of industries. They will take measures to limit the outflow of core industries, such as core technologies, the key industries of the national economy and people’s livelihood, and strengthen the restrictions with more laws and regulations.

Many countries have begun to enact stricter foreign investment laws and restrict foreign investment in core technologies to prevent foreign

investors from buying domestic companies at low prices in times of economic difficulty.

In this way, “national conservatism” based on economic, social and political security will exert greater impact. Still, no country, including the United States, is claiming to close its doors. The U.S. government is thinking more about politics and limiting the competitive power of its rivals. After all, it can maximize its own interests only by relying on the world market.

At the level of business strategies, enterprises will pay more attention to the security of their supply chains and the supply chains will be shortened for them to master the core technologies. Besides, to reduce operating costs, intelligent technologies such as robots will be used on a large scale. However, companies, especially the large ones, are paying more attention to opportunities in the international market and will not retreat to their domestic market. Instead, they will build large networks based on world markets and more enterprises will embrace the Internet of Things.

On the social level, citizens will require more from the government, demanding restrictions on the inflow of foreign capital and population for improving job security and social security. However, there will also be more people who will rely on a more open social, economic and political environment for greater and better employment and development space. Therefore, although the original liberalism will be out of power, the relationship between globalization and public interest will still be very close. Extreme xenophobic forces will not be able to win majority support.

**CNS:** What is the future of globalization?

**Zhang Yunling:** Globalization will become more “managed” or “limited.” Nonetheless, as an important part of the global economic and social functioning collective, it cannot simply be abandoned. As a process of development, globalization is adjustable, controllable and variable, but irreversible. No country, enterprise or social group can retreat into a closed so-called “tribal society.” For example, governments can support outgoing companies’ return, but they cannot force it happen. In reality, a large number of enterprises cannot go back, especially those that depend on the local market and factor resources to survive.

The COVID-19 pandemic will eventually end and the thinking, discussion, debate and adjustment of post-pandemic policies, business strategies and civic consciousness will continue for a long time. This is called the reflection and transformation of “post-liberalism.”

In the face of the global pandemic, sadness, pessimism and extreme emotions have tended to prevail, but once it ends and everything is back to normal, people will become more rational. From past historical experience, we know every major disaster provides lessons for us to become wiser and promote progress. COVID-19 is no exception.

In terms of the development of globalization, there is a new wave, namely, the construction of the Internet of Things. Driven by information, intelligent and digital technologies, it integrates various economic and social activities into it.

Globalization is not only an economic phenomenon, and the new kind of globalization will have three major features.

First, building the Internet of Things with artificial intelligence, big data and other technologies, breaking traditional national boundaries, integrating multiple factors, going beyond the existing supply chain model, and integrating small and medium-sized enterprises and individuals into the network system.

Second, market opening and balanced development will be better combined to change the “openness-only” mode led by liberalism. Developed countries pay more attention to not only the accumulation of international wealth but also the balance of domestic social economy under globalization, and other countries will also pay attention to the construction of the overall national security system, that is, to a more balanced globalization.

Third, the existing international institutions, cooperation mechanisms and platforms will be adjusted to meet the needs of actual development, especially to meet the needs of the new globalization by providing support and convenience for its development.

**CNS:** How will China cope with the future globalization?

**Zhang Yunling:** China is a beneficiary of globalization. The reform and opening up policy opened the door for China to participate in globalization, which led to rapid economic development. Therefore, China is also an active promoter and defender of globalization.

With protectionism, populism and political interventionism on the rise, China must adhere to deeper reform and opening up. For the first time since industrialization, China is leading in some respects. Both in terms of its own development needs and the world economy, China is now able to play an increasingly important role in opening up the world market and maintaining the trend of globalization.

**CNS:** What's your take on the so-called power transition?

**Zhang Yunling:** In view of the general trend of world development, changes in power are bound to happen. Historically, power shifted from one great power to another. But today's power transfer is different from the past, that is, the typical feature of power transfer is not power substitution, but the decomposition and dispersion of it.

When we talk about power transfer today, we mainly refer to the United States, the only superpower and hegemonic power in the world which dominates and controls the world. But will the power of the U.S. transfer to another country? I don't think so.

With diversified development, no country can control the future alone. International and regional organizations such as the UN will play an important role in managing the world. With the increasing complexity of global affairs, the role of non-state actors such as enterprises, individuals and non-governmental organizations is becoming more and more important. In some areas, the state cannot dominate and has to rely on multinationals.

If the transfer of power is viewed from a new perspective, there would be no Thucydides Trap. A new discourse system in theory and public opinion needs to be established. In terms of international changes, it is impossible to blame everything on China-U.S. relations.

During the Cold War, the Soviet-American confrontation affected the world deeply as it created two power blocs, each with a leader. Now we have neither the blocs nor the leaders. Most countries do not want a confrontation between China and the United States. They do not want to be involved in any bloc as they have mutual interests with both the United States and China.

Therefore, if we still view the world from old theoretical perspectives and link all issues to China-U.S. relations, we will find no way out at all. Therefore, we must analyze the world from a multi-faceted, multi-layered and multi-directional perspective.

China, for its part, needs to consider the effects of its peaceful rise and increase the transparency and integration of its strategy and goals. To realize the Chinese dream of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, we must make it understandable and acceptable to others and avoid strategic misunderstandings and miscalculations.

As a resurgent power, China expects to take center stage in the world, but there will be others there, too. This is another prominent feature of the power shift in the new era.

(Interviewed by Yang Bing, Wen Longjie and Wang Jiaoni)

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## Is America Still an Immigrants' Paradise?

*Florence Fang*

Florence Fang is a California-based Chinese-American entrepreneur, philanthropist and publisher described as a “living legend in the arena of U.S.-China people-to-people engagement.” A recipient of the 2020 George H.W. Bush Award for Lifetime Achievement in U.S.-China relations, she is also a media mogul. The Fang family was the first Asian-American family to run a major daily newspaper in the United States. She is also an honorary board member of Peking University.

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F. Fang (✉)  
Beijing, China



Florence Fang

Everyone who meets Florence is impressed by her straight back, even in her eighties. Born in China in the 1930s, she emigrated to San Francisco in 1960 and since then, has been representing a blend of Eastern and Western cultures. The United States is a nation of immigrants. The immigrant culture remains deeply rooted in the soil, starting with the arrival of the first settlers on the ship *Mayflower* that came from England 400 years ago. Even in the time of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the United States remained a preferred destination of immigrants. Immigrants have helped to build, develop and transform the nation but today, with anti-immigrant sentiments rising, people of color, especially Chinese immigrants, have become targets of hate crime and violence. Florence Fang reflects on whether the United States is still a “paradise” for immigrants in light of her own experience.

**CNS:** You once said, “I came to the United States without any background. I got where I am today with my bare hands.” How did you arrive where you are today?

**Florence Fang:** I don't have any secrets to success. Everyone's situation is different but every immigrant can be brave in their different circumstances.

For example, when the phone rings, pushing you to answer something and you don't know how to handle it, answer it right away and tell the caller that you're not ready. Be brave and face it. Things are not as bad as they seem.

Besides, it's important to be a responsible person. How much weight you can carry on your shoulders determines the success you will have. In my life, from the death of my husband, to my own career challenges, to the purchase of the *San Francisco Examiner*... I've never ceased to take responsibilities. My back is always straight, no matter how much burden I carry.

**CNS:** Your family acquired the *San Francisco Examiner* in 2000. It was a mainstream English newspaper with a history of more than 100 years. Was that a glass ceiling-breaking moment?

**Florence Fang:** It was the first time that a Chinese immigrant family bought a famous mainstream daily newspaper in the United States, which shook the American newspaper industry like never before. The *Wall Street Journal* reported the story on its front page. On the day we bought it, I wore a necklace with an eagle at dinner to go with the mood of the day. The masthead of the *Examiner* was also an eagle, a representation of mainstream American society. The outside world was curious what kind of Chinese family could buy a hundred-year-old American newspaper.

The acquisition was a big encouragement to Chinese-Americans. It was an example, telling them that glass ceilings could be broken. There may be one to be broken in every American industry. However, only a few Chinese had made it at that time and it was lonely. Only when the so-called ceiling is completely shattered will the feeling of loneliness go away. It was just a beginning: There was a brand new world out there, where it was very difficult to realize your dreams.

**CNS:** You are not an official, but you participate in various social and political activities in the United States. For the Chinese community, is this the way to integrate into the local mainstream society?

**Florence Fang:** Yes. If the overseas Chinese want to gain a foothold in American society, they must take part in various social and political activities. Participating in political activities does not mean running for

office. Even if it means just exercising your right to vote or expressing your opinion, you should do it.

After arriving in the U.S., many just want to be a law-abiding citizen and live a good life. But if everyone stays in their comfort zone, the Chinese community as a whole will always be pushed or oppressed.

As early as in 1991, I was one of San Francisco's delegates to White House conferences. Although I didn't have a say, when people talked about China and Asian-Americans, there would always be some scruples when they saw people like me sitting there. It's always good to have a Chinese face on political occasions. I believe that when more Chinese participate in politics, they will play a greater role. When you're sitting in the White House, that's what happens.

A few years ago, for example, the U.S. government launched the 100,000 Strong Initiative to choose 100,000 American students to study in China and deepen bilateral exchanges. I funded the project. The younger generation of Americans will definitely learn more about China if they have the opportunity to go to China and experience it for themselves.

**CNS:** Former President George H.W. Bush wrote the preface to your autobiography, saying, "America is a tale of immigrants who came to this land to build a nation and better their own lives. The Florence Fang story is yet another chapter on the American experience." What, in your opinion, is needed for the U.S. to be an immigrants' paradise?

**Florence Fang:** The United States is still a paradise for immigrants, but the way things are going is disappointing. The American society is sick now, even personal safety cannot be guaranteed. But it will pass. The most important element of a paradise is that people have the freedom to follow their dreams, to pursue what they love, to blossom and grow.

**CNS:** We have been seeing violence against the Chinese community from time to time. How do you think Chinese-Americans should respond?

**Florence Fang:** To be more vigilant and ushering in more legislation are only palliatives. The root cause lies in a lack of understanding of the Chinese and other Asian communities. I think the history of Chinese-Americans, especially their contributions to the American society, should be included in American textbooks, especially the textbooks used in California where there are more Chinese-Americans. In this way, primary and middle school students would be able to understand and respect us.

**CNS:** How do you find a sense of belonging as an immigrant?

**Florence Fang:** I first moved to Taiwan with my family from the Chinese mainland and was called a “mainlander” there. Then I moved to the United States with my husband and became an “immigrant.” I went through a long process from wandering around to taking root. Where is my home? It is within my heart. When you feel inner peace and contentment, you will find a sense of belonging. I love both China and the United States and feel I belong to both.

**CNS:** Your experience proves that exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and Western civilizations and cross-cultural practices are both possible and beneficial.

**Florence Fang:** Both the “community of a shared future for mankind” proposed by President Xi Jinping and the “society of great harmony” proposed by Confucianism require deep exchanges between the Chinese and Western civilizations. Civilization is a manifestation of human progress. It develops. If it is good for me and suits me, then it can be absorbed and digested and slowly becomes a part of who I am.

Having lived in the United States for more than 60 years, I am bound to be influenced by the American culture and way of thinking. For example, many Chinese like to complain about their own “pains” and gossip about the “pains” of others. Americans don’t do that. They take it personally, and so do I. Perhaps Chinese and American cultures have different understandings of the boundaries of private matters. Under the collision of the two, I have gradually formed my own way of thinking.

Many Chinese raise their children to have someone to rely on when they grow old. But in my eyes, children are more like apples on a tree. When they grow up and become mature, they will fall on the ground from the tree and become independent individuals. There are natural differences between the Chinese and Western civilizations, and such examples abound. That’s why there needs to be more exchanges and mutual learning.

Both civilizations and cultures have influenced me, and I enjoy both. I enjoy giving kids *hongbaos*, the red envelopes with money in them, on the occasion of the traditional Spring Festival, the Chinese New Year. I also enjoy Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations.

**CNS:** From your interactions with American society, what do you think is its greatest benefit from the Chinese culture?

**Florence Fang:** There's a Chinese saying: "The ocean is vast because it admits hundreds of rivers." The notion of tolerance and inclusiveness in Chinese culture has a great influence on me, teaching me to tolerate and not exclude anyone.

Living in a multicultural society where my family members, employees and associates are all from different countries and different cultural backgrounds, we all need to have an inclusive heart and respect each other's uniqueness.

(Interviewed by Luo Haibing and Ling Yun)

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## The Root of Discrimination Against Asian-Americans in the U.S. and Its Remedy

*Mae Ngai*

Mae Ngai is an American historian and history professor at Columbia University with a special interest in the histories of immigration, Chinese history and racial studies. She is also a respected author whose books include *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, *The Lucky Ones: One Family and the Extraordinary Invention of Chinese America* and *The Chinese Question: The Gold Rushes and Global Politics*, which throw light on the roots of the prejudice against Chinese immigrants in the United States and other English-speaking countries at the end of the nineteenth century, and the misleading stereotypes about Chinese-Americans and Asians that have persisted in academic circles for decades. Her books have won American Historical Association awards.

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M. Ngai (✉)  
New York, NY, USA



Mae Ngai

Racial discrimination against Asian-Americans has been a long-standing problem in the United States, fueled further by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. According to the New York City Police Department, in 2021, there was a 368% spike in hate crimes against Asians in September alone, compared with the same period the previous year. Biased comments by some Western politicians have also stoked the anti-Asian sentiment in American society.

**Mae Ngai** looks at the historical roots of the discrimination against Asian-Americans in the U.S., whether the community, including Chinese-Americans, has achieved equality in the U.S. after more than a century of immigration, and the possible remedies.

**CNS:** In the early literature of the United States, we find a deep-rooted impression of Chinese immigrants as coolies, porters or unskilled low-wage laborers. The early history of Chinese-Americans was written by white Americans. How biased or accurate were these perceptions and narratives?

**Mae Ngai:** Chinese labor was considered to be a special and racialized form of cheap labor, which was the opposite of free labor. Most of the early books on the Chinese community were indeed written by whites but there were also white scholars who identified with the Chinese community. Sociologist Mary Roberts Coolidge, for example, rejected the idea that the Chinese were equivalent to coolies in her 1909 book *Chinese Immigration*.

However, it is a pessimistic reality that in American politics, there were more people with anti-China attitudes, which made it easy to influence public opinion. That's why this bias is deeply ingrained.



Later in the 1960s, the term “coolie” was revived by white historians. They argued that the Chinese were never integrated into local society, nor did they enjoy the kind of freedom to work as European immigrants did.

My research is to reconstruct the true stories of the “Chinese” who settled in the United States and other English-speaking countries at that time, and to present a more impartial history. The term “coolie” is distorted and racially discriminatory and portrays Chinese immigrants as slaves who had no say in their lives and work. I oppose that notion.

**CNS:** From the Gold Rush in California in the mid-nineteenth century, when prospectors flooded the region to mine for gold, to Chinese immigrants’ suffering during World War II, and to the introduction of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 that banned all Chinese labor immigration for 10 years and was the only law targeting a particular community, the Chinese in the U.S. have been repeatedly excluded and discriminated against. Why then has Chinese immigration to the United States never stopped?

**Mae Ngai:** Anti-China sentiment in the U.S. dates back to the nineteenth century. Anti-Chinese politics, though varying from place to place, influenced each other, and in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries, a common anti-Chinese racist theory emerged on the basis of white colonialism.

One main reason why Chinese immigration didn’t stop was that the Chinese who came to the United States as businessmen or students were not subject to the Chinese Exclusion Act. Besides, a significant number of immigrants were “paper sons,” that is, people who immigrated by buying documents certifying they were blood relatives of the Chinese who had residency in the U.S. They were not subject to the Chinese Exclusion Act either. In 1950, as many as half of the Chinese-Americans were “paper sons.” That’s why historically Chinese immigration to the U.S. has never stopped.

**CNS:** Since the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, the study of Chinese history in the U.S. has grown. Is this the result of the long-term influence of the Chinese community on American society?

**Mae Ngai:** In addition to studies on the Chinese laborers who were at the bottom of the social ladder, there are also many studies on non-working class Chinese-Americans. For example, Sue Fawn Chung’s *In Pursuit of Gold: Chinese American Miners and Merchants in the American West*, Judy Yung’s *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in*

*San Francisco*, and my book *The Lucky Ones: One Family and the Extraordinary Invention of Chinese America*. Ellen D. Wu's *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*, which traces how the Chinese and Japanese in the U.S. began to be regarded as a model minority from the earlier "yellow peril," became almost the mainstream view of the new Chinese middle class in the twentieth century. The Chinese-American community has influenced American history and society in many ways.

**CNS:** In your book *The Lucky Ones: One Family and the Extraordinary Invention of Chinese America*, you trace three generations of the Tape family in the post-Gold Rush period. What is your message? Has the Chinese community really influenced the course of American history?

**Mae Ngai:** Joseph Tape was a first-generation immigrant, whose Chinese surname was Zhao. He aspired to be part of America's "white middle class." The Tape family experience represents in microcosm what happened to the Chinese immigrants in the past hundred years and America's social and cultural changes. I hoped to show the big picture through the story of a small family.

The book mentions the many ways in which the Chinese-American community has influenced American history and society.

For example, there were the court cases concerning Chinese immigration and citizenship, such as *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, the Chinese Exclusion Act, *Fong Yue Ting v. United States*, and *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*. Wong Kim Ark, who was born in the U.S., returned to Guangdong Province in south China to visit relatives and was denied re-entry to the U.S. for the reason that his parents were not American. At that time, under the Chinese Exclusion Act, any Chinese who left the U.S. could no longer return freely, and even permanent residents were denied the right to become citizens. Wong Kim Ark began a long legal battle and wasn't allowed to enter the country until 1898. These legal cases contributed substantially to the development of U.S. laws concerning immigration.

**CNS:** The Tape family was a middle-class family in the early American society. Even though they were well-off, it was still difficult for them to truly integrate into American society. Why? Has the dream of racial equality come true for Asian-Americans today?

**Mae Ngai:** It is true that some Chinese-Americans have achieved great material success, but I have to be honest and say that there is still a long way to go to achieve racial equality.

**CNS:** There were many Americans who were not hostile to the Chinese, but the positive messages were drowned out by a flood of negative propaganda ruling public opinion.

**Mae Ngai:** Racism is not a natural human reaction toward different peoples. It is generated by politics. There were misleading stereotypes about the Chinese for decades among academics, and very little historical information about the Chinese, let alone historical information from the Chinese themselves. I think politics play a strong role here.

**CNS:** Not only the Chinese, other immigrants have also remained in segregated groups in white American society. What's your take on that?

**Mae Ngai:** Historians call this phenomenon “transnational identities and social practices,” which is very common among immigrants. They have never been really integrated into white American society and they still want to stay connected to their own communities, families and friends from their ancestral countries. White American society is resistant not only to Asian-Americans, but also to other immigrant groups, all of which is the result of stereotyping.

**CNS:** What are the historical roots of the rise in violence and hatred against Asian-Americans in the U.S. since the COVID-19 pandemic? How can this be addressed?

**Mae Ngai:** This can be traced back to the emergence of the Chinese exclusion movement in the U.S. in the nineteenth century. As I said before, in the academic world, misleading stereotypes about the Chinese have existed for decades, and there's little literature to correct them even today.

Dispelling these impressions requires both empirical and argumentative analysis. When there's a series of anti-China sentiments caused by politics, it is also necessary to resolve it politically.

(Interviewed by Chai Jingbo)

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## Anti-China Accusations Show the West's Lack of Confidence

*Eberhard Sandschneider*

Dr. Eberhard Sandschneider is a leading German international relations scholar and China expert. Currently professor emeritus at the Free University of Berlin and a partner in the consulting firm Berlin Global Advisors, he was a former director of the Research Institute of the German Council on Foreign Relations, dean of the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the Free University of Berlin and an advisory member of the German Federal Institute for Security Policy. Johanna Pöllath is the president of Stiftung Ex Oriente, a public law foundation focusing on popularization of Chinese culture, language and economy in Germany, and director of the Confucius Institute in Munich.

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E. Sandschneider (✉)  
Berlin, Germany



Eberhard Sandschneider

With Olaf Scholz succeeding Angela Merkel as the chancellor of Germany, there has been speculation on where Sino-German and Sino-European relations are headed in the post-Merkel era amid the turbulence of Sino-U.S. relations. Dr. Eberhard Sandschneider talks to Johanna Pöllath and Peng Dawei, chief journalist at China News Service's German branch and deputy director of China News Network Research Institute, about the weaknesses in the German foreign policy and why sanctions on China or “decoupling from China” will not serve the interest of any country. Fingerpointing at China or saying that China does not live up to the West's expectations is not a constructive way to approach relations with China and continuous confrontation with China will make everyone suffer.

**CNS:** What do you feel about American political scientist Samuel Huntington's theory in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the*

*Remaking of World Order* that the rise of East Asia is challenging Western dominance and intensifying inter-civilizational conflict?

**Eberhard Sandschneider:** Harvard professor Graham Allison has also discussed the famous “Thucydides Trap,” the concept that there is tension and even possibly war when an emerging power challenges an established one. This is nothing new in global history. I would argue that China’s rise is a perfectly normal process. Imagine a country with a population of 1.4 billion and such a large territory, and nearly double-digit average annual GDP growth for 40 years. So no one will be surprised if China translates its economic power into political influence and military capability.

It is not in the interest of any country to get caught up in a long-lasting confrontation with China, and we will all suffer from it. “Decoupling,” which means that the world’s two largest economies are untethering from each other, is a magic word that began with Donald Trump when he was U.S. president and was inherited by President Joe Biden. This approach will put German companies in an almost insurmountable either/or dilemma: Which market should they focus on, China or the United States? Which market would they have to alienate because of the U.S. sanctions on China? Therefore, it is crucial for German companies to handle the relations with China properly.

Considering what has happened in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, where do we begin to talk about value systems with China? In these countries, our attempts to implement Western value systems into politics by force failed miserably. The sad result of these events is that the West has done more damage to its own value system than China could have ever through its criticism of the West. This is a trap of Western “values diplomacy,” in which our credibility has been severely damaged.

**CNS:** What’s your take on the recent attempts to de-escalate tensions between the U.S. and China? What does this mean for Germany and the EU?

**Eberhard Sandschneider:** The dialogue is important by itself. It’s important to avoid military friction. The standoff between the U.S. and China has not gone away, but the two sides have opened a dialogue, which is the first positive signal in a long time, and therefore very important.

**Johanna Pöllath:** China is already a global economic power that Germany and Europe cannot afford to bypass; on the other hand, the West has strong accusations against China on issues such as human rights

and values. How can Germany maintain a judicious foreign policy despite this tense environment?

**Eberhard Sandschneider:** I wouldn't give advice to China while pointing a finger at it and I wouldn't say "China is not doing what we expect it to do." I would try to suggest policies that China can implement for its own interests.

I think perhaps the lesson for Chinese foreign policy from the U.S. is that being criticized does not mean the end of the story. People should be able to withstand some of the criticism, responding to it constructively, and fight back where they should. But in general, withstanding criticism is something that a global power has to get used to.

On the other hand, what should the West do to improve its policy toward China? I have been observing China for more than four decades. Our biggest problem lies in expectation management. Some of my American colleagues have not changed their expectation toward China in 40 years, and when they find out that China is not "doing what the West wants," they react with frustration, even anger.

Whether the West likes it or not, whether it thinks China is meeting its expectations or not, China has a perfectly legitimate right to defend its own interests. This means that expectation management is a major challenge for the West in terms of its relations with China.

The second problem is the internalization of the China policy. When politicians criticize China for "human rights violations," "technology theft," "lack of market access," etc., they are likely to be applauded at home, but it has nothing to do with what they are criticizing. The lack of "China-Kompetenz" (China competency) means that we have not made the effort to understand this vast country in a way comparable to its size, and this has contributed to the obvious arrogance that characterizes our discussions around China. We believe that our value system and political system is also applicable to China, but China does not accept it. In the context of Chinese domestic politics, this arrogance of the West over the years is reminiscent of the humiliations the West imposed on China throughout past history.

If we are looking for a concept to summarize a multidimensional policy toward China, rather than a black-and-white one, I would like to quote Michael Schaefer, former German ambassador to China, who has a remarkable understanding of China: "Equal and respectful dialogue."



There is no alternative but dialogue. Are sanctions an alternative? I can't find a single instance where the sanctions imposed on China by the West for various reasons ultimately served the purpose envisioned.

In 2022, Germany and China marked the 50th anniversary of their diplomatic relations. While a long list of problems can be drawn up in retrospect, it must also be acknowledged in all fairness that in 1972 no one could have imagined the level the bilateral economic and political relations have reached today. Hopefully, ultimately dialogue will come from goodwill on both sides, from the willingness to learn from each other, so that the difficult challenges can be successfully resolved.

**Johanna Pöllath:** Many in the West fear that with China's global economic expansion, its political influence is growing as well. How strong is that influence? Does Western democracy need to be "defended"?

**Eberhard Sandschneider:** Democracy certainly needs to be defended, but the defense of democracy needs to be done with more confidence. The controversy surrounding the Confucius Institute is a good example to illustrate this point. China is allegedly trying to "exert great influence on Western society" and the Confucius Institute is one of the means to achieve this. Is that really true? Well, the Confucius Institute has publicly stated that its mission is to present a positive image of China to the world. But is this a uniquely Chinese approach? Not really. What is the Goethe-Institut of Germany doing? What are the major political foundations of Germany doing? And what is the German development aid agency GIZ doing?

It is normal practice worldwide for a country to try to present as positive an image of itself as possible. The United States does it; Europe does it, and now China is doing it too. We shouldn't criticize China for that.

In the process, the skeptics reveal a lack of confidence in the attractiveness of their own values. Having said that, I would like to go back to Michael Schaefer's remark that dialogue must be conducted in a respectful manner.

**Johanna Pöllath:** What will Germany's foreign policy in the coming years be like?

**Eberhard Sandschneider:** From many aspects, German foreign policy is undoubtedly in a period of significant change. First of all, there is the change in transatlantic relations. We have already seen the latest direction of the U.S. foreign policy, and Europe is no longer the core ally of the U.S. Biden has not even bothered to ask Europe—whether it is Paris or Berlin—before making key decisions, which has had a shocking effect on

German and EU foreign policy. Second, there is confusion within the EU. We have a European External Action Service, the EU's diplomatic service, but we lack a foreign policy; we have the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, but no one can really claim that the EU has a unified foreign policy. So Germany's foreign policy faces a huge challenge.

The Chinese political system is meritocracy-based. It is impossible for an official to be in charge of the Chinese foreign ministry if they cannot demonstrate appropriate competence and experience. In this respect, China is result-oriented. In Germany, it is possible to have a foreign minister with no diplomatic experience if the government formation negotiation comes at a wrong time or under undesirable circumstances. That won't happen in China.

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# It's Wrong to Say China's Inclusion in WTO Was a Mistake

*Dan Steinbock*

Dr. Dan Steinbock is the founder of the Difference Group, an international business, relations and risk and investment consultancy. A senior Fulbright scholar, he has been affiliated as research director of international business at the India, China and America Institute in the U.S., and a visiting fellow of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies in China and the EU Center in Singapore.

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D. Steinbock (✉)  
Beijing, China



Dan Steinbock

**Dan Steinbock analyzes the changes China has brought to the world economy since its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and the validity of the argument that admitting China into the WTO was a “mistake.” He also explains China’s extraordinary contribution to the world economy and argues for a differentiated perspective that will prevent a repetition of past wrongs, from colonialism to the Cold War and the post-9/11 wars.**

**CNS:** China joined the WTO on December 11, 2001, becoming its 143rd member. Does the WTO need China?

**Dan Steinbock:** Absolutely, it’s a two-way street, particularly when the new risk of unilateralism hovers over the organization, the threat that casts a dark shadow over its creation.

The WTO, established in 1995, replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) of 1947. The foundational idea originated from the Bretton Woods Conference in the United States in 1944, when a new international trade institution was proposed to augment the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The hope was to avoid the isolationism and protectionism that contributed to the Great Depression, which in turn led to World War II.

After World War I, economist John Maynard Keynes warned that the Western allies’ harsh peace terms would result in another world war, which is what happened. After the Bretton Woods Conference, he warned

that the unwillingness of the Allies to agree on a truly multilateral trading system would divide the world again after the eclipse of U.S. supremacy, which is also what happened. In the 1970s, U.S. trade deficits (and later, budget deficits) became the new norm.

Today, the WTO continues to reflect mainly prosperous economies' interests and agendas. That's why the WTO needs China and other large developing economies to pave the path to a truly multilateral and inclusive organization as envisioned in the 1940s, one that can represent today's world trade.

**CNS:** What role has China played in the WTO?

**Dan Steinbock:** When China joined the WTO, it was written into the agreement that members could treat China as a “non-market economy.” Due to the size of the Chinese economy, government intervention, and state-owned enterprises, the developed economies argued that Chinese domestic price comparisons must be ignored and “constructed values” should be used to get a “true picture” of the Chinese economy.

When the key clause in that agreement expired in December 2016, the U.S., EU and Japan were supposed to grant China market economy status. Stunningly, they refused to do so. The U.S. refusal continues, despite two decades of China's historical progress. China is still treated as it was two decades ago, as a pretext for heavy anti-dumping duties.

Imagine what would happen if this double standard had been applied to the developed economies when they were industrializing. Tariffs in 19th-century America were among the highest in the world, and infant industry protection the norm. Washington saw U.S.-based manufacturing critical to sovereignty. In France, *dirigisme*—state control of economic and social matters—goes back to the era of mercantilism and Jean-Baptiste Colbert in the seventeenth century. In Germany, Friedrich List anchored his ideas of national innovation system on American-style infant industry protection and high tariffs. And British free-trade imperialism was preceded by Elizabethan mercantilism.

Unlike the Western powers amid their industrialization, China has made vigorous efforts since 2001 to align itself with WTO rules and open its markets. China's overall tariff level has been reduced to 7.4%, which is lower than those of the WTO's developing members and close to those of its developed peers.

China is not the litmus test of the WTO or world trade. Trade unilateralism is.

**CNS:** Joining the WTO is a milestone in China's economic opening up and a testament to China's continued support for the development of the multilateral trading system. How do you see China's role in the multilateral system in the era of globalization?

**Dan Steinbock:** Until the late twentieth century, the world economy was fueled mainly by the developed world. In the past two decades, the secular growth potential has shifted increasingly to large developing economies, particularly emerging Asia and China, due to its economic reforms and opening-up policies. And yet, the multilateral trade talks, the Doha Development Agenda launched in 2001, ended in stalemate. The talks have been complicated by persistent differences among the U.S., EU and developing countries. The key issues include agriculture, industrial tariffs and non-tariff barriers, services, and trade remedies.

The timing is telling. The stalemate ensued in parallel with the rise of the large developing economies that increasingly drive the global economy. Meanwhile, the trade stance of the U.S., the architect of the GATT/WTO system, is changing. Unlike the previous U.S. administrations, the Trump trade-war hawks favored bilateral pressure to multilateralism and international rules. The Biden administration's trade stance is not that different either. Hence, the lingering stagnation of world trade today.

For a decade or two, China and other large emerging economies, particularly export-led trading nations, have asked for a proportionate voice and representation in the WTO. That's vital to both rich and poor nations. That's what multilateral global interdependency is all about. And that's why China's role in spearheading efforts to reform the WTO in the twenty-first century is vital. As the West flirts with effective de-globalization, China's role is critical to stress the benefits and value of global interdependency in both developed and developing economies.

**CNS:** Pascal Lamy, the former Director General of the WTO, once said that the argument by some Westerners that the WTO's acceptance of China was a "mistake in the first place" is "absolutely wrong." What do you think of the argument? Twenty years after China's accession to the WTO, what is China's contribution to the world economy?

**Dan Steinbock:** I have to agree with Lamy's observation. Some Westerners argue that China's membership in the WTO was a "mistake." Such views reflect a persistent imperial instinct, a dangerous nostalgia for the colonial era.

When the Cold War ended and China joined the global system, the latter was still dominated by a handful of wealthy economies in the West, the so-called Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Club. As veteran OECD economist Sylvia Ostry used to argue, there is always “system friction” when economies that reflect different political legacies begin to integrate. But such friction is something that one needs to manage, not suppress. There is no single, “right kind” of capitalism that can serve as a model for all countries. Just as there are “varieties of capitalism,” there are varieties of market economies. That diversity, that difference is a richness, not a liability.

What the West should not try to do is to impose straight-jacket models that usually serve external economic interests, and not Chinese interests. The West should acknowledge China’s extraordinary contribution to the world economy, seek to participate in its growth, and cooperate as a responsible partner.

What we all need is a differentiated perspective that allows us to avoid the wrongs of the past—from the brutal legacies of colonialism and the divides of the Cold War to the misguided post-9/11 wars—to stress the importance of peace and stability in order to ensure more inclusive development and a truly multilateral trading future.

That’s how the West should view China’s contribution to the world economy, too.

(Interviewed by Gao Chuyi)

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## The “China Threat”: Not a Theory but a Narrative

*Jan-Boje Frauen*

Jan-Boje Frauen is a German scholar specializing in the philosophy of science. A Ph.D. in international relations from Xiamen University, he is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Philosophy at the university’s College of Humanities. His published work includes his post-doctoral dissertation *Fire & Language: The Two-Faced Process of Progress in Deep-Structural Sociocultural Evolution* and *Narrations of the “China Threat”: An Analysis of the Discursive Roots of U.S.-Western China Perception from the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century until the Trump Presidency*.

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J.-B. Frauen (✉)  
Xiamen, China



Jan-Boje Frauen

As China’s national strength and international status rises, some Western politicians and media have been ramping up the “China threat” theory. Jan-Boje Frauen assesses the theory and finds that it has no scientific basis but is actually a narrative created by some people about what they regard as threats from China.

**CNS:** How did the “China threat” theory develop in the West?

**Jan-Boje Frauen:** In my opinion, there is no such thing as a “China threat” theory. It’s just an umbrella term for a variety of views, some of which are even contradictory, that come from different backgrounds. Those views are the different “narratives” of the perceived “threats” by Westerners. I prefer to call them “narratives” rather than “theories” as they have no scientific basis at all. Americans know very little about China, and so the “Chinese narratives” have become a projected space for them, but they are divorced from the real China.

The “China threat” narrative comes from different sources. The “yellow peril” narrative dating back to the Opium Wars and even earlier held the view that East Asians were “the Other,” “Orientals” and intrusive, and Eastern systems were “inferior.” Those who think that wherever economic success and progress take place, Western-style liberal democracy will follow believe that China will eventually become like the West. The “wilderness” will be cultivated or influenced by the West. This narrative seeing China as a deficient Eastern empire in need of “Westernization”

completely ignores the dramatic and transformative changes and modernization that took place in China during the twentieth century, especially in the last 40 years.

Today’s China narratives are increasingly steeped in the “red terror” and the “communist threat,” emphasizing that China is a socialist country with an ideology similar to the communism that failed in the Soviet Union, and that China will isolate itself from the Western world in an attempt to expand its influence as a counterbalance to Western domination. This narrative ignores the fact that today’s China follows a system that bears little resemblance to that of the Soviet Union.

According to both these narratives, China should have either isolated itself from the Western world and collapsed, or become a Western-style democracy in the last 20 years. China, of course, did not meet this expectation.

The Chinese system is working well, although it is not “Western” and there is no sign that it will become more “Western” over time.

**CNS:** What was your thought behind your book *Narrations of the “China Threat”: An Analysis of the Discursive Roots of U.S.-Western China Perception from the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century until the Trump Presidency*?

**Jan-Boje Frauen:** I started this project many years ago as part of my doctoral thesis to examine how the so-called “China challenge” is presented in popular business and economics books in the United States.

I was shocked by the outright racism in these books. So I started reading about anti-Chinese and anti-Asian racism in the U.S., and I was surprised by the results. The top U.S. universities appeared to be consciously limiting their admission of Asian students. There is a “bad racism” against which the U.S. has fought for decades, but there is also an “acceptable racism” against East Asians. For example, former U.S. President Donald Trump called the novel coronavirus the “Chinese virus” and hate crimes against East Asians have surged since then.

In the U.S. discourse system, one narrative about China is that China is a “scheming and highly sophisticated hostile foreign entity aiming for global dominance.” The rhetoric, which is applied to China’s economy as well as its growing military might, echoes in many ways the Cold War rhetoric. In the United States, the “communist threat” is written all over the place.

China's economic rise is seen as undermining the fight against global warming. The West often says that China is the world's largest carbon dioxide emitter, with little mention of the fact that per-capita emissions in China are actually much lower than in the U.S.

Another "threat" is the fear that a collapse in China's economy will drag down the global financial system. Ironically, in this discourse we find the West's fear of China's failure, which underscores China's importance to the global system. Therefore, on the one hand, China is seen as a highly complex and potentially dangerous superpower due to ideological differences; on the other, China is seen as dangerous as its rise lacks mature planning, which could lead to all kinds of global problems.

These narratives cannot be called "theories" at all. Behind each "theory" is scientific evaluation, which can't be found behind these narratives.

**CNS:** The targets and phrases used by the West to attack China have changed constantly in recent years. How do you see this trend? What is the nature of the "China threat" theory today?

**Jan-Boje Frauen:** The "China threat" theory comes up whenever China is cast as "the Other" against the U.S., which defines itself as "good" and "right." There can be different semantic assignments to what "the Other" means, many of which come from old Cold War rhetoric or Orientalist idiomatic phrases rather than from the actual situation in China.

The rise of China is leading to the strengthening of "the Other" mechanism as the U.S. has to contend with a country increasingly seen as the world's second dominant power. Again, the dichotomy that pits the "free world" against the rest of the so-called "Others" is a Cold War legacy.

Most of the reinforcement of the words used for China has to do with "the Other" mechanism. In part, this is driven by the growing importance of China and the U.S. realization that China is going to keep growing. China is increasingly seen as a real threat. Another reason is the rise of populism. The Internet now makes it easier to influence public opinions. Or rather, public opinions influence themselves. In the spread of the word "Chinese virus," for example, people have forgotten that viruses have no nationalities. Populists use this kind of discourse to gain influence and power.

**CNS:** How could great powers coexist peacefully in today's world?

**Jan-Boje Frauen:** This is not easy to answer. During the Cold War, political "realists" argued that the safest world was a bipolar one, and

that an outbreak of open war between the two major entities would result in “mutually assured destruction” on both sides, which is surely the worst imaginable “path to peace and stability.” Apart from the risk of human extinction, it also meant a world divided into two camps, with little contact and cooperation on the international stage. Today, many of the “China threat” theories in the “Red Scare” model assume that this will also be the case in the future between China and “the West,” or between China and the U.S.

Since the end of the Cold War, two theories have gained popularity. One is Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” theory, which argues that the future will be defined by the struggle in the cultural sphere. The most dangerous and disruptive forces in this area for the West are the Arabs/Muslims and China. The other is proposed by Francis Fukuyama in his *The End of History and the Last Man*, that all countries will become Western-style democracies and achieve peace and unity.

Put these two theories together and you will find a problem with the Western logic: Either there will be a war between the Eastern and Western cultures, or Eastern culture will become like the Western one.

Today’s world has moved beyond the point where it was still feasible to divide it into camps. We are facing a global crisis that threatens the survival of everyone. For a successful future, it is important for the West to put aside its imperialist traditions and learn to accept the fact that not everyone needs to join the Western system. This does not mean that conflict is inevitable or that the two sides cannot work together.

(Interviewed by Wan Shuyan)

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PART III

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## About China



## China's Contributions Since Restoration of Its UN Seat and Expectations

*Ban Ki-moon*

Ban Ki-moon, former UN Secretary-General, is the first East Asian to hold the office and the second Asian. The South Korean diplomat was also the chair of the Ethics Commission of the International Olympic Committee in 2017.

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B. Ki-moon (✉)  
Beijing, China





Ban Ki-moon

**On October 25, 1971, the UN General Assembly restored the People's Republic of China's seat in the United Nations by an overwhelming majority. Since that decision at the 26th session of the assembly, China has been deeply involved in the cause of the UN and supported it by playing a bigger role in international affairs. Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon examines China's support for a central role by the UN in international affairs and its role on the world stage in the future.**

**CNS:** Five decades after the restoration of the People's Republic of China's seat in the United Nations, how do you assess its role in supporting the UN?

**Ban Ki-moon:** The restoration of the People's Republic of China's seat in the UN is a milestone in the history of the UN. With that, the UN became a universal organization in both size and content. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China is engaged in the cause of peace and development in many parts of the world. Its permanent representatives to the UN have all made efforts to help the Security

Council play a more effective role. Over the past 50 years, China has made significant contributions to the realization of the ideals of the UN.

China has also greatly contributed to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The primary goal of the MDGs is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and China's achievements in this regard are encouraging for other developing countries. Besides, China also plays a crucial role in the implementation of the SDGs. President Xi Jinping visited the UN in 2015, expressing China's strong support for the adoption of the SDGs, which was a strong impetus to our work. I really appreciate it.

Among China's numerous contributions, the most important one is its strong commitment to tackling climate change. China played a decisive role in the negotiations on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in 2015 and China's pledge to become carbon-neutral by 2060 is an encouraging signal to other countries.

**CNS:** What could be learned from China's economic development in the five decades? How do you see China's future role on the world stage?

**Ban Ki-moon:** China has made remarkable progress in all areas of life, especially in the economic field, becoming the world's second largest economy from a backward country. China's experience undeniably shows that open markets and free trade are the most effective way of economic development. China's success in the economic and technological fields is a clear inspiration for other developing countries.

At the same time, China has been actively involved in global affairs, becoming one of the most influential states in the world, and its influence in the economic, political, cultural and other fields has also grown rapidly. Therefore, the international community naturally expects China to play a more constructive role in political and socio-economic sectors, as well as in human rights and other global affairs.

In addition, China adheres to the principle of multilateral cooperation in its relations with other countries. As a builder of world peace, a contributor to global growth, a defender of the international order and a provider of public goods, China's vision is consistent with the UN Charter. We hope China will continue to work closely with the UN in the future to make the world a better, safer and more prosperous place.

**CNS:** Today, the pandemic and other unprecedented changes have made the international situation more complex, with multilateralism

coming under attack. What can be China's role in improving the global governance system?

**Ban Ki-moon:** We are facing serious challenges such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. The most serious challenge in international affairs, however, is the weakening of multilateralism.

Multilateral cooperation cannot be accomplished by any one country alone. It requires the collective will and wisdom of all, including the UN. However, I have been deeply disappointed by the weakening of multilateral cooperation in recent years, and have been urging the world leaders to be more active in fostering it.

President Xi's vision of a community with a shared future for mankind is noteworthy. All of us share one planet and one future, so we need to work for common peace and prosperity. I believe that China can resolve differences with relevant countries with wisdom and patience while expanding the common ground.

**CNS:** In 2022, China and South Korea celebrated the 30th anniversary of their diplomatic ties. How do you see the bilateral relationship? What are your expectations?

**Ban Ki-moon:** For 30 years, South Korea and China have been a model of cooperation between neighboring countries. Confucius once said, "One should be able to establish oneself at the age of thirty." The same is true for countries. South Korea and China should establish a more mature relationship in various fields. Their friendly relations should be based not only on material reciprocity, but also on cultural commonalities. The two countries are geographically close, have long histories, and are both peace-loving, which are the foundation for cooperation. In the next 30 years, we should promote more people-to-people exchanges, especially among young people, seek a common cultural background and expand mutual understanding. This will be conducive to permanent peace, stability and common prosperity in Northeast Asia.

(Interviewed by Liu Xu)

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## The Right Way to Observe China

*Harro von Senger*

Swiss sinologist Harro von Senger is a tenured professor of sinology at the University of Freiburg in Germany. His areas of expertise include Chinese law and the history of Chinese legal thought and system. He has written extensively on Chinese law and cultural exchanges between China and the West. His books include *The Book of Stratagems*, which introduces the 36 stratagems used by ancient Chinese in war, politics and civil interactions, *Das Tao der Schweiz* (The Tao of Switzerland), and *The Thirty-Six Stratagems for Business*. He has also translated ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* into German.

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H. von Senger (✉)  
University of Freiburg, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany



Harro von Senger

**Harro von Senger's Ph.D. dissertation on traditional Chinese sales contracts is the first doctoral dissertation on Chinese law by a Swiss scholar. He studied at Peking University from 1975 to 1977 on an exchange program and after China opened up in 1978, visited the country regularly to witness the changes during the years of reform and opening up. He talks about his observations and understanding of China.**

**CNS:** You have been studying the Thirty-Six Stratagems for many years and have also written several books on it. You mentioned that the Chinese

classic represents a universal pattern of behavior, whether in the East or in the West. What wisdom does it embody?

**Harro von Senger:** Let me answer this with the *taijitu*, the symbol in Taoist philosophy in which two contrasting elements make a whole or full circle, that is, the *yin* and *yang*, one depicted in black and the other in white. You can say that the black half of the symbol represents the “indirect” (*qi*) and the white half represents the “direct” (*zheng*), and the two parts together form a unity. It is impossible to solve all problems in life with the “direct” method, and it is also impossible to do so using the “indirect” method. It is necessary to combine “direct” and “indirect,” and analyze problems specifically to see whether the “direct” or “indirect” method is better.

At the same time, we should not think that “direct” and “indirect” are of equal importance just because the black and white parts make up half of the symbol each. I think it is reasonable to use the “direct” approach as much as possible to solve problems, and let the “indirect” complement the “direct” one. For example, in daily life, we should first solve problems through the legal method and then use the “indirect” methods within the limits of the law and ethics. From my experience, most problems can be solved by “direct” methods, and only a few need to be solved by “indirect” methods. The Thirty-Six Stratagems are a collection of “indirect” wisdom, providing people with ways to solve problems in “indirect” areas and making it easier to find a specific method to “win by surprise.”

Some people have a negative view of the stratagems or tactics, but I believe that small things should not be underrated as they sometimes have a huge impact. For example, the novel coronavirus is so small that it is invisible to the human eye, yet it had such a huge impact on the world. Therefore, views belittling the stratagems are arrogant and superficial.

**CNS:** Why did your research interests move from the Thirty-Six Stratagems to strategy? How do you understand strategy?

**Harro von Senger:** The Chinese wisdom for dealing with problems is not limited to the “indirect,” but also includes the “direct.” This wisdom of dealing with problems is what I call strategy. Strategy includes the idea of “direct,” such as “the way to rule a country is to enrich the people first,” and also the idea of “indirect,” such as “conceal one’s ability” and “accumulate energy secretly.” Therefore, in order to understand the Chinese methodology of understanding and transforming the world in a comprehensive manner, we need to study strategies, not only stratagems.

Strategy means plans and outlook in the long run. In 1985, I read a report in a Chinese newspaper that China's leaders planned to build China into a socialist power with its economy close to that of the world's most developed countries by the middle of the twenty-first century. That would be one hundred years after the founding of the People's Republic of China. I was so stunned on reading about this long-term planning that I wrote an article in the influential Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* to introduce China's "centenary goal" to Westerners. (China announced two centenary goals: The first was to build the country into a moderately prosperous society in all aspects by 2021, which was the centenary year of the Communist Party of China. The second is to build a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by 2049, the centenary of the People's Republic of China.) I subtitled the article "2049" specifically to refer to the 2049 goal, a span much longer than the strategic plans of the West. And this is also part of the wisdom of strategy.

**CNS:** In your book *Das Tao der Schweiz* published in 2017, why did you use the wisdom of the classic text of Taoism, *Tao Te Ching* or the *Classic of the Way and Its Power*, to describe Switzerland's governance approach?

**Harro von Senger:** I first came across *Tao Te Ching* when I was studying in Taiwan in the early 1970s. Back then, I found it very strange, as its concepts were unheroic and lacked power and fight. It seemed to have little to do with Westerners and was typical of the "Chinese way of thinking." But when I reread it later, it began to blow my mind.

In the 1990s, I suddenly felt that the *Tao Te Ching* was the blueprint Switzerland had adopted, and I used almost 100 quotations from it to explain the Swiss way. The ideas of "a small state," "*wuwei*" (inexertion or effortless action) and "non-contentiousness" are very much in line with Switzerland's status as a small country and the principle of neutrality. It can be said that about 2,500 years ago, a Chinese wise man articulated the art of living in today's Switzerland. After the publication of *Das Tao der Schweiz*, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* reviewed my book, but it will take time for people to accept Switzerland's governance approach explained through Chinese philosophy.

**CNS:** You call yourself one of the few scholars in the West who study and value Marxism. Which Marxist theory impresses you most?



**Harro von Senger:** I studied Marxism when I was at Peking University from 1975 to 1977 as I hoped to understand its impact on China's reality. I began to realize that there was a similarity between Marxism and the legal theory I had studied earlier in Switzerland. Legal theory is about regulating the world while Marxism is about transforming the world and both can be called interventional systems.

What impresses me most about Marxism is the theory of major contradictions and its political practice. I think the Communist Party of China has adopted its political approach based on the main contradictions at different stages of China's historical development. For example, at the beginning of China's reform and opening up, the main contradiction in society was "the contradiction between the people's growing material and cultural needs and the backward social production." The main contradiction now is "the contradiction between the people's growing need for a better life and unbalanced and insufficient development." The main contradiction has been transformed, and all policies and guidelines have changed accordingly.

**CNS:** In your study of China, you pay a lot of attention to Chinese official documents and legal regulations, and emphasize combining the phenomenological approach with the normative approach.

**Harro von Senger:** I have a juris doctor degree from the University of Zurich and I am an attorney in Switzerland, so I have paid a lot attention to laws and regulations and official documents since the beginning of my academic career. I am used to reading and analyzing the less "poetic" and to many, "boring" expressions in normative materials. I use the normative approach to study Chinese official documents in order to predict the future development of China, because through these documents it is possible to study China's vision, direction and goals for the future.

Next, of course, one has to look at reality, and it becomes a phenomenological examination, which is an examination of various tangible phenomena to understand how those visions are being put into practice. From my experience, all areas in China are basically developing as envisioned in the official documents.

**CNS:** You say the Western industry should put themselves in Chinese shoes and empathize when observing and studying China, and abandon the interference of ideology and bias. Otherwise they are bound to misjudge the situation in China.

**Harro von Senger:** I think the most fundamental problem in the West is the indifference to epistemology. Western politicians, journalists or think tanks think understanding the world is very simple. Just open your eyes, look at the statistics, examine the scene, interview some people, and finally analyze the collected materials with various Western political, economic, philosophical, psychological and historical theories and experiences, and you can come up with the “correct understanding.” But in reality, understanding the world is not that simple.

For example, the war in Afghanistan, which the Western countries fought for nearly 20 years, was a total failure and not because of bad weapons, or unwillingness to spend money or fear of making sacrifices. The most fundamental reason was that they did not understand the situation in Afghanistan and did not see the importance of epistemology.

As another example, the Western media observe China and report on China with bias, falling into Western-centrism, which is a dead-end. It is also because of the epistemological problems, as they subconsciously see the West as the “creator of the contemporary civilization,” take the pride in the West’s technological superiority into the humanities, and believe that the West is the “teacher” of democracy and human rights and very “superior.” This breeds arrogance and prejudice so that the West ignores or is unwilling to recognize China’s technological progress and development.

I would like to propose the “full-consideration methodology,” a kind of epistemology which requires problems to be analyzed and solved from all sides and studied from multiple ideologies. This is because different ideologies do not see all aspects of the problem in the same way, which means that it is better to see the problem from multiple ideologies than from a single one.

Therefore, I am glad that I studied Marxism at Peking University, which broadened my understanding of the world and was akin to full-consideration methodology. By taking this methodology, I was able to know other aspects of Chinese culture in addition to studying Chinese law. And the study of the Thirty-Six Stratagems is one of the rewards for my efforts to know more.

(Interviewed by De Yongjian)

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## Understanding China's Whole-Process People's Democracy

*Wang Shaoguang*

Wang Shaoguang is a distinguished researcher at the Institute of State Governance of Huazhong University of Science and Technology, China, and emeritus chair professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has a doctorate in political science from Cornell University and taught at the Department of Political Science at Yale University and other universities, such as the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Tsinghua University. He is the author of about 40 books, including *China's Rise and Its Global Implications*. His research interests include the institutional and intellectual history of democracy and comparative governance.

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W. Shaoguang (✉)  
Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China



Wang Shaoguang

**According to Wang Shaoguang, the most significant thing about China’s advocacy of common human values, including democracy, is that it demonstrates that no political system has a monopoly on the interpretation of democracy. China’s development of democracy, according to a white paper issued by the Chinese government, is a whole process based on national conditions. It has distinctive Chinese characteristics and embodies the common pursuit of democracy for all. It has promoted China’s development and revival while enriching the political civilization.**

**CNS:** The two “Summits for Democracy” organized by the Biden administration since 2021 have run into controversy. Even some of the U.S. media have questioned them, calling them undemocratic. What

do you think of the Western democratic tradition and its contemporary practice?

**Wang Shaoguang:** Ancient Greece is considered to be the birthplace of Western democracy, and Athens is held up as a model of democracy. But the truth is that for most of the fourth century BC, the number of adult male citizens who actually participated in decision-making in Athens was only 15 to 20 percent of the population. This is the kind of democracy which, from ancient Greece to the early twentieth century, was seen as a “bad thing” by the Western elite. Many Western scholars have written books pointing out that “the West has no tradition of democracy.”

The Western emphasis on public participation is typical of formal democracy. This type of democracy is characterized by policymakers waiting for people to participate while assuming that all people have the same ability to participate and have equal influence on politics. However, extensive empirical research by Western scholars has found that this is an unsupported assumption and this political participation is completely unequal.

Let me tell you an ironic story about the true meaning of Western-style democracy. On his death bed, an American farmer was trying to prepare his son to take over the farm after his death. He asked the son, “What would you do if the pigs complain the feed is bad, and the cows complain that the work is too heavy, and the chickens complain that the coop is dirty?” The son answered, “Feed the pigs well, lessen the cows’ work, and clean the coop.” The farmer shook his head. “Don’t do anything,” he advised his son. “Just let them vote to choose who they want to run the farm, you or your wife. It will make them think they are in charge of the farm and they will stop complaining.”

**CNS:** You have used the term “four-dimensional integration” to summarize the Chinese people’s democracy. How would you define that?

**Wang Shaoguang:** I borrowed it from the concept of the “four dimensions of representation” by American political theorist Hanna Pitkin.

From the perspective of symbolic representation, Chinese people’s democracy ideologically emphasizes “people first” and “people’s support.” This concept guides the work of the officials, and people evaluate the ability of officials by this measure, so this type of symbolic representation has tremendous binding power.

In terms of descriptive representation, the vast majority of the over 96 million members of the Communist Party of China (CPC) are ordinary workers, so we can see that the CPC can represent people's interest descriptively.

As for formalistic representation, China's system of people's congresses ensures broad representation. It is a system in which first we have the local people's congresses at the grassroots and higher levels, from which members are elected to form the National People's Congress, the national legislature. People's congress deputies at all levels come from ordinary workers, peasants, military personnel, technical workers and general managers. Ordinary workers and peasants make up two-thirds of the people's congress deputies at all levels nationwide.

Western-style democratic theory emphasizes formalistic representation, but the focus of its theory of representative democracy is not "representation" but "representative," which means a person is given the role of "representative" through a formal process. The vast majority of these representatives come from the elite. Since 1789, the U.S. House of Representatives has changed its seats for more than 14,000 times, but its composition has basically remained unchanged. Besides, the median family net worth of the members of the U.S. Congress is more than 10 times that of the median American family net worth. In this sense, this nation appears to be administered by those who are rich.

In terms of substantive representation, the CPC's mass line emphasizes "coming from the masses and going to the masses," thus enabling the wisdom and suggestions of the masses to be incorporated into the decisions of governments at all levels.

In summary, Western-style representative democracy is mono-dimensional, with only one dimension of formalistic representation. China's people's democracy, on the other hand, is an all-embracing representation, bringing together formalistic, descriptive, symbolic and substantive representatives into one, forming a "four-dimensional democracy." It is a model of socialist democracy that covers all aspects of the democratic process and all sectors of society. It is a democracy that covers all fields, aspects and links of national political life, including but not limited to democratic elections, democratic consultation, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision. It is not only a political democracy, but also an economic and social life democracy.

**CNS:** Why do you say democracy is closely related to national governance?

**Wang Shaoguang:** Logically, all political systems are ways of governing, and democracy, by any definition, is closely related to political systems, and therefore to governance. China and the West have different ways of thinking about political issues: the West focuses on “polity” while China emphasizes the “political way.”

When discussing the relationship between democracy and governance in the polity sense, the West presupposes that its own polity is democratic and then emphasizes that only a polity like theirs is democratic. It is a simple, formal and hegemonic way of thinking about the issue.

It is also the same with governance. After the 1990s, Western countries and some international organizations interpreted it as a very specific form, the one advocated by neoliberalism. And they declared neoliberal democracy to be “the least bad form of governance” and “governance” became equated with “democracy.”

But the fact is that American economist Joseph Schumpeter’s “minimal democracy,” a form of government whose sole characteristic is competitive elections, began to show its shortcomings, and some Western countries experienced a host of governance problems that led to widespread discontent among their people. A survey by U.S. think tank Pew Research Center in 2021 found that the vast majority of Americans were deeply disappointed with their country’s political system. Only 17 percent of the respondents believed U.S. democracy was worthy of emulation, while 23 percent believed it had never been a good example.

Western mainstream scholars have also begun to reflect on it. For example, American scholar Francis Fukuyama argues that the inclusion of democracy as an indicator of governance is a conceptual confusion and suggests that the two be separated. It is clear that democracy in the sense of polity is not necessarily the best way to govern.

China, on the other hand, has had a “political way of thinking” from ancient times to the present. It is a philosophy of governance and the highest goal of political pursuit, such as “putting the people at the center.” It also includes a specific way of governance, including institutional arrangements, guidelines, policies, measures and methods. This way of thinking requires that those who govern do not follow outdated rules, or copy blindly, or stick to the old ways, but constantly explore better ways to achieve the highest political pursuit of governing.



China's system may not necessarily meet the standards of democracy in the Western sense, but it is in line with China's realities. Although it may not be able to solve all problems, it has proven to be able to solve a large number of real concerns.

**CNS:** Compared with Western representative democracy, what is the significance of China's whole-process people's democracy for the development of global democratic politics?

**Wang Shaoguang:** I call the democracy in Western countries, represented by the United States, "electing the master." Whether it is a democracy or not is a question itself.

The most prominent criterion of Western democracy is competitive election, but from Aristotle to Montesquieu, it is clear that elections are not democracy, but a characteristic of oligarchy. Western-style democracy concerns only the stage of "electing the leader" in the political process. Robert Dahl, an old colleague of mine from Yale University and a former president of the American Political Science Association, summarizes a democracy characterized by multiparty competition as a polyarchy, which is in fact an oligarchy with several competing parties. Dahl said he would reserve the word democracy for a system that was consistently responsive to the needs of the people. By this measure, China's political system is highly responsive, as many Western scholars have concluded in their field studies.

As a result, the Chinese have a very high level of trust in the government. Over the past 30 years, Western scholars have revised questionnaires and conducted countless public surveys in China on their view of the government but the findings are largely consistent.

The Chinese have a higher level of trust in their government than the vast majority have in Western countries, but China has never claimed that its system is the best in the world like some other countries. There is more than one political civilization, and China is one of those that have done a good job. The significance of China's democratic exploration is that it has provided the world with at least one option and one different way of thinking, and proved that there are many ways to achieve democracy than electing a leader.

The most important aspect of universality is diversity. The common values of all humankind are concepts that are acceptable to all nations and peoples, but the specific practices and institutional arrangements used to realize them are diverse. China advocates the common values for all

humanity, including democracy. And its greatest significance is that it shows the world that no single political system has a monopoly on the interpretation of democracy. In this sense, China's whole-process people's democracy has definitely enriched the political civilization.

(Interviewed by An Yingzhao)

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## The Fallacy of the “China Collapse” and “China Threat” Theories

*Keyu Jin*

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© Dolphin Books Co., Ltd. 2023  
L. Chen and K.-H. Pohl (eds.), *East-West Dialogue*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2\\_24](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_24)



Keyu Jin

All the Western dire predictions for the Chinese economy have come to naught so far. Since the 1990s, there have been voices prophesying the doom of China's economy and every five to 10 years, all kinds of "China collapse" theories resurface, as well as the "China threat" theory. Some pundits even make a living from it.

However, over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, China has not collapsed. On the contrary, its comprehensive national strength has increased and absolute poverty has been eliminated. In fact, it is the "China collapse" theory that has repeatedly collapsed.

Why do these two theories keep popping up again and again? Why do Western scholars and media fail to predict the state of China's economy correctly? Keyu Jin talks about these issues as well as what China's rise will bring to the rest of the world.

**CNS:** Before China's seventh national census data was released in 2021, some American and European media claimed that China was facing a demographic crisis. It was not the first time that the Western society tried to portray China in a negative light. Why does the "China's economy will collapse" theory keep on recurring?

**Keyu Jin:** I'm not worried about China's population aging. Too much emphasis is placed on the number of old people, young people and labor force in China. We should focus on efficiency, because the efficiency is improving very quickly from generation to generation. The education

level, training and overall environment of the one-child generation enable them to support the elderly.

Why does the “China’s economy will collapse” theory recur?

First of all, China’s growth model is different from the Western market economy model in textbooks. The outside world has never seen such a growth rate and development model outside China. Some Westerners think that if it doesn’t conform to conventions, there must be problems, and even link the Chinese economic model with that of the Soviet Union. These perceptions are wrong.

Second, most of their knowledge of China’s growth model is superficial. They only know that both the government and the market play a role, with the government playing the main role. Western mainstream media believe that as long as there is government participation, unless public facilities are provided, there must be problems, such as low efficiency, or high asset mismatches, which will lead to risks in the financial system.

They seldom know the more subtle mechanisms, systems and structures in the Chinese economy, and the relationships among the participants in the economy.

In recent years, many foreign experts consider China to be the biggest source of risk for the international financial system. For example, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the problems and risks of China’s financial system were repeatedly mentioned. They didn’t expect that China’s financial risks would be resolved gradually and considerably through policy adjustment although China had accumulated high debts due to its rapid development.

The Chinese government, with its great strength and resources, can introduce a series of policies to control financial risks. In Western countries, including the United States, however, the governments are not so powerful. They are aware of the financial risks, but the measures they can really take are far fewer than in China.

**CNS:** What are the differences between China’s economic system and growth model and those of Western countries?

**Keyu Jin:** In China, the relationship between the government and the market is unique. The resources, strength and mobilization ability of the government are unprecedented.

According to China’s State Administration for Market Regulation, there were 21.79 million new market entities in China in 2019. Western

scholars are mostly confused why so many new enterprises appeared in such a short time. The government played a very important role, especially local governments. They are willing to support private enterprises with high efficiency, which is difficult for economists with mainstream views to understand.

In China's system, politics and the economy are closely linked. The governments have a series of performance indicators to consider: development, investment attraction, environmental protection and innovation, so they are more willing to select enterprises with ability and potential.

If you look at the relationship between state-owned and private enterprises, in China, it's very close, and some state-owned enterprises (SOEs) directly or indirectly become shareholders of private ones. Data shows the private enterprises most closely connected with SOEs grow the fastest with the highest efficiency.

This close connection between state-owned and private enterprises is unique to China. Some people think that if a large amount of state-owned capital is involved, the efficiency will definitely be very low, but in fact it is not. The resources of state-owned and private enterprises are complementary. Private enterprises boast good corporate culture and product innovation; SOEs have advantages such as financing. Just like the *yin-yang* diagram, both black and white, or two different entities can co-exist, which is beyond the understanding of the West.

The relationship between the Chinese government and the market is very complicated, but there is a clear economic logic and relationship. Most Western scholars have only a superficial understanding of this.

**CNS:** If the Chinese economy is measured by Western systems and standards, what will be the errors?

**Keyu Jin:** The West measures China's economy very inaccurately. They always measure China by their own standards, systems and models. They believe that China's savings rate and investment rate are too high, and its economic structure is biased toward exports and industry.

However, if we observe China only from some macro data, we won't understand the growth pattern of the Chinese economy. Although the investment rate is higher than that of many other countries, China is undergoing urbanization and needs a lot of investment, including in new and old infrastructure. So what is "too high"? The situation in China is different from Japan's and the United States'.

The same goes for the savings rate. In foreign countries, a high savings rate means weak consumption, so we must reduce it to stimulate the economy. China’s savings rate is indeed high, but it has its advantages. It avoids the trap that many developing countries have stepped into; that is, they need to borrow a lot of money from abroad to develop. And foreign debt has finally triggered economic and financial crisis in many developing countries.

Another misunderstanding is that China’s savings rate and investment are very high, and the economic growth is entirely driven by capital accumulation. Once investment is reduced, the economic growth will definitely slow down or even go into a downturn.

But actually, in the past few decades, efficiency improvement, not investment, brought by reform has been the main driving force of China’s economic growth. From 1990 to 2007, more than 50 percent of China’s economic growth came from efficiency improvement, so it can’t be said that China relies only on investment and savings, or only on exports to stimulate economic growth.

**CNS:** In recent years, while we hear less of the “China collapse” theory, we hear more about the “China threat” theory.

**Keyu Jin:** China is really a very powerful country. It is also the first time in nearly a hundred years that a developing country with such a population has become the second largest economy in the world. And the culture of China is very different from that of the West.

China’s influence is not only reflected in its huge economy, but also in its science and technology, innovation efficiency and per capita income. The so-called threat theory may come from the fact that China is so strong.

After World War II, the United States acted as the world’s boss, exporting so-called democratic ideas and American models. The United States believes that the whole world should follow the path it takes. However, China is very different. The political systems, values, cultures and economic development models of China and the West are very different.

Meanwhile, the outside world doesn’t know much about China, or what its goal is. Therefore, many threat theories come from the differences and ignorance, which can easily breed fear or even demonization.

In addition, the “China threat” theory is also the political need of some countries.

Take the United States with its various problems as an example. There is a growing divide between the elite and ordinary people, which became an acute problem in the Donald Trump era. There are also racial issues, and human rights issues brought about by extreme liberalism, etc., which have accelerated the polarization of the U.S. It needs an external challenge to unite its domestic power, so hyping the “China threat” theory is also its political appeal.

China has every right to ensure its people live a better life, which is something all countries should agree with and encourage. Curbing China’s growth will deprive the Chinese people of opportunities. From the perspective of human rights, it doesn’t make sense either.

**CNS:** What does China’s rise mean for the world?

**Keyu Jin:** Economically, it has many benefits for the world.

We live in the Internet age and also a “everybody’s-a-winner” era. The leader of the Internet era has a completely different meaning from the “central country” of the previous stage. The “central country” in the Internet era should not contain the other participants but encourage, help and even support them. It should protect the network, internationalization and the entire economic system, so that everyone can win.

China can play its role mainly in three aspects:

First, China can act as the “anchor” of global financial stability. When a global economic or financial crisis occurs, it can serve as a cornerstone to stabilize the global financial market and industrial chain, together with the United States and other important economies.

Second, China’s asset market gives many investors an opportunity to disperse their risks. Relatively speaking, China’s stock market, bond market and other capital markets are much less related to those of developed countries. However, the proportion of Chinese assets held by international investors is still very small. If they increase the proportion of Chinese assets, the risks can be dispersed to a great extent.

Third, China can provide plenty of good trade opportunities. In the past 10 years, its contribution to global growth has remained at about one-third.

Although trade is win-win, some people can be negatively affected. Governments should take the lead in introducing some programs to help the vulnerable groups’ re-employment, which the U.S. government has failed to do.



Therefore, when Chinese goods come to the American market, some vulnerable groups in the labor market lose their jobs or even have no chance to return to the labor market. Should Chinese goods be blamed for that or the U.S. government for not helping these people? For decades, the education level in the United States as a whole has declined. America should better solve its domestic problems.

**CNS:** Many people worry that once the U.S. central bank shrinks its balance sheet, we will have a repeat of the 2013 taper tantrum, when the U.S. Federal Reserve announced that it would taper bond purchases, triggering an economic crisis in developing countries. Can this be averted? What role can China play in this?

**Keyu Jin:** The Fed now faces two major challenges.

First, how to balance domestic goals and international influences.

The Fed acts as a cornerstone in the global financial system. Its interest rate changes as well as quantitative easing have a huge impact on the world. However, it does not consider the whole world when making decisions, but gives priority to the needs of the United States, ignoring policy spillovers.

But the policy spillovers are very large. When the Fed cuts interest rates, there is the issue of excessive credit expansion and bubbles appear in many countries, especially developing countries. When the Fed shrinks its balance sheet, developing countries are also negatively affected, and there could even be a financial crisis. This is a manifestation of globalization, and also a problem that globalization cannot solve.

As a core country, how to balance domestic goals and international influences? The United States has failed to strike such a balance. Some people say that the central bank of a second country, such as China, needs to play a role in stabilizing the market together with the Fed. The two central banks need to communicate with each other to control the situation together.

Second, the U.S. share of the global economy has decreased in recent years, and the safe assets and highly liquid assets that the United States can provide can't meet the global demand.

Other countries or economies need to fill the gap, especially in supporting emerging economies. Since 2009, China has played such a role. In the financial crisis of emerging markets, it provided liquidity support.

Many countries are opposed to the U.S. using the dollar as a political weapon to achieve its political goals. Many people support the birth of a new international currency. The euro can't do it. Europe is not economically stable, and it has not really become a big unified market. Although the European bond market is large, it is actually still separated because of the sovereignty issue of each country.

This is an opportunity for China. However, at this stage, China may not be able to do it, and it will take a long time for its financial system to be truly advanced. Money needs to be trusted. Although there is hard power behind an international currency, that is, its economic strength and overall stability, there is also soft power, including people's trust in a country's system, where China needs to do more.

(Interviewed by Pang Wuji)

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# Telling the Stories of China's Journey from Poverty to Prosperity Through the Lives of Ordinary People

*Malcolm Clarke*

Acclaimed British documentary filmmaker Malcolm Clarke has been in the film industry for over 40 years, directing films in more than 80 countries. His films have won two Oscars and 16 Emmys. Several of his films explore the relationship between China and the U.S., such as *Better Angels*, which is about people-to-people exchanges between China and the United States, and *A Long Cherished Dream* premiering in 2021, which explains the real China to the Western audience and shows China is not understood—but even misunderstood—by the West.

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Malcolm Clarke

**Malcolm Clarke says, “China is not good at self-defense,” which is why it has not been able to shoot down the false accusations coming regularly from the Western world. However, it has pulled 1.4 billion people out of absolute poverty when Western countries have never achieved such large-scale poverty reduction.**

**CNS:** Your 2021 film *A Long Cherished Dream* is about the changes in the lives of ordinary Chinese. Every story shows ordinary people making great efforts to better their lives. How did you choose these four representative places and figures to depict China’s journey from poverty to prosperity?

**Malcolm Clarke:** *A Long Cherished Dream* is one way for me to interpret China to Western audiences. I’m glad it was released in China, but what we really want is to convince Westerners to take China seriously and understand what is happening there.

The whole film is made up of simple stories. We tried to make a series of films showing different regions of China, so we started from rural Yunnan in the southwest and went all the way to Yiwu and Shanghai in the east. The audience can see how people in extreme poverty and middle-income groups live their lives.

We started from Yunnan to tell stories about people in extreme poverty. They had to make tough decisions, such as whether to leave everything they were familiar with and face an uncertain future to get a better living environment. Our concern was the tough decisions.

Then we found an outstanding young woman. She's from the countryside and received little education, but now she earns a lot as a cross-country trucker. She believes that "Women can hold up half the sky." She wants to be as responsible, free, confident and successful as a man. She is a very admirable woman. I think she is a role model for many young Chinese women.

The third episode is about a man whose dream comes true. He was poor and had to leave his village, his family and his childhood and work hard. But now he is a world-class acrobat in the Shanghai Acrobatic Troupe. Now he drives a luxury car and has a happy family, and his children go to a good school. He has realized the Chinese dream, which is the result of his efforts. What deserves our admiration is his hard work and tenacity. Today, China has given its people many opportunities.

The fourth episode is a little different. It's about people who have realized the Chinese dream to some extent. They were born poor, but they have accumulated resources and wealth through hard work in the past 20 years. They use the money to give back to the places where they grew up. This touching story tells us that people don't forget where they came from and make contributions to the lives of their descendants and other folks.

These are all stories about people who suffered a lot, but now they are realizing their values. China is a country of people with dreams, who have the freedom to dream and strive for a better future. These people are doing the right thing. We should all applaud what is happening in China.

**CNS:** Are you worried that making films about these China stories will be considered by Western society as Chinese propaganda? Does poverty exist in Western society? How do they eliminate it?

**Malcolm Clarke:** I'm not trying to make a movie about how good the Chinese people are. We are not doing propaganda, but trying to tell you how far China has progressed and how China has created opportunities for so many people in such a short time. I think this is worthy of attention and admiration. Westerners should understand what is happening here.

Sometimes the West attacks China for various reasons, which, in my opinion, are not valid. I must say that China is not good at self-defense. Soft power does not mean political soft power, but convincing ordinary people that China is not an evil empire—of course it is not.

These films aim to put a human face on China and Chinese people, and also to show how poor the poor areas are. The Chinese government is doing something positive and has made extraordinary achievements.

Every Western country has poverty alleviation projects, but the results are not very good. They have never solved the huge poverty problem like in China. Although poverty exists in Western Europe and the United States, it does not reach the level of the poverty in China.

Some people living in remote areas of Yunnan are just like those living in Western Europe in the eighteenth century. Photos portraying their life there look great, but one can feel how terrible their life is only after living there for a while. I don't like to see people suffer, and the Chinese government doesn't want to either. In fact, they have done something to change it. This is not just to give people a better living environment, not as simple as putting money in their pockets or food on the table, but a bigger change—giving them education and opportunities.

So we named the film *A Long Cherished Dream*. You may want to be an explorer, a teacher or an Olympic champion, but if you live in that poverty, the only thing you think about is how to fill your stomach and keep your children alive. What the “building a well-off society” initiative does is much more profound than this. It enables people to realize their dreams, become what they want to be and live the life they want to live.

**CNS:** Why did you want to make a film like *A Long Cherished Dream*?

**Malcolm Clarke:** *A Long Cherished Dream* is what I have always wanted to make. What fascinates me is to open my heart and get to know these Chinese people for who they are. I'm not interested in superficial and instant things, because those things never reflect who they really are. Shooting is like diagnosing a disease. If you are honest enough, they will trust you and even tell you things they won't tell their family and friends.

This is difficult in China. I can't speak Chinese, which is a big disadvantage, but I have a great team that understands our philosophy and how to do things. We studied hundreds of different stories and people, and finally found these four stories. I'm British, so it's very important that they feel respected. In a sense, being a Westerner is an interesting advantage, because I can ask some questions that the Chinese don't ask, or some very deep questions. I hope people can believe me because I do respect them. In the films, their stories will be presented in a true and respectful way.

So in these four stories, the audience can see people talking about very private experiences in their life, something they seldom talked about and shared, but they shared with me because they trusted me. This is what we have to do. If we can build trust, we can make a good film.

**CNS:** *Better Angels* focuses on the non-governmental exchanges between China and the United States, and the benefits of cooperation for the people of both countries. Also, in 2020, you went to Wuhan to take photographs during the COVID-19 pandemic. What makes you pay so much attention to the development and changes in China?

**Malcolm Clarke:** I came here because I think the great rejuvenation of China is the biggest news story in the twenty-first century. This is a historic event, and it will not stop. This nation and civilization deserve the gratitude of the world. For centuries, China has made great contributions to the development of science and technology, but its achievements have not been praised. There are many reasons for this. We don't need to discuss geopolitics here, but I think China is a victim and has been unfairly judged. When you come to China, you will see its achievements.

The "building a well-off society" initiative is just another brick in the "extraordinary wall" that China is building. There are 1.4 billion stories to tell here. China is writing history. It is exciting to participate in it, so I want to record it.

**CNS:** More and more people want to know more about China. As a documentary maker, how do you think the world audience can really accept the real China or become interested in China?

**Malcolm Clarke:** The answer is very simple. China tends to use statistics when talking about itself, but rarely talks about its people, such as the millions of people getting out of poverty, getting education, making extraordinary technological achievements, and building more kilometers of railway than any other country. It always shows its good side, not a multi-dimensional picture, and the latter is what we do. We try to show the good and the bad, victory and defeat: I spent all my money this week and had to wait for the next paycheck; my daughter is in love with a man who has not gained my trust, but she doesn't think so... This shows that although we live in different social and political systems, we share the same experience.

The more you can prove that the Chinese, poor or rich, can be as anxious as Americans, French, Indonesians and Brazilians to have their children live a better life, the more people will pay attention to them.

If the audiences see other people also struggling in their lives, making mistakes and making decisions they regret, there emerges a sense of commonality in experience and purpose. Westerners can say, “They’re just like us!”

Westerners can see China in films, on TV and in images. We just provide a stage, put Chinese life on it, and then say, “OK, now tell us (your story); we are listening, and we respect what you say.” This will be very powerful.

**CNS:** Will you continue to tell China’s stories? What is your next film on?

**Malcolm Clarke:** I want to make a film about Joseph Needham, a 20th-century professor at Cambridge University. By chance, he came to China because of his Chinese girlfriend, began to study some Chinese scientific inventions in his field, and gradually became interested in China. The Chinese inventions became his lifelong research topic and he wrote about China’s contributions to the world civilization in science and technology and recorded them.

Needham made the West realize that many things that the West thought invented by Westerners were actually invented by the Chinese. He was a great man, eccentric and interesting. He died in 1995 at the age of 94. I want to tell the whole history of China in the twentieth century through the eyes and experiences of this Westerner who loved China.

I hope to be an example to encourage more Chinese artists and film-makers to pay more attention to their own culture and country, and look at the value of their country. China is an extraordinary country with a history of 5,000 years. They should draw inspiration from it, tell China’s stories well and talk to the world in a Chinese way.

(Interviewed by Luo Haibing)



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## Making the Chinese Voice Heard in a Fog of Misinterpretation

*David Ferguson*

British writer and editor David Ferguson, honorary chief English editor of the Foreign Languages Press, one of the oldest publishing houses in China, is also a recipient of the Chinese government Friendship Award, the highest award given to foreigners for contributions to building bridges between China and the outside world. He is also the chief English editor of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, a collection of Chinese President Xi Jinping's speeches, letters and articles in four volumes. His interests include China's poverty alleviation experience, the use of English in China, Chinese theories and initiatives, and the history of the Communist Party of China.

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D. Ferguson (✉)  
Beijing, China



David Ferguson

David Ferguson talks about the complexities of communicating Chinese thoughts effectively to the outside world. Translating key terms in Chinese political discourse is often a challenge. For example, the phrase *jiaqiang dang de jianshe* (加强党的建设), which literally means “party building.” Can foreign readers understand this or will they mistakenly think it is about a building that can be visited? In a world where the Western media controls the international discourse, communicating China’s real image and true stories, and thereby China’s voice to the West, needs effective communication.

**CNS:** With China’s international influence increasing, Western countries are giving greater emphasis to Chinese issues but the results have often been disappointing. Why do the things that China wants to convey to the West often end up being misinterpreted or misunderstood?

**David Ferguson:** It’s a mistake to consider it as “misunderstanding,” which suggests a problem that can be resolved by providing the facts and reason. The fact is that China is being subjected to a deliberate campaign

of misrepresentation and stigmatization by the Western media and politicians, with the intent of creating hostility to China. The U.S. calls the shots in the Western world. Having been the top dog in the world, it now sees a challenger to its predominance, and its first response is to lash out—to destroy the “China threat” that exists only in its twisted psyche—rather than to seek partnership and accommodation. The rest of the West is simply following the U.S. Some Western media fabricate stories, not reporting the truth on China-related subjects.

China has to recognize that trying to solve the problem by explaining things better is no use. The people behind the campaign have no intention of allowing China to present a more balanced and accurate picture, and they have the power to block or distort information coming from the Chinese side because the international discourse is in the hands of Western media.

**CNS:** Is there an effective solution to this situation?

**David Ferguson:** Once China realizes that there is a deliberate campaign of misrepresentation and stigmatization by the Western media and politicians in the international arena, I think the best way to tackle the situation is to invest more in its informal discourse—its soft power—and to directly reach out to Western audiences.

For example, they can bypass the Western media through movies—bear in mind that a movie goes directly to its final audience without being distorted through local political and media filters. The Chinese are good at making big movies. *My People, My Country* (an anthology of seven stories by seven directors on seven defining moments in the annals of the People’s Republic of China), released on the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic, is such a clever film. While preserving the formal political discourse as the official voice, China should, at the same time, develop its informal discourse to engage with Western audiences on a human level.

**CNS:** How to make foreigners who have no idea of China’s history or culture better understand China’s political discourse? What are the problems in translating China’s policies and political concepts?

**David Ferguson:** The most important issue in translating political discourse is not just translating words but presenting the message.

For example, the word *kexue* (科学) appears frequently in the Chinese political discourse. It is mostly translated literally into “science” or “scientific.” But in English, “science” refers to natural science, which is

obviously not the meaning in China's political discourse. The "Scientific Outlook on Development," (the concept put forward by a key meeting of the CPC in 2003 to address the fallouts of China's rapid economic growth, such as pollution, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and excessive consumption of resources, through sustainable development), is a perfect example of this. This concept represented a massive transformation in China's development strategy—a switch from purely economic growth to a balanced strategy considering economic, social and environmental factors. But the words in the English translation capture nothing of this—they make it sound like some kind of technocratic scheme involving chemistry and physics. So China missed a huge opportunity to send a vital and important message to the world about a fundamental strategic change.

China's political discourse is very conceptual and abstract in nature, so you have to deconstruct the concept and provide Western audiences with the actual meaning behind the concept. An example of good translation is "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era."

"Xi Jinping Thought" represents a philosophy and a set of values and principles that will persist over a long period of time. Therefore, great care was given to the wording, which had to be weighed and optimized.

The initial draft used the words "in the new era." However, this seemed to suggest that the "new era" was something that was being imposed on China by external forces, and that China was reacting. The most senior experts in Chinese translation circles went over this and then it was agreed to use "for a new era," which implies that China is driving and proactively controlling the development trends of the new era.

"Party building" is one of the biggest problems. It's a very important and often-used expression, but if you say it to English speakers who know nothing about China's discourse, their first reaction will be that you are talking about a building maybe where you take children to hold their birthday party. Therefore, it should be translated as "strengthening the Party."

**CNS:** When conveying China's political discourse to the West, how can it be an international discourse? When translating China's policies and political concepts, what could cause misunderstandings and how to avoid them?

**David Ferguson:** English is the international language, so China has to make its discourse understandable in English. Eighty years ago, Chairman Mao made a speech during the Yan'an Rectification movement (held in Yan'an, a remote, mountainous city in Shaanxi Province in the north-west, the stronghold of the communists, with the objective of "rectifying mistaken ideas," including the blind imitation of the Soviet model). Mao called it "Oppose stereotyped Party writing"—in which he criticized the Party's writing style.

Then in 2005, Xi Jinping, who was then Party secretary of Zhejiang Province in east China, wrote an article detailing similar criticism, and warning against issues like repetition, verbosity, clichés and formulaic writing.

China has to adopt these counsels when conveying its political discourse to foreigners. Things like the "Two Upholds,"<sup>1</sup> the "Three Represents,"<sup>2</sup> the "Four Confidences,"<sup>3</sup> etc. may confuse the Western public who has no idea of their importance and what is behind them.

We need a completely new approach that starts by recognizing that there's a problem. We need to stop fussing about whether something is the same as the Chinese version and start looking to create a message that is understandable. The best way to do that is to ask yourself, "How would a native English speaker express this?" rather than "How can we translate this from Chinese?"

**CNS:** Can translation of China's political discourse correct Western preconceptions about China?

**David Ferguson:** In my view it is an issue of culture, not translation. I think translators and interpreters should play a far more active role in the process of conveying China's political discourse.

<sup>1</sup> Two Upholds refers to upholding General Secretary Xi Jinping's core position on the CPC Central Committee and in the Party as a whole, and upholding the Central Committee's authority and its centralized, unified leadership.

<sup>2</sup> Three Represents means representing the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people.

<sup>3</sup> Four Confidences refers to confidence in the path, theory, system and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Creativity has to play a greater role in political translation than in other translations because political discourse is dry in nature and hard to understand. So translators and interpreters should learn to not only translate the words but also analyze the message and even make some adaptations. This is one way to correct Western preconceptions of China.

(Interviewed by Chen Jinghan)

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## The World Needs Kung Fu Diplomacy

*Laurence Brahm*

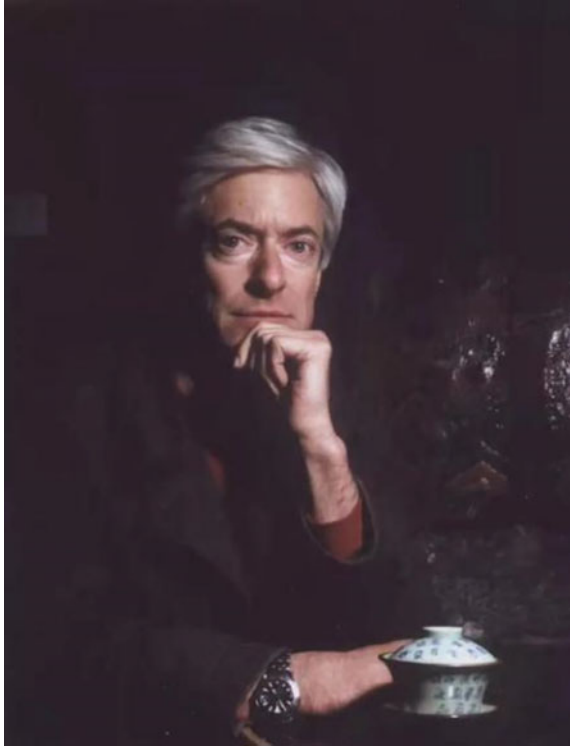
American political economist and writer Laurence Brahm is a senior researcher at the Center for China and Globalization, a Beijing-based think tank. The author of over 20 books on the Asian region, his work covers a wide spectrum including economic development and reform in China.

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© Dolphin Books Co., Ltd. 2023  
L. Chen and K.-H. Pohl (eds.), *East-West Dialogue*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2\\_27](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_27)





Laurence Brahm

When Laurence Brahm first came to China 40 years ago, it was different from what he had known about it before, and he decided to record what he saw with his own eyes. His “China story” covers a wide range of areas and is the result of his extensive travels in China and speaking with many people. He feels when foreigners write about China, they should eventually write about its people, their lives, cultures and institutions, and hopes that his book series *Searching for China* can share Chinese traditional cultures with Western readers, break cultural barriers and achieve better communication. According to him, the deficit in the overseas media’s reports on China is that they are always about the China decades before: “In the 1980s they were reporting on the 1960s, and in the 1990s, they were still reporting on the 1970s and 1980s.”

**CNS:** What do you see as the essential difference between the Eastern and Western cultural values?

**Laurence Brahm:** In a nutshell, the basic difference between Asian philosophies and Western religions lies in a single concept: Western religion is all about duality while Asian philosophy seeks non-duality.

In Western religion, it is all about opposites, polarities, exclusion, expulsion and conflicting ideologies. In Western thinking there is only black vs. white, right vs. wrong, man vs. nature, good vs. bad, them vs. us and so on.

Asian philosophies seek harmony and balance, equanimity and collective consciousness, and a deep recognition that man does not overcome nature, rather we exist only as a part or even sub-part of the natural world. In Chinese it's called *yin* and *yang*, the harmonious coexistence of opposites; across South Asia it is the Shiva-Shakti synergy, where Shiva is the destroyer of the world in the Hindu concept of the divine trinity, and Shakti embodies Mother Nature as well as female power. All of these seek to explain how we may synchronize seeming opposites into harmonious synergy like protons and neutrons in the symbiotic nucleus, holding together a strong force. It means not judging and rejecting with prejudice but embracing all possibilities.

Ancient Asian philosophies borrowed from one another and integrated ideas as they were all interlinked by the ancient Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road that promoted not only trade but the exchange of ideas. Somehow, with all of our so-called modernity, we lost touch with the philosophies and values that were in many ways more sophisticated than what we have achieved in our so-called modern times. Now, it's time for us to find our roots and bring these traditions back because they can show us the way to the future.

**CNS:** How did you observe the Chinese civilization?

**Laurence Brahm:** For my early films such as *Searching for Shangri-la*,<sup>1</sup> *Conversations with Sacred Mountains*,<sup>2</sup> and *Shambhala Sutra*,<sup>3</sup> I traveled to remote regions in western China, searching for China's core cultural values of respect for nature, mutual respect among people and harmony with nature. Many of these values could not be felt in the major cities in the competitive rush to get ahead and develop quickly. So I went to the rural areas and ethnic minority regions, searching for these values in their pure form.

Today I am witnessing a renaissance of Chinese culture and traditional values, especially among young people. When a tree has deep roots, no wind or storm can blow it down. But if the roots are shallow, then the tree will be vulnerable. In the same way, traditional values play an important part in the resilience of a people and nation.

To understand Chinese cultural values, we have to look to the core pillars of Chinese culture that have remained unbroken for thousands of years. Taoism is about change. Buddhism is about seeing the past, present and future simultaneously and being able to turn negative situations into positive by realizing that everything is about how something is perceived. Confucianism gives the Chinese the organizational capability to respond to any situation and crisis by utilizing the longitudinal and latitudinal matrix of organization. These are three aspects of the Chinese collective unconscious that are ever-present in everyone in China and constitute a resilience that no Western country or people have.

**CNS:** How does China cope with opportunities and challenges in its development?

**Laurence Brahm:** I have both observed and participated in many of the reforms and policies of China to overcome challenges over the four

<sup>1</sup> *Searching for Shangri-la* is on Brahm's journey through western China and his meetings with people searching for their version of Shangri-la. He ended up discovering the spiritual truth that Shangri-la is not a place; rather, it is a state of mind.

<sup>2</sup> *Conversations with Sacred Mountains* is on Brahm's trip along the ancient Tea Caravan Trail in Yunnan Province in southwest China where the people he met shared with him stories about the misty mountains that stand majestically in this land "south of the clouds," and explained how the mountains are sacred to all who live in these regions.

<sup>3</sup> *Shambhala Sutra* focuses on Brahm's expedition across western Tibet's Ngari region where he learned that the ancient sutra was actually a metaphorical guidebook. As he traced a route through deserts and mountains embedded with riddles, the lessons learned from the journey (as told in the sutra as a prophecy) are that shortsighted greed, war and failure to protect our environment will cause kingdoms and empires to vanish.

decades of living here. I have seen a consistent pattern of unity and cooperation among the people, and meticulous coordination of government policies when faced with a crisis or challenge. Experience has shown me, time and again, that when a crisis occurs, China's leadership faces it with a rational clearheadedness. Something seems to kick into the subconscious of the people and they work together in synergy with the state institutions to overcome these moments of crisis.

In the Chinese language, the word for "crisis," *weiji*, consists of two characters: "*wei*" meaning "danger" and "*ji*" meaning opportunity. Throughout China's history, the nation and its people have responded to each crisis and challenge. They responded collectively and united in overcoming the danger of each crisis. More importantly, they turned each into an opportunity to re-build, grow and develop further.

In the past four decades of rapid economic growth, China has met the challenges of alleviating poverty and promoting education and economic advancement with unprecedented achievement. By 2021, China was able to eliminate absolute poverty nationwide and become a model of growth and development. Adopting a policy of developing an ecological civilization, which is a response to pollution and the climate change crisis, China has become a global leader in renewable energy and green finance. The emphasis on smart infrastructure to achieve commerce and connectivity has become the central consideration in the Belt and Road Initiative that has brought so many developing nations together in a matrix seeking a common shared destiny of mankind.

Another factor is the ability of the government to respond quickly to crisis through the matrix of organizations, established at the grassroots to the center of the government since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This system of government organization is strong and resilient as it is built upon the common and shared characteristics of the Chinese people that have become an inherent part of their culture and cultural response to all situations. These cultural factors make the Chinese resilient and responsive to crisis. Their positivity allows them to turn each crisis into a new opportunity.

**CNS:** How can China and the United States achieve better exchanges and mutual learning between civilizations?

**Laurence Brahm:** There seems to be an old formula for thawing cold relations. In 1972, "ping-pong diplomacy" (the Chinese government's invitation to the American national table tennis team, when they were

taking part in an international tournament in Japan, to come and play with Chinese players in Beijing) paved the way for President Richard Nixon's visit to China and a blueprint for forging diplomatic relations. It was pretty simple and straightforward at a time when world circumstances were complicated. The American table tennis team came and played with the Chinese team, a conversation began around sports and goodwill followed.

Maybe we need a new kind of ping-pong diplomacy in this era of global confusion. So how about kung fu diplomacy? Culture and sports are the fabric of people-to-people communication and everyone loves a Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan movie. The mixed martial arts (MMA) and UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) are ragingly popular in America and many of the really great fighters come from the martial arts traditions. The concept of MMA began with Bruce Lee, who selected and combined different traditions, setting the stage for MMA with his famous fight scene in *Enter the Dragon*.

People across the world turn to kung fu and martial arts, not for fighting but for the underlying Chinese values of persistence, perseverance, respect and harmony. In the minds of many underprivileged and minority groups, kung fu stands as a symbol of justice, of standing up against unfairness.

I recently had the pleasure of directing a series of short videos called *Searching for Kung Fu*. I have over 40 years of hard martial arts training behind me in different styles and the film was an exploration into the origins of martial arts, taking me and our team right back to the Shaolin Monastery in Henan Province in central China where the legend began. The journey through China's legacy of martial arts traditions made us understand that it is not about fighting but striving and there are key values inherent in the martial arts. They range from perseverance, loyalty, respect, roots and identity, moderation, harmony with nature, flow, emptiness, and at the core of everything, non-violence.

Non-violence? Many might jump up on reading this and ask, "What? Non-violence?" Yes, non-violence. The Chinese term for martial arts is *wushu* (武术). Actually "martial" is a mis-translation. The character *wu* (武) is composed of two radicals: *zhi* (止) which means to stop or halt, and *ge* (戈) which means a weapon. So the literal translation of *wushu* is the "art of halting weapons or fighting," more precisely expressed as the "art of non-violence."

Non-violence is core to everything. Conflicts are just not worth having as nobody gains from them. So if America really adheres to the values of non-violence that Martin Luther King once spoke about, then through kung fu, there should be a lot to talk about and a positive dialogue can begin between China and America. Many of the world's problems could be avoided if the members of the American Congress practiced tai chi every morning.

A martial artist who is trained in both the fighting techniques and mind management and emotional control that comes with the cultural aspect of such training is the last person to pick a fight, and the first to avoid one.

Hopefully that spirit will set the tone of discussions for upcoming dialogues between Chinese and American diplomatic representatives. The values of kung fu should be recognized as universal values. Today loyalty and respect need to be applied more than ever. You can have a nice democracy with two parties, but when neither respect the other and only fight on every issue blindly, then both sides need to learn respect.

Learning moderation is also core in body and mind training to prevent one from being misled into intractable extremes. This applies to personal beliefs and political posturing as well.

(Interviewed by Wu Xu)

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## To Understand China, You Need to See China for Yourself

*Mark Levine*

American sociologist, writer and country music singer Mark Levine is an educator at Minzu University of China in Beijing. A professor of the Union of Western and Eastern Education headquartered in Beijing and an expert of China International Talent Exchange Foundation, a Chinese non-profit organization, he is the author of *Stories from My Chinese Journey* and *Demystifying Impromptu Speech*. He uses American country music to tell Chinese stories and has composed over 70 songs themed on China. He has been given honorary “citizenship” of Huai’an, a city in Jiangsu Province in east China, and is also a recipient of the Beijing Great Wall Friendship Award, and the Chinese Government Friendship Award for his outstanding contribution as a foreign expert in China’s modernization and reform and opening up.

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M. Levine (✉)  
Beijing, China





Mark Levine

**Mark Levine discusses the ideological and cultural differences between the East and the West, as well as the barriers to bilateral exchanges and mutual learning.**

**CNS:** You have been in China since 2005. What significant changes have you seen in this period? And how did you come up with the idea of using music to tell the stories of China?

**Mark Levine:** My first stop in China was Huai’an, the hometown of the late Premier Zhou Enlai. It was there that I wrote my first song after coming to China, “Huai’an—Promise of the Future,” as I felt there was a bright future ahead.

It was in China that I was inspired to start writing songs. I love strumming my guitar while walking in the streets and when inspiration strikes, I will write the song down. I wrote a song while rafting on the Lijiang River. Later, I started to write on specific themes. Music is a more convenient way to communicate than writing books.

When talking about the changes in China over the years, people will normally mention WeChat, the Chinese social media and instant messaging as well as payment app, high-speed railway and so on, but to me there is something more important. When I first came to China, I found many young Chinese were not confident about the future of their country and themselves. They wondered why there was only “made in China” instead of “designed in China” in the sector of mobile phones.

You don't see that any more. Young people today are proud and confident. This sense of pride is internalized and creates motivations that impact individual behavior.

**CNS:** What are the differences and similarities in the ways the East and the West think? Can they reach mutual understanding?

**Mark Levine:** I wrote a song about China's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and before that, I had written songs about the response to the 2008 earthquake in Wenchuan in southwest China (in which over 60,000 people were killed), blizzards, floods and other disasters. The common theme of these songs is that the Chinese government, military, police, enterprises and people always come together as one. In the U.S., however, often time is wasted debating whether to do this or that. It's not easy for everyone to work together to address problems.

This reflects the nature of traditional Chinese culture and modern civilization, which is the understanding that problems can be resolved only through joint efforts. The United States, on the other hand, has always been too much focused on individual achievement and pursuit. In the case of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a lack of unity made things worse. Besides, the Chinese people are more willing to lend a hand when others are in difficulty than Americans. I hope Americans can gain more understanding of China, especially in these areas.

**CNS:** What should be done to promote exchanges and mutual learning between the two countries?

**Mark Levine:** China opposes hegemony and advocates managing one's own business first before exploring ways of cooperation. But the United States believes that cooperation with it should be based on the rules set by it.

Political conflicts in the U.S. are fierce and people have little faith in their government. I think at the private level, improving the U.S.-China relationship or the relationship between Western countries and China depends more on the people. The best way to communicate across cultures is for people with different cultural backgrounds to sit down and talk face to face. Although they come from different countries and speak different languages, they share the same goal, which is to pursue a better life without harming each other.

I know many foreigners who came to China full of stereotyped notions but began to understand and respect China after interacting and working with the Chinese. A few years ago I met a musician from Boston at a

Chinese music festival and asked him how he felt about living in China. “It’s amazing,” he said. “I didn’t know the country well before I came, but now, when I get back to the States, there are so many [China stories] I want to tell people.”

When foreign tourists and students come to China, they get a first-hand experience. They talk to people face to face, learn from them, see for themselves how people’s livelihood in China has improved, and thus form an accurate perception, instead of a distorted one fabricated by the U.S. government and some media. Personal experience speaks louder than secondhand books, interviews or any TV programs.

**CNS:** How do the professors and students from different ethnic groups get along at Minzu University of China, where you teach?

**Mark Levine:** A few years ago, I was asked a similar question at a symposium. Someone asked me, “Since the university has students and teachers from different ethnic groups, how do you handle clashes between them, especially clashes arising from ethnic issues?” I replied, “In the 11 years that I have been working at the university, I’ve never seen or heard of any clash between teachers and students over ethnic issues.”

I think the key to national harmony lies in shared values. While people seek their own well-being, they also think about how they can contribute to their country and to the well-being of others. In traditional Chinese culture, this is called “a sense of responsibility for one’s compatriots.”

**CNS:** Based on your personal observations, how do you see the environment of multi-ethnic development in China and the Western accusations of human rights violations in China?

**Mark Levine:** I have visited 29 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities across China, many of which are inhabited by the ethnic groups. I saw policies to guarantee that the poor in the rural areas don’t have to worry about food and clothing and have access to compulsory education, basic medical services and safe housing, which have been well implemented.

I’ve also witnessed obvious progress in people’s livelihoods in Hubei, Hunan, Anhui, Jiangsu and Yunnan provinces, many of which were underdeveloped or are mountainous or remote. China has succeeded in eradicating absolute poverty, and we have every reason to believe that it will achieve more poverty reduction targets.

As for the human rights violation accusations made by the United States, I want to say, based on the firsthand information I’ve obtained

from the places I've visited, they are totally ill-founded. The U.S. always likes to blame its "rivals." It makes outrageous demands on countries that refuse to be bullied, and ignores all the terrible things its allies and countries that take orders from it do.

We must not forget that the U.S. launched the Vietnam War on the ground that its warships were attacked. It also went to war with Iraq on the ground that Baghdad had weapons of mass destruction. Both accusations proved false. Many of the things said by the American media were not true at all.

(Interviewed by Ma Jiajia and Jiang Wenqian)

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# China's Promotion of Common Prosperity Means New Opportunities for Multinationals

*Shaun Rein*

Shanghai-based Shaun Rein is the founder and managing director of the China Market Research Group, a strategic market intelligence firm focused on China.

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S. Rein (✉)  
Shanghai, China



Shaun Rein

**Shaun Rein** has lived and worked in China for over two decades, successfully predicting major changes and transitions in the Chinese market in his books *The End of Cheap China* and *The End of Copycat China*. He thinks that after the end of “cheap China” and “copycat China,” China will usher in a new revolution—common prosperity. It will mean more opportunities and a better competitive environment for multinationals, including those from the United States.

**CNS:** Three of your books, which are all international bestsellers, are on the Chinese economy and market and the effect of China’s economic rise. How has the Chinese market changed over the years?

**Shaun Rein:** In 2011, I wrote *The End of Cheap China*, in which I argue that multinationals will no longer see China merely as a manufacturing hub, but as a sales hub. While the cost of doing business in China has risen due to rising labor costs and other factors, rising incomes have also made China one of the world’s largest consumer markets.

When *The End of Cheap China* came out, most of the American media, including the *Wall Street Journal*, claimed that I was wrong, but over the years, bit by bit, my views have been borne out.

My second book, *The End of Copycat China*, argues that China will become the most innovative country in the world. In the past, China focused on the innovation of business models, but in the future, it will shift to the innovation of original technologies.

Ten years ago, there was no need [for Chinese companies] to do this because they could be worth billions of dollars just by acquiring the

existing technologies from the U.S. and other world markets. But now, we can see the Chinese innovations in AI, robotics, quantum computers. The quantum computer developed by a team led by Chinese academician Pan Jianwei is much faster than Google's.

My books and the ideas in them are arguably one of the best tracks of the Chinese economy in the past 20 years. Now I focus on common prosperity. Many foreigners do not understand it or even fear it. However, common prosperity is about helping low-income groups, rather than trying to destroy capitalism.

**CNS:** What kind of new opportunities will China's promotion of common prosperity bring for multinationals?

**Shaun Rein:** Seen from different regions, after the reform and opening up began in 1979, first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen benefited more. The chances of a senior high school graduate from these places getting admission in a prestigious university like Peking University or Tsinghua University are higher than for their peers who come from less developed provinces like Anhui or Henan, which is unfair. Common prosperity benefits not only the first and second tier cities, but the smaller ones as well.

When I interviewed consumers in many Chinese cities in 2010, corruption and pollution were their biggest concerns. In 2021, when I did the interview again, their biggest concerns were no longer pollution and corruption—these two areas have improved a lot, and people are now more focused on housing, education and healthcare. This is what common prosperity is trying to solve.

The Chinese government wants to make everyone, not just one-tenth of its people, rich.

I suggest that American companies go deep into China's third-, fourth- and fifth-tier cities where there is huge potential. In the future, better opportunities will exist in many fields, such as sports health, intelligent manufacturing, tourism and so on.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the city of Sanya on Hainan Island became a popular domestic tourist destination owing to high-speed rail and other convenient transportation. Nowadays, domestic travelers never complain about poor hotel conditions, restrooms and infrastructure in China.

**CNS:** How do you see China-U.S. economic and trade relations? Have both countries benefited from them?

**Shaun Rein:** The prosperity of the American middle class is largely due to the efforts of Chinese labor. Without China, the United States would have been a much poorer country over the past 30 years and would not have had so many middle-class people who can afford Apple and Nike products. Similarly, in the 1970s, when China was a relatively poor country, it needed a lot of capital to create jobs, much of which came from the U.S. There is no doubt that both countries benefit from trade and cooperation. The peoples of both countries are better off when the two countries work together.

But the Trump administration's attacks on China by launching trade tariffs left many negative impressions about China in the minds of Americans, ruining this economic partnership.

However, the truth is that China won the competition with the U.S. (in some areas) through a low-cost and well-trained labor force, and good infrastructure, such as roads, airports, railways, etc. Some U.S. politicians need a scapegoat to cover up their wrongdoings, and they find one in China.

**CNS:** What is the biggest misunderstanding or miscalculation that Americans have about China?

**Shaun Rein:** First of all, they don't understand why the Chinese government has widespread popular support. It is not that the Chinese have been "brainwashed" but because the government has done a good job in improving and implementing policies and creating jobs and economic opportunities.

Second, some of the U.S. leadership is biased and discriminatory against China. For more than 70 years, the United States has been the most powerful nation on earth. America believes in military power. Today, with the rise of China, some fear that China's power will undermine America, which scares them.

**CNS:** In which areas could China and the United States expand cooperation and normalize their relations?

**Shaun Rein:** One is environmental protection, and the other is trade and investment. China has made great achievements in environmental protection over the past decade and there is potential for cooperation between the two countries.



The American business community sees China as more of an opportunity than a threat, which provides opportunities for U.S.-China cooperation. Closer economic ties could reduce the likelihood of military conflict. It is important that China continues to roll out the red carpet for U.S. corporate investment.

(Interviewed by Pang Wuji)

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## CHAPTER 30

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# The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and “Oriental Wisdom”

*Bolat Nurgaliyev*

Bolat Nurgaliyev is a former deputy foreign minister of Kazakhstan and former secretary general of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Currently, he is the director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute of the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His research fields include global politics and the economy, and national and regional security trends.

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B. Nurgaliyev (✉)  
Astana, Kazakhstan



Bolat Nurgaliyev

The SCO, founded in 2001, has become one of the largest trans-regional organizations in the world, playing an increasingly important role in dialogue among different civilizations and cultural exchanges. Bolat Nurgaliyev explains the differences between the SCO and similar organizations dominated by the West, especially the “Oriental wisdom” of the former.

**CNS:** How do you see the SCO, a regional yet international organization connecting 18 countries and nearly half of the world’s population?

**Bolat Nurgaliyev:** Although the SCO is a relatively young organization, it has made many unique contributions to regional—and even global—security, stability and sustainable development. Its goal is to create mutual trust among its member states who share borders, solve problems and jointly respond to the challenges to national and regional security and stability.

With its expansion, it has become an important part of the international system with its influence going beyond its member states.

In the 1990s, the “Shanghai Five,” five countries sharing borders—China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan—formed a new collective security model, opening a new chapter in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2001, it was succeeded by the SCO, with Uzbekistan becoming the sixth member. Later, India and Pakistan became its new members. The SCO came into being to jointly fight terrorism, separatism and extremism. With time, its cooperation areas have expanded, covering politics, economy, society, humanities and other fields.

Afghanistan has always remained important in the SCO's security agenda. The SCO-Afghanistan Liaison Group is pooling in regional efforts for constructive engagement with all parties involved for a peaceful settlement of the Afghan issue.

The SCO has successfully completed the mission entrusted to it at the beginning of its establishment, optimized its sustainable development and responded flexibly to the international development process.

**CNS:** How is the SCO different from similar organizations led by the West? What kind of "Oriental wisdom" does it embody?

**Bolat Nurgaliyev:** When I was the SCO secretary general, I studied the views of all parties on the SCO and got extensive opinions, especially from the West. Some people tend to think that the SCO is a political and military alliance against the West, but this is not true. The SCO is a transparent and open international organization that can conduct East-West cooperation.

The difference with similar international organizations is that the SCO has a highly open operation mechanism, including the public release of all documents and information. Although there are debates and disputes among the member states in the meetings, all parties participate in the discussions and the SCO adopts decisions openly on the basis of consensus.

Another difference is that the SCO adheres to the "Shanghai Spirit." In the attitude of equal consultation, all member states respect the cultures of countries with different nationalities and religious beliefs, and jointly promote human development and progress. This is not only in line with the common interests of all member states but also reflects an advanced form of civilization exchange.

It is this spirit that constitutes the equality of the SCO dialogue platform. The SCO respects the interests and opinions of every participating country, and all countries on the platform, big or small, rich or poor, have an equal voice. There are few such precedents in international practice, especially considering the composition of the countries in the SCO.

**CNS:** The combined geographical area of the SCO member states includes the birthplaces of many civilizations, where different civilizations had dialogue and exchanges. Does that help the member states learn from each other?

**Bolat Nurgaliyev:** The area has a profound cultural tradition and is the birthplace of important civilizations, religions and cultures in the world.

The SCO member states share a common geographical and historical relationship; various civilizations collided and had exchanges in the region, forming a historical tradition of mutual respect, openness and tolerance, proving that “a close neighbor is better than a distant relative.”

I think this is the secret of mutual attraction. The civilizational backgrounds of the member states are indeed very different, but they all have the desire to work toward friendly relations: to jointly build their homes and be responsible for regional coordinated development. This goal has been skillfully translated into the SCO’s constitution, political principles, organizational plans and cooperation projects.

The differences among the member states are not a problem, but a source of vitality. Humanistic mutual learning in the SCO is a good example, which has become another driving force to promote the development of the SCO besides security and economic cooperation.

**CNS:** What is the role of Central Asian countries in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)?

**Bolat Nurgaliyev:** The projects under the BRI have made many impossibilities possible, thanks to the relatively stable political environment in the region, which has strengthened economic and trade ties among the countries. In fact, the SCO has created favorable conditions for the cooperation concept put forward by China, which has greatly benefited the promotion of the BRI.

The SCO member states, observer countries and dialogue partners are mostly countries located along the Belt and Road. Reinvigorating the ancient Silk Road and other Eurasian land arteries has been in the long-term development plans of various countries.

Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the BRI in Kazakhstan in 2013. Over the years, the participation of more than 140 countries and 30 international organizations has proven the great potential of the BRI. China’s accumulated investment in the countries along the Belt and Road has crossed \$100 billion, and Central Asia has become the heartland of BRI cooperation.

Kazakhstan, located in the center of Eurasia, is a key crossroads between Europe and Asia. As the place where the BRI was first announced, it’s one of the first countries to carry out cooperation with China under the BRI, and also an important partner of China in Central Asia. In addition, Kazakhstan’s national development plan “Bright Road”

aligns with the BRI. Kazakhstan will continue to improve its infrastructure to unleash its potential as a transit transport.

**CNS:** The COVID-19 pandemic and other factors have profoundly changed the international landscape and the world order. What role will the SCO play in this changed scenario?

**Bolat Nurgaliyev:** The pandemic has become a turning point in the development of the international community. Every country now faces a major test: to choose between multilateralism and unilateralism, openness and seclusion, cooperation and confrontation.

On one hand, the sound institution of the SCO and all-round close cooperation among its member states have created the necessary conditions for the security and sustainable development of the region. On the other hand, the international influence of the SCO is improving, and its successful experience is being widely referenced by other international and regional organizations. In addition, since its establishment, the SCO has engaged in the international system in a positive way, focusing on a wide range of topics, and its attraction to countries in Europe and Asia has gradually increased.

The changing reality is a test for the SCO. In the past, the SCO explored a successful road of cooperation in practice. With the evolution of international politics, the SCO now needs to optimize its cooperation concept and mechanism while consolidating its development achievements, which is normal for any growing international organization. Only by adapting to external changes and making internal adjustments can it become a stable force in an unstable world.

(Interviewed by Zhang Shuo)

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## Taoist Ecological Thought and the West's Concept of Permaculture

*Patrick Nijs*

Patrick Nijs is a former Belgian ambassador to China, and lifetime honorary ambassador and co-founder of the EU-China Joint Innovation Center in Brussels. He has been a witness to China's reform and opening up since 1997, when he first came to China. A staunch environmentalist, he chose to stay in China and work in the environment sector after his term as the Belgian ambassador ended in 2013.

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P. Nijs (✉)  
Brussels, Belgium





Patrick Nijs

In 2013, Patrick Nijs bid farewell to his diplomatic career and returned to his wife Deng Minyan's hometown, a place called Dongchuan in the city of Kunming in southwestern China.

Combining Taoist ecological thought with the Western concept of permaculture—sustainable agriculture for a lifestyle at harmony with nature—he has built a farm on wasteland, restoring the land after seven years' effort.

**CNS:** Dongchuan has a history of copper mining for more than 2,000 years, due to which its ecology suffered serious damage. What made you engage in permaculture there?

**Patrick Nijs:** The idea of permaculture came from Australian ecologists Bill Mollison and David Holmgren. To deal with the problems caused by rapidly expanding and highly destructive industrialized agriculture, they thought about how to develop a more stable agricultural system. They thought industrialized agriculture had poisoned land and water sources and reduced biodiversity. They observed that plants naturally grew in “mutual-aid communities,” so they developed special agricultural strategies and community planning methods accordingly, the gist of which was combining appropriate elements to make them complement each other and exist forever.

Dongchuan suffered serious ecological damage due to long-term copper mining, and lacked enough vegetation to regulate the climate, so it became one of the areas most affected by climate change. I chose a wasteland here, hoping to create a permaculture system to change the

destructive industrial norms, and guide people to treat land with the concept of tolerance and reciprocity. I believe that combining natural elements can make production and life easier. Here I don't plow, fertilize, use pesticide or deworm because plowing will destroy the ecological balance of the soil, and fertilization will pollute the environment. We should follow the rules of nature and listen carefully to the voice of each species to produce ecological and organic agricultural products.

After seven years, the land changed significantly in 2020. Roses began to bloom without pesticides and fertilizers; the vegetables flourished; and the fruit trees bore fruit while earthworms, several centimeters long, reappeared. These were the results of soil improvement.

**CNS:** Do you think permaculture is feasible in China?

**Patrick Nijs:** Taoism's idea of "the way of nature" coincides with the idea of permaculture. Therefore there is a foundation for the Chinese to understand and accept permaculture.

"The way of nature" is the philosophy of Laozi, the founder of Taoism. The physical environment is fathomless and full of vitality, and the vitality of nature far exceeds human intelligence and understanding. This leads to an important concept of Taoism, "follow the trend"; that is, human beings should trust the guidance of nature, be respectful of nature and follow her rules instead of confronting her.

In Dongchuan, I saw that the local government had a clear understanding of the ecological condition and problems. They have a strong will to improve the ecological environment and used that will and listened to my suggestions. In recent years, Dongchuan has made a lot of effort to restore and protect forests, and some methods are refreshing. They have a special tree planting plan and are also innovating the garbage disposal method.

In fact, permaculture is actually the re-elaboration and practice of Taoism. I really hope that Chinese farmers will accept the concept. But it takes time and is limited by conditions, so I respect their choice.

**CNS:** You have done a lot of research on Taoist culture. What is the significance of the Taoist ecological concept for China's current drive to develop an ecological civilization?

**Patrick Nijs:** China boasts a broad and profound culture. Taoism, as an extremely important part of the traditional culture, contains rich ecological protection ideas.

From 1978 to 2011, Chinese policymakers paid more attention to economic growth data. This is normal, because all countries in the world paid scant attention to eco-environmental protection in the early stage of their development. But during the 12th Five-Year Plan period from 2011 to 2015, China gave extra weight to ecology. At present, economic growth is still very important but China is guiding its development with the ecological civilization concept, which means we should respect nature, follow her rules and protect her. Respecting nature is the fundamental idea of scientific development; following her rules is the decision-making principle; protecting nature is a practical requirement.

The thoughts in Chinese traditional culture, especially “the Tao begets all things of the world,” “the law of the Tao is its being what it is” and “to govern by doing nothing that goes against nature” coincide with respecting nature, following her ways and protecting her, which has profound practical significance for building an ecological civilization in China and even the whole world today.

**CNS:** How does Europe view China’s ecological civilization concept and development?

**Patrick Nijs:** China regards ecological civilization construction as fundamental to sustainable development, and will strive to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060. President Xi Jinping made a statement at the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly that China would step up support for other developing countries in developing green and low-carbon energy, and would not build any more new coal-fired power projects abroad.

This is good news for the world, but Europe may not be aware of this profound change in China. Regrettably, many Europeans think that China still follows its old mode of development, and that the Chinese know little about ecology.

China has a vast territory and a huge population, so it’s very difficult to run such a country. And it is switching from measuring GDP to green growth. This is not easy and takes time, but it’s changing rapidly. I have great confidence in its ecological civilization construction. Facts have proved that China is undergoing rapid ecological changes.

**CNS:** How do China and Europe differ in ecological civilization construction? How can they work together to create a better world?

**Patrick Nijs:** In Europe, the shift in ecological consciousness started from the people, and some behaviors harmful to ecosystems have been

changed to stop the waste of natural resources. But this is far from enough, and the government must take the lead to improve the ecological environment. In China, creating ecological awareness is a top-down process, and government officials already have ecological awareness, though many people don't. The foundation of China's ecological civilization construction is that all people should follow the concept of respecting and protecting nature.

China has a strong government, so it can mobilize and organize the people quickly on a most extensive scale, which is an important advantage. The government is leading the people to improve the ecological environment in various ways. Although it took the wrong path in the past, it's seeking solutions suitable for its national conditions and working in the right direction.

Both China and Europe are concerned about the ecological condition, and they cooperate on an equal footing in the area of ecological environment. It is very important for Europe to maintain cooperation with China, which will contribute more wisdom and solutions to the world's ecological civilization construction. This is also the reason why I live in Dongchuan, combine Taoist ecological thought with the Western concept of permaculture and put it into practice.

(Interviewed by Miao Chao, Luo Jie and Xie Ying)

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## Understanding China's Biodiversity Protection

*Terry Townshend*

British environmentalist Terry Townshend is a senior consultant for the Conservation Program of Paulson Institute, a Chicago-headquartered think tank founded by former U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry P. Paulson to foster better China-U.S. relations. He is also a member of the global advisory group of BirdLife International headquartered in Cambridge, the UK, and the founder of Birdingbeijing.com, a website dedicated to birds and other wildlife found in Beijing, where he has been living since 2010.

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T. Townshend (✉)  
Beijing, China



Terry Townshend

**As one of the world's mega-biodiverse countries, China has been developing and exploring better ways of conservation since signing the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992, and the approach is based on its unique wisdom. Terry Townshend says China's efforts to protect biodiversity are reflected not only in the protection of certain species, but also in the protection of entire ecosystems. China is moving toward a symbiosis of economic development and natural environment protection.**

**CNS:** What made you start Birdingbeijing.com over a decade ago?

**Terry Townshend:** I have always been devoted to environmental protection issues. At first, Birding Beijing was just a personal diary. I kept a record of my travels around Beijing and what I was seeing. But very soon I started to get a lot of people contacting me to ask about birds in Beijing because of the website. And I found myself replying to these questions over and over again. So I decided to develop the website as an online resource to celebrate the wildlife of Beijing.

I once asked my friends outside China what's the first word that comes into their head when they hear Beijing, and the most common response was pollution. So that was the image of Beijing internationally. So what I try to do is show that there's another side of Beijing. Actually, Beijing is a really good place for birds and other wildlife. More than 500 species of birds have been recorded here and I think a lot of people would be surprised to hear that Beijing is one of the best birding capital cities in the world, ranking second among the G20 capital cities, preceded only

by Brasilia in terms of the number of species recorded. There are more butterflies and dragonflies in Beijing than in the whole of the UK, and Beijing also has wild cats—the leopard cat—which is like the jewel in the crown. I try to use the website to raise awareness about how much there is in Beijing because the first step in conservation is knowing and understanding what we have around us.

Biodiversity is all about the wealth of species that we have. We evolved in nature and we're part of it. Each species plays a role and if we lose one, it will weaken the resilience of the ecosystem and may lead to ecological imbalance. Globally, vertebrate populations have declined by an average 68 percent over the past 50 years. If we continue to follow this path, by the middle of the twenty-first century, we could lose 30–50 percent of all species on earth. And this loss isn't only sad; it presents economic as well as public health risks. As one species in nature, human beings must respect and protect nature while shaping the world with their powerful capabilities.

**CNS:** In your extensive China experience, which places have impressed you most? In terms of biodiversity, what specific changes do you see today?

**Terry Townshend:** When I came to China, I started to travel around and I was amazed at how much wildlife there was compared to my home back in the UK. I went to the forests in Dongbei—northeast China—and they were full of singing birds. Beijing is a bird-watching paradise and the birds here vastly outnumber those in the UK and in Europe. Qinghai in the northwest is a very special place, with incredibly beautiful mountains and incredible wildlife. There are top predators such as snow leopards, wolves and bears.

I was also impressed by the number of birds in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in northern China—lots of different species singing like an orchestra in the morning. In Sichuan, the home of the giant panda in the southwest, I saw pandas and also red-breasted flycatchers and common stonechats, birds that are found nowhere else. I have been to Xinjiang in northwest China, which has spectacular biological resources. With a relatively sparse human population, there are big wild spaces and quite different wildlife flora and fauna compared with the rest of China. I've been in China over a decade now and I've still just scratched the surface. There's still so much more to see.



Over the years, I have seen many changes. The east coast of China is the only stopover for many migratory water birds. The coast of the Yellow Sea (between the Chinese mainland and the Korean Peninsula) is a vital “refueling station” for millions of birds. During China’s period of incredible economic growth, a lot of these coastal wetlands were taken over for development. However, in 2019, the government issued a ban on any further reclamation of coastal wetlands and was committed to protecting the remaining sites. They became UN World Heritage Sites, which means they’re protected and recognized for their special value and natural heritage. So that’s a big change just in the last few years and one of the number of positive changes that are happening in China.

President Xi Jinping has this policy to develop China into an ecological civilization, which is essentially recognizing that you cannot have a healthy economy without a healthy environment. Those two things go hand in hand. We’ve seen quite a lot of progress, for example, with laws. We’ve seen the strengthening of environment protection and wildlife protection laws in the last few years. There are a number of things that are moving in the right direction for China and I see that as being very positive. We’ve still got a very long way to go to secure the future of the most important landscapes and wildlife, not only in China but globally.

**CNS:** China is one of the countries with the richest biodiversity in the world, like rare birds and abundant wildlife resources. How do you see China’s role in protecting biodiversity?

**Terry Townshend:** My feeling is that in the last 20 years there has been a huge growth in environmental awareness in China. The only way to slow and stop global biodiversity loss is to build more awareness and understanding of the value of nature.

Today, there are so many NGOs in the country working to protect specific species or specific habitats. For example, there is an NGO in Yunnan in the southwest that focuses on protecting gibbons, and there are organizations in Jiangsu in the east that specialize in wetland protection for “one of the eight major bird migration routes in the world.” We also have the Shan Shui Conservation Center, an NGO that focuses on conservation of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. I have been fortunate to personally work with them.

In 2021, the first part of COP15, the UN Biodiversity Conference, was held in Kunming, China, and the second part in Montreal, Canada, in December 2022. This is inarguably the most important environmental

meeting the world has seen as it is where 190 countries and regions agreed on a new global biodiversity framework for the next 10 years and beyond with the aim of slowing and halting biodiversity loss. The fact that China hosted the first part of this major international conference is a sign of the importance China places on biodiversity conservation.

**CNS:** Together with the Shan Shui Conservation Center, you started the “Valley of the Cats” project, a wildlife-watching tourism project in Qinghai that has contributed to the development of the county of Zaduo in the province. How do you regard the role of community-based conservation and tourism, reflected in this project, in addressing the funding gap in conservation?

**Terry Townshend:** Many people think the herders in Qinghai are poor. However, when I first went there, I felt the local people are not poor at all. They're very rich in life and they're also some of the happiest people I've ever met. And when they get up in the morning and step outside, they have the most amazing back garden, the cleanest air you can breathe and the cleanest water you can drink. The people living in Qinghai are the custodians of a special environment on behalf of us all, and it's important to find a way to reward them for their role in looking after these special places.

Community-based conservation and tourism are the ways to do this. The Valley of the Cats project means that tourists from all over the country come to Qinghai, where they enjoy homestays with local residents and eat their food, and the local residents guide them to watch the surroundings, wild animals and plants. This way the locals can get some more income and visitors have a chance to see some of the special wildlife and enjoy an authentic experience.

At the same time, the local communities participate in conservation projects, for example, setting up and maintaining infrared cameras on behalf of researchers from the universities in Beijing. The pictures and videos taken by the local residents are sent back to Beijing, reducing the need for the researchers to travel frequently to Qinghai and reducing the associated cost. By demonstrating the value of these places and the wildlife that live there, the local people have become proud of where they live and there is a strong collective will to protect their environment. I think this model can be replicated elsewhere in China and maybe even overseas in order to help bring more income to the local communities to reward them for protecting these special places on behalf of all of us.

At this stage, there is a large funding gap for protecting biodiversity. We calculated that the global funding gap for supporting and protecting biodiversity is more than \$700 billion per year. Closing the gap will largely depend on government policies. It is crazy that today, globally, for every dollar we spend on protecting nature, we spend \$4 incentivizing actions to harm nature through subsidies in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors. Reform of these subsidies is critical and could help to reduce the gap by half.

In addition, steering the trillions of dollars that are due to be spent on infrastructure around the world into projects that enhance and don't damage nature is vital. Enterprises can play a key role in exploring the potential of natural infrastructure and green financial products. Given the huge risks associated with biodiversity loss, protecting nature is like an insurance policy, just like what we take in our daily life. When human beings face significant risks, such as health risks or car accidents, we take out insurance policies so that if the worst happens, we are financially covered. Financial support for nature protection will be our insurance policy against the risk of biodiversity loss.

**CNS:** What is behind the poor implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity for almost a decade since its adoption in 1992? As the COP15 president and the largest developing country, what experience can China provide for the international community?

**Terry Townshend:** Initially, there wasn't enough awareness of biodiversity risks, both among governments and the people. Successful protection of biodiversity requires the attention of the leaders of various countries and strong legal and policy support.

COP15 was a real opportunity for China to share its experience with other countries and learn from the best practices elsewhere. No country can save nature on its own. All countries must work together. Biodiversity conservation is such an important issue for every country that it's really important that success stories, wherever they are in the world, are shared, because if we can learn from what has worked and what doesn't work, it benefits everyone as we all try to work harder to protect nature. The Chinese government has issued policy documents to support biodiversity conservation mechanisms, strengthened supervision and financial support, and encouraged enterprises to invest in and protect biodiversity, and this is something that should be shared with the world.

As the co-host of COP15 and the largest developing country, China has brought together many countries, coordinating ministers and heads of international organizations to reach an agreement for everyone in the world. We have seen that in recent years, China has elevated ecological civilization to a national strategy, and its investment in legislation and scientific research projects has improved and increased.

**CNS:** You are an ecological advisor to the local governments of Beijing and the city of Yushu in Qinghai. Can China's incorporation of ecological management into its national legal policy system and key development plans in recent years be a replicable model?

**Terry Townshend:** Chinese leaders put forward the idea of an ecological civilization, and underneath that, the Chinese government has strengthened its scientific and legislative foundations. China is striving for a balance between economic growth and environmental protection. In China and other countries, such as Costa Rica, there are many good examples and experiences. I think it is very important for other countries to learn from positive experiences and replicate them as much as possible.

**CNS:** You once wrote, "Biodiversity loss presents risks to human prosperity and well-being. There must be a comprehensive, worldwide effort to value, protect and restore nature." What are your arguments for saying this?

**Terry Townshend:** Humans are part of nature, and if we destroy other species and ecosystems, we are essentially destroying the foundation of human life. The public health and economic and social risks arising from biodiversity loss are immeasurable. On the positive side, due to more media coverage and more government action, I think people are becoming more and more aware of the importance of the environment and nature.

**CNS:** How can younger generations worldwide have a deeper understanding of biodiversity conservation? How to pass on the concept of protecting biodiversity from generation to generation?

**Terry Townshend:** When I was four years old, I saw a particularly beautiful bird in our garden. I asked my parents what it was and they didn't know, so they bought me a book about birds and I taught myself. That connection with nature has stayed with me. However, in the modern world, where most people live and work in cities, it is easy to become detached from nature and to be unaware of not only its beauty and its incredible stories but also of its importance to us as a species.

A British professor suggested that education on biodiversity conservation should be central in our education systems from a very young age. I think that children are innately curious about nature when they have the chance. We have a responsibility to let the younger generations connect with nature from an early age, and to discover some of the incredible stories about individual creatures, such as the unbelievable journeys made by migratory birds. Nature is the best theater and the best source of beauty, innovation, inspiration and everything good about life. Inevitably, there are so many more interesting stories still to be discovered, presenting so much opportunity for discovery.

I look forward to more young people participating in new scientific discoveries that will inspire generations of people, leading to more and more people falling in love with nature. If that happens, we have a chance to protect the wonderful creatures with which we share this beautiful planet.

(Interviewed by Chai Jingbo)

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PART IV

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## Sino-U.S. Relations



## CHAPTER 33

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# Understanding the “Most Important Bilateral Relationship in the World”

*Neil Bush*

Neil Bush, the son of late U.S. President George H.W. Bush, is the founder of the George H.W. Bush Foundation for U.S.-China Relations.



Neil Bush

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N. Bush (✉)  
Houston, TX, USA

Five decades ago, ping-pong diplomacy followed by then U.S. presidential national security advisor Henry Kissinger's secret trip to China ushered in a new era of China-U.S. relations. Five decades later, Washington and Beijing are still exploring ways to manage their relationship in the midst of ups and downs. President George H.W. Bush, who was an old friend of China, and his son President George W. Bush paid more visits to China than any other U.S. president. Neil Bush talks to Dr. Wang Huiyao, founder and president of the Center for China and Globalization (CCG), about how China and the U.S., two giants with different systems and backgrounds, could seek common ground while reserving differences to work together on issues like global safety, peace and prosperity.

**Wang Huiyao:** You said your first visit to China was in 1975 and you have been to China regularly since then. Since you have visited China many times and witnessed firsthand the tremendous changes that China has undergone, how do you see the China-U.S. relationship?

**Neil Bush:** I'll start by reflecting back on October 1971. The People's Republic of China was re-admitted to the UN and I happened to be in New York City during that vote. The first thing my dad did when the Chinese delegation arrived in the United States was to invite them to lunch at my grandmother's home in Connecticut to show American hospitality. And from that point onwards, which was his first real contact with Chinese leaders, my dad had affection for the Chinese and high aspirations for how our two countries should be working together.

I was in Beijing in 1975. Three of my siblings and I visited China for five weeks. We were in Beijing for four weeks and then traveled with my mother to Wuxi, Nanjing and Shanghai by train. So looking back at that time, back in 1975, I couldn't have predicted or imagined that China would have lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty; that the middle class would be growing as rapidly as it is; that the economy continues to turn out new jobs and crank out wealth for the people; that people would enjoy daily freedoms that frankly back then were clearly unimaginable in China. I've been deeply impressed by this.

I think one of the things that separates me from other folks is the fact that I've been there and seen it grow over many years. I've come to some deep conclusions. One, there's no single system that works for every country. Every country needs to develop a system that is suitable and fitting for its conditions. China's system has worked for China, if you look at the results over the years since I was first there and over the years since U.S.-China formal ties were established. The results speak for



themselves. I believe that our system works for us and the Chinese system works for China. We need to be respectful of that.

**Wang Huiyao:** Do you remember the things you saw in Beijing on your first trip?

**Neil Bush:** We rode bikes all over the place. It was really fun. We rode to Tiananmen Square. I distinctly remember pulling up to a “Stop” sign, where the guards were stationed, with their hands up, and the crowd of bikes was stopped. When they saw us Americans, the white guys with long noses, they looked us over and they almost fell off their bikes. We went to the zoo to see the pandas and other animals, and there was a bigger crowd following us than those looking at the animals. But it was a friendly adventure for us.

One of the things I observed, and this was something Dad and I talked about during the trip, was that if you observed Chinese consumers and individuals walking by a bike shop or a shop that had kitchen utensils or whatever, you could see in their eyes that they wanted more, that they wanted a better bike, a better “Flying Pigeon” (the iconic Chinese bicycle brand that started manufacturing in 1949). And so it was pretty clear that there were aspirations even then that led to this incredible growth and the realization of potential.

Now when I go back to China, there are cars everywhere. It’s totally transformed. High-speed trains and Internet connectivity are everywhere. It’s like a whole new world that couldn’t have been imagined back in the bicycle-riding days of the 1970s.

It’s a leap forward. As I mentioned, China’s high-speed rail. Other developing countries or even developed countries can’t keep up with China in the construction of high-speed rail. I’ve been on many Chinese trains that have been very efficient. They are quiet. They are fast. They are clean. China is enjoying a leap of capability that really sets it apart in many respects. So yeah, it has gone from the bicycle- to car-consuming capital of the world and now, a leap to high-speed rail as well.

**Wang Huiyao:** In the recent past, particularly during the presidency of Donald Trump, we saw China-U.S. relations deteriorate. How do you assess the relationship now? How could it reach normalcy with both countries working for a better relationship?

**Neil Bush:** You mentioned the deterioration in the relationship and it strikes me that there are a number of converging factors that have led to the U.S. becoming fearful of China’s rise, and that fear was reflected in the harsh rhetoric under the Trump administration. And with that came a kind of isolationist approach of stepping back and not having dialogues.

Dad believed at his core that countries, families and friends needed to stay in touch with one another in order to better understand one another, in order to put yourself in the other guy's shoes, so that when conflicts arise you can address those conflicts in a mature way. We got away from that for five years or so and maybe even prior to that.

That, coupled with the American problem of “America First,” “Build the wall,” anti-immigration and “We are the greatest country on the face of the planet,” and seeing China's economic rise to where it's now, just behind the U.S. economy on a gross basis—not per capita, but gross basis, a lot of politicians are fearful of losing our prominence in that way.

And then a third factor is political, given that there's not very good information about China floating around in the ecosystem in the U.S. Politically China is an easy target. We see politicians blasting the Communist Party of China as though it was the party that manifested itself in different ways very early in the People's Republic of China's history. There's a lot of China-bashing and it gets to the Thucydides Trap issue as China rises and America, the prominent power in the world, faces this rising power. How are we going to react? A lot of people in our country and many politicians are reacting quite poorly to it and thinking that China is an existential threat to our economic and national security.

Clearly, any bilateral relationship is going to have issues between the two countries involved. We have issues with France. We have issues with Germany. We have issues with Israel. We have issues with our closest friends. We're going to have issues with China and we're going to address them. We have values that we stand firmly behind. We're going to express those values in a way that's hopefully respectful and not finger-pointing or in a derogatory way. We'll express our values in the hope that we can help shape outcomes in that kind of thing. But the ultimate goal should be to come together as often as possible in as many different ways as possible and to resolve challenges respectfully and maturely.

My view of the tariffs (on Chinese goods imposed during the Trump administration) is that it was such a stupid idea to start with—raising tariffs that was a tax on American consumers, hurting American businesses. It was a non-starter. There's nothing in Economics 101 that says a trade imbalance is unnatural or inappropriate or bad. So it was a silly thesis in the first place. Deep down inside, that logic might have been to be punitive to try set the Chinese economy back. But that was illogical as well. So it was a failed policy that needs to be reversed.

**Wang Huiyao:** The COVID-19 pandemic cut us off in terms of travel. And we have actually become more divided because of it. There’s the COVID-19 virus origin-tracing issue, blaming and finger-pointing at China. How do you think we should really work together on this? How can we get China and the U.S. to focus on pandemic-fighting, rather than finger-pointing and shouting at each other?

**Neil Bush:** It’s a question I would ask on a number of major topics that affect the sustainability of life on Earth for humans, including climate change, food insecurity and everything health-related. The pandemic is the most obvious and most pressing matter. But because of climate change, we have all kinds of natural disasters. How can we learn to alter course amid climate change so that Earth will be able to carry on for many more years beyond the current trajectory? These are big issues and clearly the two largest economies in the world have to work together. In fact, it’s hard to imagine solving these issues without the collaboration of China and the United States. There’s a clear mandated necessity for all of us to share our common humanity in addressing these kinds of issues. We should learn from one another.

We should be open-minded about looking at what New Zealand has done, what Australia has done, what China has done and what other countries have done. We should share the best technologies that exist for vaccine development and have manufacturers all over the world convert to qualified vaccine manufacturing so that the global population can be more readily vaccinated against this pandemic. All of these kinds of things need an environment of collaboration, which, sadly, doesn’t exist today.

I do believe that the Biden administration is creating more opportunities for exchange and dialogue and inevitably, when you sit down and you have dialogue with your counterparts, good things come out of it: better understanding in addressing serious issues. The topic of collaborating on the pandemic and healthcare-related issues in general should be front and center for discussion.

**Wang Huiyao:** So how can we really improve? What are the low-hanging fruits? Can we start with climate change, so that we can get some positive news? Can we have U.S. students back in China? Or can we have the Chinese consulates resume business in both Houston and Texas and the U.S. consulate in Chengdu in southwest China?

**Neil Bush:** One of the great blessings of connectivity is having so many thousands of students come to the United States every year. We’re a land of immigrants. I know these students aren’t immigrating, but it’s wonderful how America has taken the best of talents from all over the

world. They come to this part of the world, they learn and go back to their countries, or stay and help us build our economies. There's so much value to those students' experiences, both U.S. students going to China and vice versa.

**Wang Huiyao:** I also have some examples in terms of collaboration. Texas has abundant energy and the energy cooperation between China and the U.S. is one of the big areas. Before Trump started the trade war, we saw a lot of cooperation on trade. But actually, the lack of infrastructure in Texas is detrimental to exports to China and Chinese companies could help out with infrastructure, perhaps by forming joint ventures with U.S. companies to build infrastructure. Another area could be aerospace and aviation. Which areas could promote further collaboration?

**Neil Bush:** I love your suggestion that we should be very open to having joint-venture collaborations. Investment in infrastructure by Chinese joint ventures with American companies to get access to these supplies makes total sense to me. You mentioned aerospace. The George H.W. Bush Foundation for U.S.-China Relations co-sponsored an event three years in a row, called the International Symposium on the Peaceful Use of Space Technology, with a focus on health. And this organization has brought together leading space-related agencies and organizations from around the world, from Europe, France and Germany, from Japan and Russia, the United States, and the results have been pretty remarkable. The last couple of sessions were in-person in China but virtual for all those outside of China. The first forum held in Hainan was very successful in bringing people together.

I'm not sure about the privatization of space and the competitions but there are all kinds of science that can be gleaned from space-related work and that's the kind of science that's going to benefit humankind. To the extent that China brings something of value to that exploration and we bring something of value and the Europeans too, we should collaborate, no doubt about it.

**Wang Huiyao:** Regarding the investigation of the origin of the coronavirus, some say there's more politics in it than science. What is your thought on that? How should China and the U.S. cooperate on fighting the pandemic?

**Neil Bush:** I am not as concerned, for example, about the origin of climate change—whether humans caused climate change or whether it's a natural occurrence or whether there's some combination. The fact is that there is climate change and we need to address it and there is clearly a role for the U.S. and China and all the nations of the world to lock arms in

addressing it. China’s got its 2060 carbon neutrality pledge. Governments at all levels, and the private sector should be unified in their effort to do that, and I have no doubt that China would be a major player in the collaboration to try to address climate change.

The same thing rings true to me with the virus. Who cares where it originated? Whether it originated in a lab or from a bat or from the United States or from somewhere else, wherever it originated, who cares? The fact is that we have a pandemic that continues to affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of people all across the globe and there is a pressing need for nations to work together. Collaboration is very natural when it comes to something as big as this.

And the origins of the virus—I will put a little caveat here. I reject the idea that there was some malicious effort to release a virus that causes a pandemic—I think that is a crazy notion that there was some intent from one side or another to do this on purpose. So throw away the crazy conspiracy theories and just assume that there was an origin of some kind. It doesn’t matter where it originated. Let’s deal with it together.

**Wang Huiyao:** How can we go forward, given the legacy of both the President Bushes?

**Neil Bush:** I will start by reiterating what my father often said, publicly and openly—that the bilateral relationship between the United States and China is the most important bilateral relationship in the world. It was prescient of him to say that many years ago because it is becoming truer now than ever, given the gravity of issues that we face as humans on Earth.

I would further say that given the U.S. economy, our GDP and our individual wealth, China has been a huge shot in the arm and our biggest partner in the world of globalization. So the United States has been a beneficiary of trade, as imperfect as it is.

This trade relationship has benefited our country tremendously, and there is no doubt that China has been an enormous beneficiary of our trade relationship as well. As we’ve had more and more cultural and student exchanges, there have been millions of Chinese visitors to the United States. They all happily go home to China. It’s not like there’s something restraining them from getting back to their homes.

The reality is that we benefited tremendously from this bilateral relationship, so the past to me is what we should look at to predict the future. The future is going to be even better. And we’ve come into this kind of crazy time where China’s rise all of a sudden is recognized by politicians as

a threat to the United States. Once we can get over the hurdle that China doesn't represent a threat to our national security, our economy and our freedom or basic way of life, then through dialogue we can establish better understanding and more cooperation.

So I pledge to continue to work with our team at the foundation to do whatever I can, to help speak the truth and shed light on this very important relationship in a way that hopefully will allow for greater collaborations across the board, not only on all major issues, but on basic things that are taking place day to day. Our governments at all different levels should be having meetings to better understand one another, to put ourselves in the other guy's shoes, to create a better, more peaceful and harmonious world.

(Reported by Wang Enbo and Zeng Nai)

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## Can China and the U.S. Escape the Thucydides Trap?

*Justin Yifu Lin*

Justin Yifu Lin is the dean of the Institute of New Structural Economics, dean of the Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development, and professor and honorary dean of the National School of Development at Peking University. A former senior vice president and chief economist of the World Bank, he is also founding director of the China Center for Economic Research at Peking University, where he taught for 15 years. He is a state councilor, a senior position in the State Council, China's cabinet and a member of the Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultation Conference, the top body advising the government. Justin Yifu Lin is the author of more than 20 books.

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Beijing, China



Justin Yifu Lin

The gap between the Chinese economy and the U.S. economy narrowed down in 2020, as China's GDP rose to about 70 percent of the United States'. Two decades ago, it was only about one-tenth of that.

The change indicates China's rise. When a rising China meets a ruling United States, how will the global competition pattern change? Can China and the United States escape the Thucydides Trap?

Justin Yifu Lin thinks that China's rise has been achieved in a peaceful way, unlike the "law-of-the-jungle" approach adopted by the West for its own development. It, therefore, provides a new possibility—that development can be achieved in a peaceful and mutually beneficial way.

He also thinks that contrary to the "China threat theory," China's rise will help build a new, stable international landscape and environment in which all countries can develop together. He is optimistic that China-U.S. relations will improve in 2050 and in this article he explains why.



## THE “LATECOMER ADVANTAGE”

How long can it take for a country whose industries lagged in every respect to become the world’s second largest economy, the largest trader in goods and the biggest holder of foreign exchange reserves?

In China’s case, it took less than 40 years. In 2012, China’s total GDP at constant prices was 24.5 times higher than in 1978, and its share in the world economy increased from 1.8 percent to 11.5 percent. In the decade since then, China’s economy has continued to grow at a high rate.

How did China create such an economic miracle? What has it done right? It remains a riddle for economists.

Scholars say China’s sustained high economic growth defied the rules of Western economics. If evaluated with the Western criteria of development, such as the state should not have absolute power, the judiciary should be independent, and the property rights of individuals should be protected, China should not be among the top countries and yet it achieved this economic miracle. How did such a paradox happen?

According to Lin, Western economics is mostly a set of rules that the Western countries summarized from their own development experiences. However, it overlooks a key issue—that the opportunities and challenges that the developed West face are different from those encountered by the developing countries.

For example, Western countries emphasize market and property rights protection. The reason is that since the industrial revolution, they have been world leaders in technology and economic growth depends on technological innovation. To achieve technological innovation, they have promoted research and development for more inventions. The investment in research and development can be protected only if the inventions are protected.

While there is a technology gap between developing and developed countries, the former can access the mature technologies and industries of the latter. That also involves some technological innovation but the cost and risks are much less than if they had to invent these technologies themselves. In this way, they can achieve more rapid technological progress than progress in domestic inventions, and that’s the “latecomer advantage” of developing nations. The bottlenecks for invented technology and introduced technology differ greatly; therefore, the areas and ways in which the government and the market play a critical role are also bound to be different.

Traditionally, the Chinese have the mentality of “learning from the West,” thinking that they can learn from the Western experience and use it to build their country and make it prosperous and strong like the Western countries.

But after World War II, very few developing economies caught up with the developed countries. Mainstream Western theory thinks the successful developing countries or regions followed “incorrect” policies. However, the countries that did adopt the policies regarded as “correct” by the West turned out to be largely unsuccessful.

### CHINA’S RISE NOT BY PLUNDER OR HEGEMONY

There are major differences between China’s rise and the West’s. China has followed its own path. Also, China’s influence has been achieved through its own sustained economic development and its mutually beneficial and globalized trade, not by plundering resources abroad.

Since the geographic discovery of far-flung countries and the industrial revolution, the growth of the developed nations can basically be characterized as following the “law of the jungle” and expanding colonies overseas. After the two world wars, they used their technological and military might for political hegemony and gaining or maintaining control over the rest of the world.

Traditional Chinese culture, on the other hand, advocates the philosophy that if you want to be successful, you should help others to be successful. There is a code of conduct for individuals: Cultivate your moral character, manage your family affairs well and serve your country. The government also has a goal: As the national economy grows and people have a good life, it also wants other countries to develop and their people to live a good life. Moreover, China advocates “living in harmony despite differences” and “seeking common ground while reserving differences,” espousing inclusive participation so that all countries can help one another and develop together.

Because of this huge gap in culture and other aspects, the Chinese and Western historical development trajectories differ greatly.

China’s development proves that there is another path to modernization, one that is different from the path taken by the developed nations. It also shows that a country’s rise can be achieved without following the law of the jungle that the Western world followed. It is possible to obtain

an alternative path of development in a peaceful, mutually beneficial way and create a win-win situation.

### CHANGES UNPRECEDENTED IN A CENTURY

In 2018, the Chinese leadership observed that “the world is undergoing profound changes not seen in a century.”

What triggered these changes? It is largely because of the rise of emerging market economies such as China, India and Brazil. Among them, China showed the most significant change. Based on market exchange rates, it surpassed Japan in 2010 to become the world’s second largest economy, and in 2014, it surpassed the United States to become the world’s largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity.

The eight countries that dominated the global economy and politics in the past century have lost their power of dominance. In 1900, the Eight-Power Alliance, consisting of Britain, the United States, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Japan and Austria-Hungary, attacked China. At the time, these eight countries accounted for 50.4 percent of the global economy in terms of purchasing power parity.

Years later, the “core” eight-member-pattern changed with the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Canada joining the Group of Eight (G8). In 2000, the G8 still accounted for 47 percent of the global economy in terms of purchasing power parity. In other words, over the span of a hundred years, the share of other countries in the global economy increased only by 3.4 percentage points.

This situation changed after 2000. And in 2018, when the concept of “changes not seen in a century” was introduced, the G8’s share in the global GDP in terms of purchasing power parity had fallen from 47 percent to 34.7 percent, losing its dominance.

### CHINA-U.S. RELATIONS MAY IMPROVE IN 2050

China overtaking all but one economy is bound to drive changes in the international competition landscape. The U.S. has begun to feel increasingly overwhelmed by its own dominant position in the world. The Barack Obama administration proposed to return to the Asia-Pacific and deploy military forces in the Pacific. After Donald Trump took office, he launched a trade and technology war on China, creating more tension in China-U.S. relations.

How to address this problem? Development is key. China needs to focus on itself and continue to develop and provide development opportunities for other countries.

China had “two centenary goals.” The first was to eradicate absolute poverty and build a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2021, the centenary of the Communist Party of China. With that achieved before the deadline, the remaining goal now is to build China into a modern socialist country that will be prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by 2049, when the People’s Republic of China celebrates its centenary. By 2050, when China achieves its second centenary goal, the world may enter a new stable state if by then China’s per capita GDP becomes half of the United States’ while its total economy becomes double the United States’.

The U.S. has imposed science and technology bans and trade tariffs on China mainly because its level of technology is higher than China’s. However, by 2050, there will be other changes. It is estimated that Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai as well as the five eastern coastal provinces of Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong will then have a combined population of 400 million. The population and GDP per capita of these areas will be at the same level as the United States’ if China’s overall GDP per capita reaches half of the United States’ by then. The population, income level and the industrial technology level of China’s most developed regions will be almost equal to the United States’. If that happens, the technological bottleneck that the U.S. has been imposing on China would be basically gone by then.

However, more than 50 percent of the Chinese population—or nearly 800 million people—live in central and western China, where the GDP per capita is about one-third of the United States’. These areas have potential for rapid development. By 2050, when China’s economy becomes twice the size of the United States’, it will still be developing faster because of these regions. In other words, the U.S. will no longer have a technological edge and would be incapable of changing the situation in which China’s economy is twice the size of its own, nor would it be able to ignore the opportunities for its own development that the Chinese market will offer. All these factors will create a foundation for peaceful cooperation and development.

If China concentrates on developing itself and utilizes its potential, it can have a better future and can lay the foundation for a new and stable

global pattern. The rise of China will help build a new, stable international landscape where all countries can develop together.

### ROOT CAUSE OF AMERICA'S PROBLEMS: SILICON VALLEY AND WALL STREET

Is China's development the root cause of America's problems? Most developed countries are reluctant to admit that the causes of their problems lie in themselves. Instead, they blame others and look for scapegoats.

Since 2008, China has contributed over 30 percent of global economic growth every year. Western countries can also develop well if they can seize the opportunities in China.

For example, Germany, the most developed European country, has been called a "miracle." American economist Michael Spencer, joint winner of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2001, once said it was the rapid development of China that contributed to the German miracle after the 2008 crisis. China was undergoing industrial and technological upgrading and massively imported new technologies and equipment from Germany, helping Germany revive.

On the other hand, the situation in the United States is a study in sharp contrasts. The American middle-income group has shrunk, the income of general workers has not significantly increased, and the polarization in U.S. society has worsened. A lot of research shows this was caused by Wall Street and the Silicon Valley.

After the U.S. dollar's direct convertibility to gold was terminated in 1971, the U.S. took advantage of the dollar's status as the world's reserve currency to advocate financial liberalization. This allowed Wall Street to enter developing countries and speculate for profit with the dollar's status and U.S. capital accounts. The large sums of dollars that flowed into the stock markets and bond markets of the emerging economies and then quickly withdrew caused consequent financial instability in these countries. One study shows that in 2007, a handful of Wall Street companies controlled as much as 40 percent of the overall corporate profits in the United States.

Let's now look at the role of the Silicon Valley. The United States is at the forefront of the global technology and continues to invent new technologies. The Silicon Valley, where most of the tech companies are located, enjoyed patent protection on new technologies, which enabled

it to straddle the whole world as its market and derive an astronomically high income.

From the 1970s and the 1980s, those two have been the two major contributors to American growth. But they created only a limited number of jobs, which resulted in U.S. manufacturing hollowing out. Some of the industries that still remain in the United States are general services companies with very low value added. The service industry does create many jobs, but the income is very low, and the wealth stays in the pockets of a small number of people on Wall Street and in the Silicon Valley. That is the root cause of the United States' domestic problems.

The United States' wealth is unevenly distributed. So it needs to hike taxes. After taxation, the wealth brought by technological innovation or financial liberalization should be invested in improving infrastructure and education, so that more better-paid jobs can be created.

Unfortunately, that is not what Washington is doing. Instead, it's attributing its domestic woes to China's rapid development and globalization. It should look for the causes within itself and find solutions to benefit not just itself but other countries in the world as well.

(Interviewed by Pang Wuji)

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## A “Position of Strength” Is Not the Right Way for the U.S. to Approach China

*J. Stapleton Roy*

J. Stapleton Roy, a former U.S. ambassador to China, was born in Nanjing in east China and spent his teenage years in Chengdu in southwest China.

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J. S. Roy (✉)  
Beijing, China



J. Stapleton Roy

**The U.S. seeks to engage with China “from a position of strength” that will put pressure on China and give Washington an advantage. J. Stapleton Roy, a former U.S. ambassador to China, discusses the feasibility of this approach in his conversation with Wang Huiyao, President of the think tank Center for China and Globalization. Roy thinks the U.S. must stop thinking in terms of dominance. The U.S. and China should shoulder their responsibilities as two great nations and not let the differences in their systems block cooperation.**

**Wang Huiyao:** You are a seasoned diplomat who has lived in China for many years. What’s your take on the past, present and future relationship between China and the U.S.?

**J. Stapleton Roy:** For much of the last 50 years, the United States was confident that China’s growing wealth and power was no threat to its vital interests and bilateral differences could be managed by diplomacy and engagement. But that is no longer the case.

A starting point to understand what has happened is to recognize that the United States and China are both in the midst of fundamental transitions that affect their respective places in the world. The United States is seeking to adjust to an international situation in which it is no longer the sole superpower. This is not so much because of a decline in power,



but because other countries have risen to major power status and China, of course, is the first and foremost example of that.

A new multi-polar world is emerging. Not surprisingly, the United States is reluctant to give up the dominant position it has occupied since the end of the Cold War, and to accept the adjustments that must be made in order to establish a new equilibrium. At the same time, there is no question that the social and political polarization that has been a prominent feature of the U.S. domestic scene over the last half decade has damaged the international image of the United States and the perception of its reliability as a great power.

China, on the other hand, has in a remarkably short period of time regained the wealth and military strength that are the attributes of major powers. This has altered the psychology of the Chinese and it has changed Chinese behavior patterns, which have become more assertive. These are two of the key background factors that have influenced the plunge in the U.S.-China relationship to the lowest depths in half a century.

Fortunately, despite some superficial similarities, the Biden administration is fundamentally different from its predecessors. It is moving carefully to iron out internal differences and adopt sustainable policies. The administration has reaffirmed that it would adhere to the one-China policy and does not support independence for Taiwan, which is particularly important for U.S.-China relations. It is also seeking a pattern of regular consultations with Beijing.

A hardline American approach to China does not mesh well with the interests of U.S. allies and friends in East Asia who do not wish to see the region polarized. In other words, if the United States tries to work with its friends and allies, it will discover they do not support a hardline approach to China, and I think that will have an impact over time.

**Wang Huiyao:** One of the things that is of great concern is the move to link the origin of the COVID-19 virus to a lab in China. Your comments?

**J. Stapleton Roy:** This, in particular, is an issue on which we should be cooperating and not fighting each other. I think it is important to trace the origins of the virus and we have our own views about how that should be pursued. But the basic point is that the pandemic threatens every country in the world and if the two leading countries in the world are unable to cooperate in dealing with the common threat, then there's

something wrong with both of us and we need to consider what the problem is that is preventing us from cooperating on this vital issue.

**Wang Huiyao:** There is a saying now in the U.S.—“China doesn’t converge with us and has not become one of us.” China has its own unique system and it doesn’t have to converge with the U.S. system. What do you think about the future developments between China and the U.S. from the perspective of a very experienced China hand?

**J. Stapleton Roy:** You can’t have a new equilibrium if either China or the United States is setting dominance as a goal because the other side will not accept it. You have to have a balance of power in East Asia, otherwise we’re going to be continually in strategic rivalry with each other. That’s one reason why I think it is absolutely wrong to think that our dominant factor has to be strategic rivalry because strategic rivalry always focuses on the military component and that ends up generating an endless arms race in which resources are diverted away from economic development into military development. I think the United States has to stop thinking in terms of dominance, and I think the Biden administration was wrong by introducing this concept of “dealing with China from a position of strength.” Anybody would understand that China would never accept that as a basis for engagement.

That means national interests have to be defined in a way that doesn’t exclude the possibility of peaceful coexistence. So I think there is enormous scope for China and the United States to stop looking at the world in terms of their own domestic driving factors. They have to look at the external circumstances in the world in an objective way and then formulate foreign policies that are compatible with the international circumstances in which they have to operate and gain domestic support for that approach.

The United States is not yet doing that. For example, if we look at East Asia, where all the countries have more trade with China than with the United States, it is clear that if we ask Asian countries to choose between China and the United States, they are not going to do so because they have very important interests with China. So we have to understand that and our foreign policy approach to China and the way we talk about China must not be in a way that requires countries to choose between a “good United States” and a “bad China.” That’s the wrong way to formulate our foreign policies.

**Wang Huiyao:** Former ambassador to the United States Qin Gang has said that the door to Sino-U.S. relations was opened five decades ago following Dr. Henry Kissinger’s secret visit to China and it will not be closed.

**J. Stapleton Roy:** I think Dr. Kissinger’s visit to China five decades ago is well worth commemorating. It illustrates that when the national interest is served by cooperation, differences in political and social systems do not block that cooperation. The problem with differences in systems, which have become a big issue in the United States in terms of thinking about China, is that at some level, it does influence cooperation, but it shouldn’t block it, if it’s in the national interest to cooperate.

There are forces in the United States that want to block our cooperation with China because of the differences in our political systems and we need to rethink about President Richard Nixon and Kissinger opening to China at a time when there couldn’t have been bigger differences between our domestic systems. At that time China was also at the height of the “cultural revolution” (1966–1976). If we look at what the world requires as our responsibilities as great nations, it is clear to me that the lesson from Kissinger’s visit to China is that when it is necessary to have cooperation between China and the United States, we should not let the differences in our systems block that type of cooperation. So I think it’s a very important visit. Historically, it created the possibilities for the United States and China to create enormous common interests and those common interests, in my opinion, continue, and we have to find ways to cooperate to promote them.

(Reported by Wang Enbo and Zeng Nai)

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## America Should Fix Its Own Problems First

*John Hamre*

John Hamre, a former deputy U.S. defense secretary, is the CEO of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, an American think tank based in Washington, D.C.



John Hamre

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**John Hamre** talks to Wang Huiyao, President of the Center for China and Globalization, on the major changes in American foreign policy since President Joe Biden took office and their impact on Sino-U.S. relations. Hamre thinks the two main American parties are not focusing on the real problems the country is going to face in the next 10 to 15 years, and the U.S. may enter another 20-year period of political restructuring. As for Sino-U.S. relations, the U.S. should focus on addressing the problems in its own society.

**Wang Huiyao:** When the U.S. troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan in 2021, President Joe Biden said the U.S. did not go to Afghanistan for “nation building.” What do you think of that?

**John Hamre:** I think President Biden was reflecting what the American public feels, which is that we were in Afghanistan but we didn’t have a strategy; we were not successful. We shouldn’t have got involved in a situation where we didn’t know what we were doing. I think that was basically the thought behind that statement. But does it mean that America is going to pull back from working with other countries to build stronger institutions? No, I don’t think it means that we’ll abandon that. But I do think it means that Americans feel that we used the military too excessively, and we didn’t really have a plan, and we were not successful.

So I think a foreign policy that is more focused on solid economics, on social development and on traditional diplomacy is what he was talking about. The term “nation building” in the sense that “We are going to shape the world so that it looks like us”—I think that is over. I don’t think we’re doing that any longer.

**Wang Huiyao:** Even though Donald Trump is not in office, Trumpism is still thriving. So how do you assess the political future of the U.S.?

**John Hamre:** America had two periods in its history when there were profound changes in our political system. One was from about 1842 to 1860, and that ended in a civil war, which was a bad thing.

The other big period, when politics got turned upside down, was from about 1885 to 1915. In both cases, it lasted over 20 years. And I’m afraid we’re in probably another 20-year period where our politics is going to go through profound restructuring. And I have my own personal views about it. I don’t think either political party here is effectively focusing on the challenges we’re going to face over the next 10 years or 15 years. I think both the parties are battling over their past policies, rather than looking forward to the future.

So I think we're going to be internally divided. I think there's still going to be a lot of progressive work, but it's going to happen more at the state level. I think the economic disparity is very real and is going to be the greatest thing we're going to have to work on. I would say that's the big debate that we have right now between the Democrats and the Republicans. But I don't know if what's going to come out of it is going to be a breakthrough. I think we're going to have internal tension in the United States, probably for the next 15 years.

**Wang Huiyao:** If the U.S. joins the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) trade deal, which it had abandoned in 2017 (when it was known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership), will it be a new platform to talk about 21st-century trade issues?

**John Hamre:** I thought it was a major mistake on the part of President Trump to pull out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

I wish that the Biden administration would join the CPTPP, but I don't know whether they're going to. If they don't, that's a mistake, in my view. We should be leaning forward. One of the few really good ways to deal with that is to expand and open up wider on trade opportunities. I don't know whether the Biden administration is going to see it that way, unfortunately, but I do think that there is a larger restructuring underway now.

It started before the COVID-19 pandemic, but instead of globalization we're starting to regionalize trade patterns. I'm worried because of the tension between China and the United States.

The sentiments in Washington are very negative about China right now. And I think that's very unfortunate because it makes it hard for us to develop real ideas and real policies in a constructive way. But we're two great countries with global interests. We're going to have areas where we're going to disagree with each other. We're going to rub up against each other. Sometimes we're in tension. We have to find ways where we don't let the tension overwhelm us and prevent us from having constructive conversation to work through the problems.

In the U.S., I'll say in Washington, there are basically two camps. One camp believes that China is racing ahead. It's going to be dangerous. We'd better stop it any way we can. That's one camp. I'm in the second camp, which believes that this is a huge, unprecedented competition. We're out of shape. It's like a runner who hasn't been exercising. We're going to have to get in shape if we're going to stay in this competition.

So instead of trying to trap China because it's running ahead of us, we need to work harder to run faster.

I believe that America's focus ought to be on improving ourselves, fixing our own problems, overcoming the problems within our own society. This is where I think we should be focusing rather than opposing China in everything it says or does. That's going to go nowhere. So I'm in the camp that says that if Americans are going to compete effectively, we've got to get stronger internally.

**Wang Huiyao:** What do you think about Track 1.5 or Track 2 dialogues, like between think tanks, to bring the China-U.S. relationship into better understanding and better communication?

**John Hamre:** I think over the next 10 years, Track 1.5, Track 2 dialogues are going to be more important than in any time in our history. It's hard for the governments to meet each other because the politicians are so busy throwing rocks at the other side. We can at least meet and talk to each other as professionals and as friends. It doesn't mean we're always going to agree, but it means we can have an honest conversation with each other.

And then we're going to be in a better position when we have real hard issues that we have to share with each other. We're big countries, that's unavoidable, but we do have to have a framework where we can talk to each other.

I feel we're in a period of time where we're going to have to be honest with each other about where we disagree, but we have to have a framework where we're talking to each other, where we can understand each other. And I think that's what Track 1.5 is going to be, especially over the next 10, 15 years.

(Reported by Zeng Nai and Wang Enbo)



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## Confrontation in Sino-U.S. Relations? Absolutely Out of the Question!

*John L. Thornton*

John L. Thornton is chair emeritus at Brookings Institution, an American think tank, and the John L. Thornton China Center of the organization is named after him. A former president of the Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., he was also a professor at Tsinghua University. He is a recipient of the Chinese Government Friendship Award.

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John L. Thornton

**John L. Thornton Speaks to Wang Huiyao, President of the Center for China and Globalization, on how the China-U.S. bilateral relationship can move forward.**

**Wang Huiyao:** Now that we are into the Biden administration from the Trump administration, how can the deficit of trust between China and the U.S. be addressed?

**John L. Thornton:** The U.S.-China relationship is and will be both the most important bilateral relationship of this century and one that will drive or create in large measure the world in which we all will live. In general, I am skeptical of the grand sweeping statements about inflection points or decoupling or Cold War analogies. For me, these kinds of statements are mostly emotional, provocative, not helpful and wrong.

I think we're better off looking at the long term and the trajectory of dynamics and forces creating that long term. I have taken to looking at the mid-twenty-first century, the year 2050 or thereabouts. The best estimates are that the world's population in 2050 would be about 10 billion people. Today we are approximately 7.8 billion. More than half of the incremental 2.2 billion will come from nine countries: India, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Tanzania, the United States, Uganda and Indonesia. In 2050, as now, a small percentage of the world's countries—maybe the top 10 countries—will represent 65 percent to 70 percent of the global GDP.

In that world, in which very few countries will dominate the global GDP, and in which the incremental 2-plus billion people will be coming from very poor countries, does any serious-thinking person believe the

world would be better off with rich countries primarily arguing or even fighting among themselves, while the rest of the vast percentage of the world remains poor, malnourished, victims of climate change, sources of migration and disease and poverty? Or do the wealthy, most powerful countries have a responsibility to work together to lead the world to a safer, more prosperous and harmonious place? Isn't the answer obvious?

If the answer is so obvious, then why does it feel or seem that at least some, maybe many of the world's richest, most powerful countries, do not seem to be animated or motivated by such a collective goal? There is a myriad of answers to this question, but it certainly includes a penchant for staying trapped in the old way of thinking of the past, as well as a fear of change, of losing one's place. Whatever the reasons, surely the world's two most powerful countries, the U.S. and China, have a disproportionate responsibility to lead the world. Of course, with others. And there is no reason why they cannot do this.

The issue of climate is a global one, it is larger and more important than the U.S. and China. The entire thinking world wants it to be resolved or well-managed. The two leading countries must lead on the solution or it will not be resolved. Everyone knows this. Tellingly, the two presidents are following the only path, the only *modus operandi*, that works in U.S.-China relations—one might call this the Zhou Enlai-Henry Kissinger model, or, more recently, the Liu He-Robert Lighthizer model. (Liu He, Chinese Vice Premier, and Robert Lighthizer, former U.S. Trade representative, were the chief China-U.S. trade negotiators.) The only model that we know works is when the U.S. and Chinese presidents each appoint a very senior, serious, experienced, highly trusted individual and together, the two presidents instruct the two officials to get into a room, and truly work together and build a relationship of trust and not come out until they have addressed the problem.

Both presidents have publicly said that they would cooperate on climate irrespective of other issues. Both should instruct their senior leaders to give the existential issue a real chance to get resolved. Finally, to state the obvious, success on addressing climate change will demonstrate yet again that the U.S. and China working together can lead the world to a better, safer, healthier, more harmonious existence. This is good for both countries and the world and gives a concrete model and hope that all other gnarly complex problems can also be addressed by the two leading countries working together with others for the collective benefit of their countries, their peoples in the world.

**Wang Huiyao:** Scholars say that President Joe Biden’s Build Back Better World proposal at the G7 Summit in 2021 could be dovetailed with China’s Belt and Road Initiative and the EU’s investment plans. Chinese President Xi Jinping had talked about China-EU collaboration with France and Germany. What do you think?

**John L. Thornton:** The Belt and Road has been characterized by many people in the United States as some kind of nefarious geo-strategic plan to take over the world but it’s not. The Build Back Better World and Belt and Road—all those efforts should be coordinated globally by the wealthy countries trying to build the infrastructure necessary for the rest of the world so that we build a safer and more prosperous world.

We all know these projects are very difficult to execute. It’s not as though anyone’s got a monopoly on how to do this well. They are hard. And we would be doing ourselves a great service if we became particularly expert at building important infrastructure all over the world in an efficient manner for the benefit of the respective peoples. So obviously we should be doing it. There’s no question about that.

**Wang Huiyao:** There’s an issue about student exchanges between China and the U.S. How can people-to-people exchanges, business exchanges, tourism, cultural exchanges and of course, think tank exchanges be conducted during this special time?

**John L. Thornton:** To state the obvious, ties between American and Chinese people, to me, are absolutely essential to getting the relationship where it needs to be. I’m hopeful that the younger people who have a vested interest in the long-term future of their countries in the world will be the forces for good in the relationship. In one way of thinking about China, for example, you think about roughly 400 million millennials, how they have grown up and how they think about the future. The Chinese leadership needs to be responsive to that group. And the same thing is true in the United States. The ties between those groups are absolutely central to progress in moving forward.

We all know that the ties are deep and broad, they are state-to-state, university-to-university, NGO-to-NGO, and individual-to-individual. The sort of societal trust that needs to be built was being built and can be built cannot be overstated. This is probably the single best insurance policy against any untoward policy by the leadership. I think in some ways the wisdom or common sense of ordinary people can act as a kind of break against the occasional unwise policies of the elite.

**Wang Huiyao:** At an event in 2021 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Henry Kissinger’s visit to China as then U.S. secretary of state, Kissinger said the U.S.-China relationship is more critical today than it was in 1971, when he made that secret visit. Five decades later, is there any chance that the two nations would break the ice again? What is your vision for the future development of China-U.S. relations?

**John L. Thornton:** When we talk about competition and cooperation, I can understand and be comfortable with both of those ideas between the two countries. But when we add the idea of confrontation, to me that’s absolutely out of the question, and we shouldn’t even be considering that as a concept. The world simply can’t take it. We shouldn’t waste any time on it. As I said earlier, should the leading countries of the world really be spending their time arguing or trying to put each other down, or should they be spending their time trying to get the world to a better place? To me the answer is very obvious. And the sooner we recognize that, the better. And we have a right to demand of our leaders that they get the big things right, as Richard Nixon, Mao Zedong, Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai did five decades ago.

(Reported by Zeng Nai and Wang Enbo)

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## We Need Trust-Building Steps in U.S.-China Trade Relations

*Craig Allen*

Craig Allen, a veteran American diplomat, has worked in Asia for nearly 30 years. Beginning his government career in 1985 at the U.S. Department of Commerce, he was an international economist for China studies, commercial attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing from 1992 to 1995, and senior commercial officer from 2002 to 2006. Since 2018, he has been president of the U.S.-China Business Council.

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Craig Allen

**From dispute to multiple rounds of negotiations to signing the “phase-one Economic and Trade Agreement” to more friction, the China-U.S. economic and trade relations have seen many challenges and uncertainties since 2018. Under President Joe Biden there are more changes in the U.S. trade policy toward China such as the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 that is regarded as targeting China’s semiconductor industry. Craig Allen talks about the uncertainties prevailing in the bilateral economic and trade relationship and the areas where the two countries can work to enhance “recoupling.”**

**CNS:** In August 2019, you described the U.S.-China economic and trade relations as heavy winds blowing hard. How are they now?

**Craig Allen:** I think I can answer this question in two ways. If you just look at the numbers, it’s pretty good. For example, U.S. exports to China were up 17 percent in 2020 and 11 percent in 2021. Besides, despite a slowdown, U.S.-China bilateral investment continues to flow across both sides of the Pacific. The U.S.-China relation is at a pretty good level, when judging from the statistics.

But I think the reality is much more complicated. The political climate for both remains frosty, and the differences between both have created uncertainties and a lack of trust, as well as increased complexity in the bilateral relationship. All of this puts pressure on investors in both the U.S. and China. I am concerned that if there is a lack of adequate discussion and communication between the two governments, then the differences between the two sides will become even greater.



**CNS:** What do you think of the Biden administration's trade policy with China so far?

**Craig Allen:** The U.S. trade policy with China is part of its global trade policy. Looking from the perspective of its global trade policy, I don't think the Office of the United States Trade Representative has put forward a coherent overall strategy in this regard. For now, the U.S. has made some progress in resolving trade disputes with the EU and has proposed an Indo-Pacific economic strategy (the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework), but there are no policy details and we are still waiting.

As for the trade policy with China, Biden talked a lot about the negative impact of tariffs on American workers and American families during his presidential campaign. But there appears to be no bilateral negotiations on how to reduce or eliminate tariffs, or to resolve other outstanding market access issues. While the U.S. government says it's looking for new tools to address the issue I don't know what kind of tools it is looking for and that makes me feel very uncertain about the future. I think that's the kind of uncomfortable, uncertain position we're in today, made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic and the tensions in Ukraine. We're all waiting to see what happens next while trying to help our member companies deal with this great uncertainty.

**CNS:** When United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai spoke on the trade policy on China in October 2021, she talked about "recoupling" of U.S.-China economic and trade relations. What kind of signal did it send?

**Craig Allen:** She only mentioned this expression once. Since then, I haven't seen any further action or proposals from the U.S. government on it. But I would say that we are seeing positive signs of cooperation on agriculture and climate change: A 35 percent increase in U.S. agricultural exports to China in 2021; a lot of cooperative activities between the U.S. and China on climate change and epidemic control. Many U.S. energy companies are actively engaged in energy saving and emission reduction actions with their Chinese partners. However, in August 2022, China suspended its climate cooperation with the U.S. in response to U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's controversial visit to the Taiwan region.

I am not saying that there are no problems in the economic and trade relations, but if there are good opportunities for cooperation, both sides should consider them. Another promising area for cooperation is public health and life sciences.

**CNS:** You met Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang several times when he was the Chinese ambassador to the U.S. What do you think of China's economic and trade policy toward the U.S.?

**Craig Allen:** Speaking from the aspect of the global trade again, I think it's very noteworthy that China's economic and trade negotiations have been hectic and very successful. I appreciate China's accession to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and its formal application to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. This is a positive sign.

As for the U.S.-China bilateral trade and economic policy, I think we see some very similar things in Beijing and Washington: Both sides want to reduce dependence on the other, particularly in terms of strategic goods or goods that might be of strategic importance.

**CNS:** There is a view that the U.S.-China economic and trade relation is so closely linked in various areas that approaches such as "decoupling" or "recoupling" do not help constructive dialogue between the two sides.

**Craig Allen:** I agree. When you talk about the so-called "decoupling," you're only looking at a small part of the overall economic and trade relation. It's really impossible to "decouple" the U.S. and China in areas like agriculture and energy, but in the area of technology, it's another issue. I think that in the area of technology, both governments are taking actions to make it difficult for companies from one country to do business freely in the other's territory.

**CNS:** If the U.S. and China seek to "recouple" their trade and economic relation, which areas should they start with?

**Craig Allen:** We really need confidence-building measures. For example, lowering tariffs, especially during the inflationary period that we are facing now, would be a very smart move. But I think that both governments have concerns on national security, and we should accept that. If this is the case, we should define national security concerns by defining the scope and drawing up a list so that the other areas can comply with the rules of the World Trade Organization.

However, national security concerns are often exaggerated, motivated by trade protectionism. The U.S. and China will pay a huge economic price for this, and it is the people of both countries who will bear the cost.

**CNS:** Some U.S. mainstream media commentaries say the "trade war" is a costly lesson for the United States, and that increasing tariffs will not

improve its economic and trade relation with China. How do you think the U.S. and China should work together to promote the development of their economies and businesses?

**Craig Allen:** At the current stage, I see a tendency of a long-term tariff, which is very dangerous because it will distort the U.S.-China economic relation. It would be good if both sides could start negotiations on lifting tariffs. The U.S.-China bilateral relation is in a really difficult time right now, and tariff is one of the tricky issues.

**CNS:** What kind of political statements from the U.S. and China would help the two sides to move closer to each other?

**Craig Allen:** It would be great if the leaders of the two countries could reach a consensus on overcoming their economic differences, eliminating tariffs on each other's goods and restoring bilateral trade relations. It is very difficult to have such a dialogue at this time. But we should keep in mind the fact that the United States and China must co-exist in the long run. I believe that all the Chinese and all Americans will be happy to see a cooperative relation. We should think about the ultimate goal of our cooperation and how to achieve it.

**CNS:** At the start of 2022, President Xi Jinping and President Joe Biden had a video conference. How do you see this contact between the U.S. and China at the highest level?

**Craig Allen:** Clear and direct communication between the U.S. and Chinese governments is critical to responsibly maintain the world's most important bilateral relationship. It's great that President Xi Jinping and President Biden have personally taken the lead and set a good example. We hope that officials at all levels in both countries will also simultaneously enhance constructive dialogue to manage competition and cooperate on many other pressing, outstanding issues.

(Interviewed by Chen Mengtong)

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## No Winner Needed in the U.S.-China Relationship

*Kishore Mahbubani*

Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's former permanent representative to the United Nations, is a distinguished fellow of the Institute of Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. He is also the author of the book *Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy*.

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K. Mahbubani (✉)  
Queenstown, Singapore



Kishore Mahbubani

While grounded in Asian traditions and culture, Kishore Mahbubani worked in Washington and New York for more than a decade, and is equally familiar with Western culture and politics. He holds that there can be a win–win outcome in the U.S.-China relationship; their different historical experiences do not preclude mutual understanding. The rise or rejuvenation of China is not a threat to the West; instead, by strengthening the existing global frameworks and multilateral institutions, the two sides can arrive at a common set of values to deal with global challenges.

**CNS:** *Has China Won?* is a very provocative title. Is there a need for a winner in the U.S.-China relationship?

**Kishore Mahbubani:** The goal of the provocative title is to persuade people to read the book. When they read the book, they will find that I do not argue that there should be a winner in the U.S.-China relationship. Instead, I argue that there can be a win–win outcome in the relationship. As a friend of both China and the U.S., I am trying to encourage better mutual understanding between the two countries and also prevent a worst-case scenario in their relations.

**CNS:** When China and the U.S. look at each other from across the ocean, they seem to have different understandings of and disagree with each other. What are the reasons for this? Is there a fundamental lack of empathy between the two sides?

**Kishore Mahbubani:** The lack of mutual understanding between the U.S. and China is understandable. Their different historical experiences over the past 200 years have conditioned their different perspectives.

The U.S. has been exceptionally successful over the past 150 years. By contrast, China experienced a “century of humiliation” from roughly 1842 to 1949, when it was dominated by Western powers. Hence, China has been very focused on achieving its goal of “the great rejuvenation.” With these historical experiences, the U.S. is deeply troubled by the prospect, given that it might become the No.2 economy in the world in the next 10 to 20 years. Hence, many Americans believe the U.S. should try to stop China’s rise. By contrast, China’s main goal is to overcome the “century of humiliation,” improve the living standards of its people, and ensure that it is treated with respect by the rest of the world.

In theory, these different historical experiences shouldn’t have prevented mutual understanding between the U.S. and China. However, in practice, there has been massive misunderstanding, as I documented in my book. One example of major misunderstanding of China in the U.S. is demonstrated in the American belief that the Chinese are unhappy with their current condition.

As American psychologist Jean Fan wrote in 2019, “China is changing in a deep and visceral way, and it is changing fast, in a way that is almost incomprehensible without seeing it in person. In contrast to America’s stagnation, China’s culture, self-concept, and morale are being transformed at a rapid pace – mostly for the better.”

**CNS:** You have said that major geopolitical competition between China and the U.S. is “inevitable and avoidable” in the future. Isn’t that a contradiction?

**Kishore Mahbubani:** The geopolitical competition between China and the U.S. is inevitable because it is driven by deep structural forces. For most of the past 2,000 years, the two largest economies were China and India. Only in the last 200 years did Europe, followed by America, surpass them and come to dominate world history. The return of China and India is simply bringing this aberration to an end, but the United States is refusing to accept this reality.

It is also avoidable because the U.S. and China share an interest in global issues. The recent major global challenges, like COVID-19 and climate change, have shown that humanity has a shared future. The U.S. and China can work together to manage these issues. They also have a shared interest in promoting the well-being of their people. For example, after years of wasting trillions on unnecessary wars in the Middle East, the U.S. has a great need to improve its domestic infrastructure. China has

the financial and institutional capacity to build such infrastructure. Since China has emerged as an infrastructure superpower, it would be in the mutual interest of both to cooperate on infrastructure construction.

**CNS:** President Joe Biden says the U.S. “does not seek a new Cold War” but even the Western media are skeptical about this. How do you evaluate the statement? Will there be a new Cold War between China and the U.S.?

**Kishore Mahbubani:** It was a very positive development for President Biden to say that the U.S. does not seek a new Cold War with China. Nonetheless, many thoughtful observers of the U.S. have pointed out that the Biden administration has not reversed many of the negative policies of the Trump administration. Fareed Zakaria of the *Washington Post* says that “Biden’s foreign policy is a faithful continuation of Donald Trump’s and a repudiation of Barack Obama’s.” Edward Luce of the *Financial Times* has pointed out that “There is little of substance on China to distinguish Biden from Trump.” It would therefore be a positive development for the Biden administration to lift some of the negative measures of the Trump administration.

**CNS:** Some Western politicians and think tanks often make black-or-white judgments based on cultural biases. For example, they see the “rejuvenation” of the Chinese nation as the rise of a new empire, and the Chinese wisdom that “the Pacific Ocean is big enough to accommodate two great powers” as rivalry with the U.S. Is the Chinese civilization a threat to the Western civilization?

**Kishore Mahbubani:** The rise or rejuvenation of the Chinese civilization is not a threat to the Western civilization. China believes in a multi-civilization world, in which the Chinese civilization is one part, the Western civilization another, along with other civilizations. China does not believe in the concept of a “clash of civilizations.” Rather, it believes in a dialogue of civilizations, including learning from and absorbing aspects of the Western civilization.

Many Americans believe that the Chinese civilization, like the Western civilization, is inherently militaristic and will desire to conquer and subjugate other territories as it becomes more powerful. This is another misunderstanding. In my book, I mention in the chapter “Is China Expansionist?” that it is a marvel that in the long history of the Chinese civilization, it did not conquer geographically close territories. This was even when China had a strong and powerful navy.



At the start of the fifteenth century, nearly 100 years before Christopher Columbus tried to find a route to the so-called Spice Islands, China sent out seven naval expeditions under the remarkable leadership of Admiral Zheng He, a legendary Chinese figure. He traveled as far as Africa on ships that were far larger than the Portuguese or Spanish vessels. But remarkably, he did not conquer or occupy any overseas or distant territories. This reflects the great wisdom of ancient Chinese thinkers like Sun Tzu, who said, “To win 100 victories is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”

**CNS:** The COVID-19 pandemic, ecological crises, and the polarization between the rich and the poor are testing the resilience of all civilizations. How can we establish a common set of values to deal with these global challenges?

**Kishore Mahbubani:** In the past, when the 7.8 billion people of the world lived in almost 200 separate countries, it was as though they were living on almost 200 separate boats. Now, the world has shrunk. The 7.8 billion people live in almost 200 separate cabins on the same boat. If one cabin of the boat catches fire, it impacts the entire boat. COVID-19 and climate change have demonstrated this concept well. The pandemic could not be restricted to one country or region. It became a global medical emergency in a matter of months.

Similarly, the solutions to COVID-19 and other pandemics in the future, as well as climate change, also cannot be restricted to individual countries. The solutions to global challenges must be global. To arrive at such solutions, we need to strengthen global multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization. By strengthening the existing global frameworks and multilateral institutions, we can arrive at a common set of values to deal with these global challenges.

(Interviewed by Wang Enbo)

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# China, Infrastructure and U.S. Strategic Error

*David M. Lampton*

American political scientist David M. Lampton is professor emeritus and former Hyman professor and director of the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)-China and China Studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Institute of SAIS. A former president of the National Committee on United States-China Relations, he is the author of many books including, *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds*.

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David M. Lampton

Promoting infrastructure construction across the globe has been a major political and diplomatic concern of many countries in these years. The Belt and Road Initiative proposed by China in 2013 is often called the biggest infrastructure-building project in the world that has boosted regional integration and economic growth of the partner countries. The Build Back Better World (B3W) proposed by the U.S. at the G7 also indicates that these countries are keen to play more significant roles in this area. Can China and the U.S. cooperate on global infrastructure construction? David M. Lampton speaks on this to Wang Huiyao, President of the Center for China and Globalization.

**Wang Huiyao:** What's your general take on the U.S.-China relationship?

**David M. Lampton:** The first thing to say is that in a way, we're in the most unprecedented time in the U.S.-China relations, perhaps since President Richard Nixon went to China in 1972. So to borrow a phrase from Deng Xiaoping, I think both sides are "making their way across the river by feeling the stones." I think we are engaged in a kind of incremental step-by-step attempt to understand how we can manage this relationship in a far different environment, which is different from what we dealt with for the last 40 years in several respects, for China has made enormous strides in its economic power and its capacity to shape the regional economic architecture and infrastructure.

So to summarize, I think it's better to talk than not to talk. I'm glad we're talking. I think that is certainly the first step to make progress.

**Wang Huiyao:** I would interpret the problem between the U.S. and China as mistrust and also misunderstanding to some extent. For example, China has always been a highly centralized country and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) play a unique role in China. And that really helped to have these big infrastructure projects across the country, the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River in Hubei Province, or the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the world's longest sea-crossing bridge and tunnel system. But the unique role of the SOEs in China is not really understood well outside China.

**David M. Lampton:** You're right. China has a different history and a different geography. You have to deal with a much bigger population. But I think that by the same token, Americans should better understand China's particular circumstances, and China too needs to recognize our particular circumstances, that is, small and medium businesses are the backbone of the American economy and even our biggest corporations for the most part have little or no direct ownership by our government. And so in our politics, the private sector or small business look at China and they say, how can we compete with state-financed corporations that have more centralized decision making?

Along with China's applying to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, the new version of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, I hope we can move toward the direction that both China and the U.S. are trying to join that and once again, trying to develop common economic practices that will reduce the tension. So my basic feeling is that in the last few years, since we didn't join Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the new investment bank for funding infrastructure in Asia, or the Trans-Pacific Partnership while China has joined the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, both sides have been growing apart. And it seems to me that China and the U.S. have to get back trying to grow a little more together.

**Wang Huiyao:** What is your book, *River of Iron: Railroads and Chinese Power in the Southeast Asia*, co-authored with Selina Ho and Cheng-Chwee Kuik, about?

**David M. Lampton:** The book is about how China built a high-speed rail industry. In about 2000, China didn't have a high-speed rail industry or a high-speed rail system. So the first part of the book describes how China built the technology and the infrastructure for a high-speed rail system, and it's quite a story. The second part is about how China is

negotiating with seven Southeast Asian countries to build a system that will possibly connect them to the south of China and hook into China's domestic system.

Some people ask: Is this China's strategy to take over Southeast Asia? And I would say no. Each specific project may be better or worse, overall, but the concept is strong that China is going to get rich if its neighbors get rich. If the neighbors are going to get rich, they need to be connected to China, and they need to be connected with each other. I think this is building the infrastructure for economic modernization and integration in Asia, and this isn't a plot by China to take over the world or that region.

**Wang Huiyao:** Building infrastructure to connect is really great and now the U.S. is waking up to that. At the G7 Summit in 2021, the U.S. proposed Build Back Better World. Should that be combined with the Belt and Road Initiative?

**David M. Lampton:** My personal view is that the U.S. and others should realize the world needs infrastructure. In the end, due to the difference in their economic systems, the U.S. will probably not play as big a role as China in building infrastructure all over the world. That would just be my guess.

But I think the U.S. should try. We ought to work with our friends, in that sense, with China too, if there is an opportunity. We're going to do more of this in more places in the world. Because frankly, if the U.S. is going to achieve economies of scale in the same way China benefits from this integration and connectivity, we need to benefit from closer connection to bigger markets. So I think we're going in the same connectivity direction, and globalization is not dead.

It's my impression that the Belt and Road itself is evolving over time as China gets involved in more places around the world and more different kinds of infrastructure. So I think China's learning and becoming a little more cautious. Looking at the discussions in China, I think the Chinese are asking themselves, how much of our national talent and resource and technology should we devote to foreign countries and how much to China?

So what I try to tell Western observers is that China debates about all these issues and it's feeling its way toward sounder policy and

not becoming overly-committed financially. It's always been my understanding that one reason China wanted the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank was to have others beside China finance a lot of this infrastructure. Frankly, I thought that was a pretty good idea. I think the United States made a strategic error under the Obama administration by not joining this.

(Reported by Wang Enbo and Zeng Nai)

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## CHAPTER 41

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# How to Get Back to the Original Vision of Breaking the Ice?

*Kal Raustiala*

Kal Raustiala is the Promise Institute distinguished professor of comparative and international law at the UCLA Law School in Los Angeles, professor at the UCLA International Institute and director of the UCLA Ronald W. Burkle Center for International Relations. He is also a former Vice President of the American Society of International Law.

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Los Angeles, California, USA

© Dolphin Books Co., Ltd. 2023  
L. Chen and K.-H. Pohl (eds.), *East-West Dialogue*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2\\_41](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_41)

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Kal Raustiala

**Richard Nixon visited China as the U.S. President in 1972 and those seven days, from February 21 to 28, came to be known as “the week that changed the world” and also the “ice-breaking trip” in the history of China-U.S. diplomacy. Kal Raustiala shares his views on how China and the U.S. should rethink the intention of that visit and seek out areas where they can combine forces to better manage the existing problems.**

**CNS:** On the 40th anniversary of President Nixon’s visit to China, you said the visit “seized the moment, seized the hour, transformed history.” How do you see the historical significance of the visit at that time?

**Kal Raustiala:** Richard Nixon’s visit to China marked the strategic reengagement of the two great powers, which, with hindsight today, we can see as the two most important states in the international system. What made the summit between President Nixon and Chairman Mao Zedong so significant was that the People’s Republic of China had been shunned by the U.S. largely for ideological reasons, and Nixon was able to frame the reengagement in the U.S. strategic interest. He saw that China’s return to the center of world politics was inevitable, and managing that process made more sense than rejecting it.

**CNS:** Since then, China-U.S. economic and trade relations developed rapidly, so did cultural exchanges. What changes do you see in the bilateral relations in the five decades?

**Kal Raustiala:** The U.S.-China relationship five decades ago was largely about the geopolitical issues of security and shared antipathy toward the Soviet Union. Today, the U.S. and China are in a much more

complex relationship, marked by aspects of competition and rivalry but also cooperation and interdependence. Clearly, the biggest change has been in the economic sphere, and today there are many thousands of Americans living in China and Chinese living in America. Our societies, not merely our governments, have a relationship.

**CNS:** Looking at the history of China-U.S. relations, what can the two countries learn from it? How should they understand this dynamic?

**Kal Raustiala:** A peaceful world order requires a close working relationship between the U.S. and China. Of course, the two nations have many differences, but certain issues—from the global economy to climate change—can be effectively addressed only by joint action. A key part of the history of the two nations is that the U.S. welcomed a rising China into the global order, and did not try to block its rise. Nixon’s landmark visit was the start of this process, and it continued through subsequent administrations, even as the U.S. sometimes feared China’s potential power and influence and vice versa.

**CNS:** In your book *Global Governance in a World of Change* published in 2021, you explored concerns about the lack of integration in global governance. What is the role of China and the U.S. in global governance?

**Kal Raustiala:** The existing global order strongly reflects American preferences from the early postwar era. While China was always a part of the United Nations, for instance, the fundamental design of the UN was American and China tended to be “quiet” on the Security Council. Today, China is rightly far more active and influential in what has long been a Western-dominated global order. China has strongly benefited from this order—which has brought peace and prosperity to much of the world—and the key going forward is for China to have a more active voice and role in that order while keeping that order’s best qualities intact. A more hostile and fearful world is in the interest of no one, especially the strongest powers.

**CNS:** Some scholars say that the key to mutual benefit is whether China and the U.S. can properly manage their important and complex relationship. How can the two countries get out of the current difficulties and rekindle their old friendship?

**Kal Raustiala:** That is a difficult question. The U.S. and China have some major areas of tension, ranging from issues of values and rights to concrete disagreements over, for example, the South China Sea. The important thing is that both sides see lawful action as essential, and ensure

that these areas of tension are actively managed—not through threats but through diplomacy. There is too much to lose for both sides—and for the world—were conflict to arise. Even during the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union found ways to cooperate and ways to ease tensions. China and the U.S. have a very different relationship but it is still important to actively seek out areas where the two nations, working together, can combine forces to better manage existing problems.

(Interviewed by Gao Chuyi)

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## How to Build Momentum in U.S.-China Trade Relations

*Manuel C. Menendez*

American businessman and philanthropist Manuel C. Menendez is founder and CEO of MCM Holdings, a business advisory service organization. He played an active role in China's return to the world market in the late 1970s. In the 1980s, he was CEO of Great Eastern Development, which completed the first U.S.-China equity joint venture in China for a major Fortune 100 company.

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M. C. Menendez (✉)  
Beijing, China



Manuel C. Menendez

**Manuel C. Menendez came to China in 1979 and has witnessed the entire process of the country’s reform and opening up. In 1985, Deng Xiaoping, the architect of the reform, gave him a Chinese name, Meng Deshi. His motto is “world peace through world trade.”**

**He thinks that the United States and China will not be able to decouple. He shares his insights on the real problems in the current U.S.-China economic and trade relations.**

**CNS:** It seems that after talks between the U.S. and Chinese trade teams resumed, their communication has advanced to deeper and more specific areas. How do you see this change?

**Manuel C. Menendez:** First of all, the frequency of the meetings is much higher than in the past. Each meeting has made a little bit of progress. I think positive signs have been built up based on the frequency and frankness of the meetings. What we need is more engagement, more meetings, more discussions. That has to be an urgent priority.

With respect to the U.S.-China trade disputes, I think both sides have legitimate concerns. There’s not going to be one meeting where they are all solved. It’s going to be a step-by-step process to make progress, an incremental approach.

Many countries face many challenges due to the global pandemic. There are pressing issues that take away the immediate focus. It's like with so many fires burning, you have to decide which one to put out first. I think that people's health and safety has to be the top priority of any country. Alongside of that, the U.S.-China trade relationship has to be one of the top priorities.

Overall, I would advocate more frequency in the talks. I'm very positive about the trade relations through the interactions. Talking is always better than silence. There's already a good sign with these more frequent interactions between the U.S. and China, which means that the windows are open again for discussions. I think the U.S. trade representative has talked about recoupling.

**CNS:** What do you think of recoupling between the U.S. and China?

**Manuel C. Menendez:** I don't think we've ever decoupled. Our economies and countries over the past 40 years have become interdependent, interconnected and intertwined since China's reform and opening up.

I don't think it's possible for the two economies to ever decouple. There are going to be areas of high sensitivity when it comes to, for example, cyber security, selective areas in hi-tech. That's why, again, I advocate higher frequency of discussions to work through differences and find common ground.

My only recommendation as a businessman is, you can't address all the issues at the same time. What I suggest is to develop what's called momentum. When you drive your car, the most energy is used when you just start, and as you get rolling you use less and less energy, and there's less friction. What I would like to see happen is the U.S. and China start moving incrementally, make positive progress in areas both sides agree to create momentum. To do so we all need to get back to the talking table because creating positive momentum is important.

And the way to do that is, when you have these big meetings, just pick a few things that both sides in advance could agree to, like climate change. It'll at least develop the momentum coming along. It is not only good for the U.S.-China relations, but also good for the world.

**CNS:** What could add to this momentum?

**Manuel C. Menendez:** When it comes to U.S.-China relations, I put things into two buckets. One is policy-related, and the other bucket is structural issues.

Structural issues are very complicated where you might have to change a rule or law. Dealing with them takes a long time. So if you're going to create momentum, pick some policy issues. The tariffs (imposed by the Trump administration on Chinese goods) are a great policy issue to begin with.

I'm not saying both countries can agree on removing tariffs on the whole list tomorrow, but incrementally, certain categories can get rid of the tariffs immediately, going back to the way they were before. For example, agricultural products, health-related items, environmental technologies equipment, garments and footwear, or things that are not related to sensitive areas.

**CNS:** As the U.S. continues to face record inflation, import of quality but inexpensive products from China can help alleviate the pressures. With that as a basis, can the U.S. and China usher in a smoother trade relationship?

**Manuel C. Menendez:** Let's take one step back before I answer that. I think the thesis about the trade imbalance has been a big political football in the U.S. When I speak to business people and many government officials, I tell them that the trade imbalance is actually not caused by China.

There is a market only when there is a demand. The trade imbalance where there are more goods coming from China to the U.S. is because many U.S. companies order and manufacture products from China as the quality is good, and the price is good. The rule of the world in business is that the winner has the best quality at the best price and with the best delivery. When companies like Walmart, Costco, Nike and Apple are ordering things for the U.S. market, that's where the trade imbalance comes from.

Companies that set up early in China, including Procter & Gamble, Starbucks, McDonald's and General Motors, have grown well. These companies have served the Chinese market well as well as the U.S. market. Some people in the U.S., like former President Donald Trump, say, "China is costing us jobs" but that's not true. We need to get back to the kind of mutually beneficial and cooperative U.S.-China relationship that we had before.

**CNS:** What is the biggest misunderstanding and misjudgment some people in the U.S. have about China? Why has the misunderstanding deepened in recent years?

**Manuel C. Menendez:** Part of this is just the politics in the media. If people have never been to China and do not understand the situation, it may cause misunderstanding.

I've been here since China's opening up in 1979. And my company put together the first U.S.-China joint venture. So I've seen what has happened in China with my own eyes. When you think of what China has been able to do in 40 years, it's unbelievable.

If I were the richest man in the world, I would ask the mayors of every American city, the governors of every state, and even members of the U.S. Congress to come and see China. Not only Beijing and Shanghai, but wherever I am in China, people are very friendly to me. As Confucius said, "When friends come from afar, you should be happy and welcome them."

Confucius also said China was a benevolent society. So China is not interested in conflict, and has never been aggressive. The other concern that people have is that as China rises, it doesn't mean that the rest of the world is diminished. China's rapid growth is driving huge demand and that has significantly helped other countries' economies grow.

China is already playing the role of a stabilizer. For example, during the Asian financial crisis in 1997, many countries devalued their currencies, but the Chinese renminbi kept strong, which helped stabilize Asia.

**CNS:** How has the economic and trade friction between the U.S. and China affected American companies?

**Manuel C. Menendez:** There's no winner in trade wars, only losers.

The trade war started by Trump has not worked at all till now. There was this idea floating around the previous administration and in some political circles that if the U.S. made the tariffs on imports from China so high that the price of Chinese imports would be equal to or close to the price of the U.S. goods, then the factories in China would close and move back to the U.S. But that never happened. What was missing in the thinking is that many of these U.S. companies that set up China operations sell in the huge China market and are making money for the U.S. shareholders. They were not set up just for exports to the U.S. Tariffs should not be used as a means of trying to improve competitiveness and level the playing field for every business.

China did not initiate the trade war. They responded to it with tit for tat. China's way is to respond to external pressures.



When trade becomes difficult, and there are logistical interruptions as well, some U.S. companies need to expand and redesign their supply chains. As far as I know, the vast majority of companies have not, and will not, abandon the Chinese market altogether. If you're a major player in the world market, you're not likely to abandon your business in the world's second largest market, which is China!

**CNS:** How does the U.S. business community want the U.S.-China relations to go?

**Manuel C. Menendez:** The vast majority of U.S. businesses, especially the ones that are involved in China, want the relations to get better, without any doubt.

They also want more dialogue on those areas that are issues on both sides. There are certain areas, certain markets in China that foreign companies, not just U.S. companies, want to enter, but sometimes the government hasn't fully opened them up yet. People may go "Oh, it's protectionism." But it's not true.

I always try to explain to my friends that sometimes you have to look at the timeline of China. In what I have learned, China never opens up its market completely and immediately, because it's a big country, with 1.4 billion people. China will try maybe in one area opening up a certain market and seeing if there are any issues. If there are issues, they try to solve them and then they will open the market up step by step. So I ask my friends to be patient and remain positive.

(Interviewed by Pang Wuji)

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PART V

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## Cultural Collision



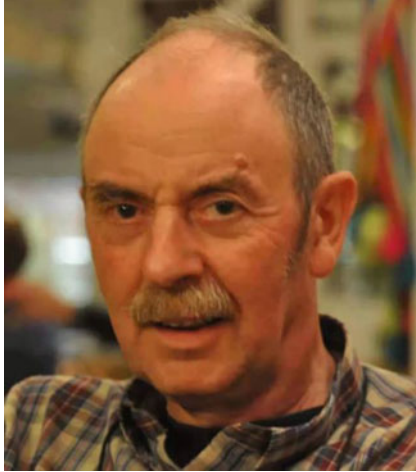
## Portraying the Beauty of Chinese Culture Through Translation

*Karl-Heinz Pohl*

Karl-Heinz Pohl, a renowned German Sinologist, taught at the University of Trier in Germany until his retirement in 2010. He was the dean of the Faculty of Literature and Media at the university and head of its Department of Sinology, as well as a former professor of Chinese literature and philosophy at the University of Tübingen. His research interests include the history of Chinese philosophy, ethics and modern Chinese aesthetics and cross-cultural communication and dialogue between China and the West. He is the author of several monographs such as *Chinese Aesthetics and Literary Theory (in German and Chinese translation)*, *Chinese Thought in a Global Context*, *Intercultural Dialogue with China (in Chinese)*, and *Discovering China: Tradition and Modernity (in German and Chinese translation)*. Prof. Pohl translated *Peach Blossom Spring—The Poetry of Tao Yuanming* and eminent philosopher Li Zehou's *The Path of Beauty into German*.

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K.-H. Pohl (✉)  
Trier, Germany



Karl-Heinz Pohl

Though Sinology in Europe started only 200 years ago, European translations of Chinese literature appeared much earlier in the sixteenth century. Karl-Heinz Pohl feels that despite the role played by Sinology and translations in creating exchanges between China and the West, there is still an “asymmetry” due to the “hegemonic discourse” of the West, which has many misunderstandings and prejudices about China. However, translations can convey the “beauty” of Chinese culture to the West, remove misunderstandings and help both to hold exchanges and learn from each other.

**CNS:** You have been studying Chinese philosophy and modern aesthetics for years, and you have also translated many Chinese classics and published academic monographs. How did you become interested in Chinese culture?

**Karl-Heinz Pohl:** I became interested in Chinese culture through (Chinese author, philosopher and translator and Harvard scholar) Lin Yutang’s inspiring book *The Importance of Living*, which I read in high school. It shows the fascinating differences between Chinese and Western cultures. Later, I read a book on Zen—a classic by British-American philosopher Alan Watts, *The Way of Zen*, which was equally amazing. The book claims that Zen is more of a Chinese philosophy than Japanese, as it is a fusion of Indian Buddhism and Chinese Taoism. I am a Catholic,

and my encounter with Zen was inspiring and broadened my worldview considerably. It also led me to switch from geophysics to Sinology studies at the University of Hamburg in Germany more than five decades ago.

**CNS:** Has studying Chinese culture been a spiritual journey? How has Chinese culture impacted you? How do you introduce it to the West?

**Karl-Heinz Pohl:** First, I studied the rich history of ancient Chinese thought. Although my interest began with Buddhism, I soon became interested in Confucianism and Taoism as well. I learned that these worldviews were not mutually exclusive, but complemented and influenced each other. Today, I find each of these three schools of teachings equally fascinating.

I then studied modern Chinese history, particularly the impact of European colonialism and Japanese militarism on China, historical incidents such as the Opium Wars, the Boxer Uprising and the War of Resistance against Japan, and I began to understand how this history has influenced the mindset of the Chinese today.

When I teach or write about Chinese culture, I first try to explain the characteristics of the Chinese language and then the influence of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism on the everyday life of the Chinese. I also talk about Chinese history that spans several thousand years, unique in the world for its long existence. Finally, I try to explain how to understand Chinese behavior through Chinese culture.

**CNS:** You translated *Peach Blossom Spring—The Poetry of Tao Yuanming* and Li Zehou's *The Path of Beauty: A Study of Chinese Aesthetics* into German. How did you handle the “untranslatability” of translation?

**Karl-Heinz Pohl:** In 1982, I did my doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto in Canada on Zheng Banqiao, 18th-century poet, painter and calligrapher. To do my research, I made my first trip to China in 1981, staying in Nanjing for two months, where I was mentored by a calligrapher. That was a great experience and gave me a better understanding of Zheng Banqiao's background.

On that trip, I developed a keen interest in Chinese poetry. When I returned to Germany from Canada, I decided to translate the entire collection of Tao Yuanming's poems into German. In the process, Chinese aesthetics captivated me more and more. After Li Zehou's *The Path of Beauty* (on the philosophy of Chinese art and literature) was published, I translated it with my students. I invited him to Germany, and he spent six months at the university where I worked. Later

I invited him again and kept in touch with him until he passed away (in November 2021).

Translations are sometimes difficult because of the differences between Chinese and Western thought, but they can be overcome. Translating writings in the classical style is more difficult as the language is extremely rich in meaning and esoteric, and not always easy to understand, even for Chinese scholars. The *Zhou Yi (Book of Changes)*, an ancient Chinese divination text, for example, has been interpreted differently by different Chinese scholars.

Poetry is the most difficult to translate because of its form. As the saying by Robert Frost goes, “poetry is what gets lost in translation.” The form cannot be fully reflected by translation, such as the tone patterns in (Tang Dynasty poet) Du Fu’s poems. Therefore, the translation of a Chinese poem into German can only convey its content, but hardly the beauty of its form.

**CNS:** How similar or different are Chinese and Western aesthetics? What are the characteristics of the communication between modern Chinese and Western aesthetics? Where can they learn from each other?

**Karl-Heinz Pohl:** Western aesthetics is a sub-discipline of philosophy. In the West, it is not considered a significant area anymore. In Chinese history, on the other hand, aesthetics is considered to be a unique “Chinese way” of exploring artistic and literary creativity, and the essence of poetry, calligraphy and painting.

Chinese aesthetics is also closely related to cultural identity. When Western thought was introduced in China about 150 years ago, the Chinese believed that Chinese culture was shaped by aesthetics, while Western culture was shaped by Christianity. Cai Yuanpei, an influential Chinese philosopher and politician, advocated “aesthetic education instead of religion.” Thus, aesthetics is important to the discussion and understanding of a “Chinese identity.” The “aesthetics fever” in China in the 1980s (a cultural trend accompanying the economic reform and opening up of China), which was influenced by Li Zehou’s writings, would never occur in the West. We Westerners need to have a better understanding of the importance of aesthetics to the Chinese identity.

**CNS:** Cross-cultural communication and dialogue between China and the West is also your field of study. What do you consider to be the origins of the Chinese and Western value systems? How can intercultural dialogue be carried out between China and the West?

**Karl-Heinz Pohl:** The Western value system originated in Christianity. Although today the influence of religion has greatly diminished and is not so obvious, it is important to understand this background. This is why I call Western values post-Christian values. The origin of the Chinese value system is Confucianism, which has been the core of traditional Chinese culture and forms the moral foundation of the Chinese society. The Chinese values today still retain the Confucian precepts of “benevolence, righteousness, etiquette, wisdom and trust.”

Cross-cultural dialogue should be conducted with mutual respect and willingness to learn from each other. Both sides should try to understand each other’s point of view and the other’s civilization by thinking the way the other thinks.

**CNS:** How can translation inspire communication between China and the West today?

**Karl-Heinz Pohl:** Cultural development relies heavily on translation, just like the Bible, which was translated from Hebrew into Greek, from Greek into Latin, and from Latin into English... not to mention the translations between English, French, German, Spanish and other languages. In China, translations of Indian Buddhist scriptures once had a great impact on Chinese culture, and translations of Karl Marx’s works also had a profound impact on modern China.

As for translations between Chinese and Western languages, a main problem is the “asymmetry”: The Chinese have translated almost all the Western classics into Chinese, but Westerners know very little about China. Although Sinologists have played a critical role in promoting cultural exchange and mutual understanding between China and the West, it is far from sufficient.

This is because of the position of the West for centuries. Western ideas and perspectives have become the norm, the so-called “hegemonic discourse,” and Western views and ideas have influenced the entire world. China has also learned a lot from the West.

This “asymmetry” can be rectified only when China shows more cultural confidence on the global stage. It will then also make the West want to understand more about China.

(Interviewed by Shi Yuanfeng and Wan Shuyan)



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## Translation and Other Approaches to Promote Cultural Exchange

*Martin Woesler*

German Sinologist Martin Woesler is a member of the Academy of Europe and holds the Jean Monnet Chair awarded by the EU. He is also professor in Sinology at the University Witten/Herdecke in Germany. Earlier, he was the head of the Chinese Department at the International University SDI München, a professor at the University Roma Three in Italy and a former associate professor at the Utah Valley University, the U.S. In 2019, he became a distinguished professor of the Hunan Normal University in China. His main research interests are the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, one of the four great Chinese novels, comparative literature, translation, cross-cultural communication and contemporary Chinese literature. His joint translation of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* with Benjamin Schwartz is the first full translation of the classic in German. He was awarded the Chinese Government Friendship Award in 2020.

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M. Woesler (✉)  
Witten, Germany



Martin Woesler

In 1926, the French literary journal *Europe* published the French version of Lu Xun's novella *The True Story of Ah Q*, translated by Jing Yinyu. It marked the start of the translation of Chinese modern and contemporary literature into Western languages. Martin Woesler has translated several major Chinese authors' work into German. They range from Lu Xun, Zhu Ziqing, Ba Jin, Qian Zhongshu, Wang Meng and Jia Pingwa to Han Han. Here, he talks about the importance of contemporary Chinese literature in understanding China.

**CNS:** In addition to the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, you have translated a large number of modern Chinese writers' works as well. Why modern Chinese literature?

**Martin Woesler:** Chinese literature has always maintained a good level of creativity. The *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *The True Story of Ah Q* were among the best works of global literature at the time.

In the 1920s, China produced many high-quality works that formed part of world literature. One reason for it was the good communication between Chinese writers and the literary communities of other countries. Today, there are many outstanding Chinese literary works that deserve to

be known to the rest of the world but are still unknown because while more works are being introduced in China, original Chinese works are not being translated and introduced to the world.

Another reason contemporary Chinese literature appeals to me is because it has a lot of local characteristics. For example, (1952-born prolific novelist) Jia Pingwa's work contains a lot of the dialect and traditions of his hometown. These wonderful elements, while difficult to translate into other languages, deserve a wider readership. I would love to translate Chinese stories that depict rural life and present them to international readers.

There are many quality contemporary Chinese literary works. Lu Xun improved the use of the modern colloquial language in writing. Although he declined to be nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature, his work has surpassed the criteria for the award. *The True Story of Ah Q*, *Kong Yiji*, and the *Diary of a Madman* are among the most advanced modern literature of his time. I still cherish the ambitious goal of publishing his complete works in foreign languages. I have translated three of his essays, including *The Crisis of the Literary Essay* and *In Memoriam in Order to Forget*.

(Iconic satirical author) Wang Meng has contributed greatly to the experimental development of the stream of consciousness style in literature, and I have been involved in translating some of his work. I also enjoyed translating (1953-born novelist) Han Shaogong's work.

**CNS:** How does translating modern literature deepen one's understanding of China?

**Martin Woessler:** Reading modern Chinese literature is the best way to understand China and its culture. Modern writers can make their readers understand their ideas, engage them in their thoughts and help them understand China from a Chinese perspective.

We can see the integration of ancient literature and foreign literature in modern and contemporary Chinese literature. Lu Xun's *Call to Arms*, for example, provides a realistic portrayal of Chinese society from the 1911 Revolution (the armed rebellion in 1911 that overthrew the last Qing Dynasty ruler and established the Republic of China) to the May Fourth Movement (the intellectual and sociopolitical reform movement growing out of student protests in 1919). It reveals the deep-seated social issues and profoundly analyzes and critiques the old Chinese system

and the traditional stereotyped concepts, giving readers new insights into modern Chinese culture and the characteristics of the times.

The emergence of the “post-80s” literature and other new types of literature also became an important cultural phenomenon in China at the beginning of the twentieth century. After 2000, “post-80s” writing, mainly youth literature, proved quite a success in the literary market. (Author, blogger and rally driver) Han Han is one of the noted authors of this generation.

Literary works in some way reflect the writers’ different understandings of the times. Their work and ideas help us understand China step by step.

**CNS:** Some critics say that many literary works lose their original charm in cross-cultural translation. How did you overcome the translation bottleneck when translating modern Chinese literature?

**Martin Woesler:** I think that is a prejudice. Literary works do not lose their original charm in the process of cross-cultural translation. If there are no translations, then a country’s literature will only have domestic readers. To make it known to the outside world, it has to be translated into English at least.

Each literary work has its own charm in one way or another. If a work of literature is attractive to foreign readers though domestic readers have a different opinion, it is a meaningful task for us to translate it into a foreign language.

However, translating a work of literature must not change its original features, it should neither add nor reduce any meaning. If a local translator cannot fully understand and appreciate it, the best person for the job would be someone who has lived abroad for many years. Generally speaking, most successful translations of literary works are done by native speakers of the language of translation.

**CNS:** For a long time, the West focused more on studying classical Chinese literature than translating and studying modern and contemporary Chinese literature. Some foreign translators have even said that the West is like a desert where modern and contemporary Chinese literature is concerned. What is the reason for this vacuum?

**Martin Woesler:** Outside China, the situation is indeed arid where Chinese contemporary literature is concerned, which is unfair because China does have high-quality modern literature.

In Germany, non-German literature accounts for 12.5 percent of the total literature; of this, Chinese literature accounts for only 0.3 percent.

Before I began my translation career, about a dozen Chinese literary works were being translated into German every year. Since my joining in, that figure has roughly doubled. I gathered a group of young Sinologists in Germany to join a translation workshop and we translate 10 books a year from Chinese into German on average. Most of them are works of literature.

Chinese literature will become popular only when China enters the international arena and its image plays a big role in that. China still has a long way to go to improve its cultural appeal, and I hope my translations will help Chinese culture go out and be known to the outside world.

**CNS:** Has the cold shoulder given to Chinese modern literature in the West changed in recent years? What types of writings are likely to appeal to European readers?

**Martin Woesler:** The world of Chinese literature itself is capable of producing many high-quality books. Since the 1930s, China has seen a lot of high-quality literature. Some contemporary writers such as (Nobel laureate) Mo Yan, (popular science fiction author) Liu Cixin, Yan Lianke, Su Tong and Yu Hua are already known to Western readers. But many writers are still unknown in the West.

On the whole, for the Western readers, Chinese literature has not yet formed a stable image with its own characteristics. Chinese writers can read more foreign literature to address their shortcomings and learn from the work of other countries. For example, in the 1920s, Lu Xun was involved in cultural exchanges and translations. Through frequent cultural exchanges, his novella *The True Story of Ah Q* was translated into French and supported by French writer Romain Rolland.

Among the literary genres, science fiction, children's literature and Internet literature are popular among Western readers, including European readers. A study by iResearch, a consumer research service provider specializing in online audience and consumer insights in China, said Chinese Internet literature had over 80 million overseas readers in 2020, indicating the genre has great appeal for Western readers.

**CNS:** Your translations are renowned for their remarkable language and skill. How can translations of modern Chinese literature contribute to the cultural exchange between China and the West?

**Martin Woesler:** To improve cultural exchange and mutual understanding, it is also necessary to bring people together. When people of one country really get to know the people of another country, they

often change their attitude toward that country. Therefore, we can, for example, strengthen partnerships between schools in China and abroad, and partnerships between cities. Also, other cultural approaches can be taken to attract foreign readers. The films made by the fifth-generation Chinese directors have greatly promoted Chinese literature in the West. *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, and *Life* are all films adapted from eponymous books. Films like Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* and *Eat Drink Man Woman* introduced the Chinese food culture, while *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* introduced the Chinese martial arts.

The best way to understand a people, a country and a culture is to read modern contemporary literature. Authors can transport readers to their inner world and engage them in their thought process so that the readers see China through the eyes of the Chinese and prejudices are eliminated. For example, when interpreting the *Analects of Confucius*, Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr. analyzed it from a comparative philosophical angle, which successfully conveyed ancient Chinese philosophical ideas to the English-speaking world.

**CNS:** How is the exchange between Eastern and Western literature progressing today? Do they influence each other?

**Martin Woesler:** The major drivers of cultural exchanges between China and the West since the twentieth century were the Western missionaries who came to China, international students and overseas Chinese immigrants and translators. The missionaries introduced classical Chinese literature to the West. (Scottish linguist) James Legge translated and published *The Chinese Classics*, and introduced Eastern culture, philosophies and customs to Western readers. Zhu Shenghao was one of the earliest Chinese translators of Shakespeare, and the quality and style of his translations is recognized by Shakespearean researchers at home and abroad. Guo Moruo was one of the earliest translators of Goethe.

Contemporary and modern East–West literary exchanges have not only promoted the development of Chinese literature, but also enriched world literature. The rich variety of Western literature offers more options to Chinese readers while Chinese literature has given a different perspective and experience to the West. Mo Yan was a voracious reader of foreign classics and his books portray Chinese rural culture, presenting an authentic image of China to Western readers.

Literary exchanges are increasing today. More and more Chinese literature is being translated into foreign languages and vice versa. However, the global influence of Chinese literature will increase only when the market demands more Chinese books.

(Interviewed by Wan Shuyan)

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## Why the Dutch Translation of the Dream of the Red Chamber Took 13 Years

*Anne Sytske Keijser*

Anne Sytske Keijser is a Dutch translator known in China by her Chinese name Geshu Xisi. She is a lecturer in modern and traditional Chinese and Chinese literature at the School of Chinese Studies at Leiden University, the Netherlands, which is also her alma mater. In addition, she studied at Xiamen University in southeastern China. She has translated Chinese classical literature as well as authors such as essayist Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun's younger brother, Chinese-American novelist and poet Hualing Nieh Engle and novelist Su Tong, author of the acclaimed novella *Raise the Red Lantern* that was made into an iconic film.

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A. S. Keijser (✉)  
Leiden, Netherlands



Anne Sytske Keijser

The *Dream of the Red Chamber*, an 18th-century epic about the fall of a noble family that is considered one of the “four great classical novels” of Chinese literature, became available to Dutch readers only three centuries later, when its first full translation was published in November 2021.

It took the trio of Silvia Marijnissen, Mark Leenhouts and Anne Sytske Keijser 13 years to translate the 120 chapters. Their final version runs into four volumes totaling 2,160 pages.

The Dutch version caught the eye of Dutch scholars and media and was reviewed by several publications. Keijser talks about the epic labor the translation required and its significance in introducing Dutch readers to Chinese culture, especially the young generations.

**CNS:** People are curious why it took 13 years to complete the translation. What was the most challenging part during the work? And what was the most interesting?

**Anne Sytske Keijser:** Actually, we didn't work on the translation full-time for 13 years as we all have our own jobs. I teach at Leiden University and Silvia Marijnissen and Mark Leenhouts were translating other things besides the *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Still, it took so long because first of all, we had to find a way to translate its tone appropriately into Dutch. The *Dream of the Red Chamber* contains a lot of very interesting and engaging dialogue with very subtle details, from which you can understand the characters' personalities. So sometimes even after we had translated the lines faithfully, it would feel like something was missing. They were not vivid enough or lifelike enough because the tone had not been conveyed accurately.

For example, take the Chinese word *nin* (“您,” “you” in English, used to address someone of an elevated status). In Dutch, we have a similar word but it conveys only respect, not the difference in status. In the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, the tone of *nin* changes a lot. You would think that Xiren (the maid of Jia Baoyu, the protagonist of the novel) would address Baoyu as *nin* but due to her close relationship with him, she never calls him that. On the other hand, she uses *nin* to address Wang Xifeng (the wife of Baoyu's cousin). Those details distinguish the relationships between the characters and we have to pay attention to them to convey the nuances.

Translating the *Dream of the Red Chamber* also required substantial understanding of the cultural background. It exposed us to various aspects of traditional Chinese culture, which was particularly rewarding. For example, where the book mentions Chinese medicine, we had to read up Chinese medicine to find out what the herbs it mentioned were and why Baoyu said certain medicines should not be taken by girls but boys. When we translated the parts related to the Grand View Garden (the sprawling garden in the novel that provides the setting for much of the plot) we learned a lot of interesting things about Chinese architecture. Subsequently, when we visited a Chinese garden near Groningen (a city in northern Netherlands) with our new-found knowledge, we found the garden design fascinating.

In addition, the *Dream of the Red Chamber* includes certain things that have no equivalent in Dutch, so we had to invent phrases when we translated them. For example, there is no Dutch word for *kang* (“炕,” a raised platform made of brick, mud or stone with a stove-like heating system inside which served as a traditional bed), so there was no way to translate it. We felt we should keep the original word. So we made an

annotation the first time it appears in the book, and subsequently, used *kang* in the rest of the text.

For the characters of the novel, the names of the aristocrats have been transliterated into Dutch, while the names of the servants have been translated according to their meaning. Xiren was one of the most difficult names to translate. It took us three years to work that out as it had to be a beautiful Dutch name. We would translate it and one of us would think it was okay but the others would not and then we would try again. Only when all three of us agreed finally, we decided on the name.

**CNS:** After the full translation was published, a review called the *Dream of the Red Chamber* “a literary masterpiece of both beauty and depth.” In China, we have something called “Redology,” that is, academic study, research and comment on the *Dream of the Red Chamber*. However, you and your co-translators have repeatedly said that the target reader for the Dutch edition is the general public. How did you balance depth with making the book comprehensible to the general reader?

**Anne Sytske Keijser:** That’s a good question. We gave this issue a lot of thought before we finally decided to make a compromise. For example, there are many names in the book, so we added a list of the characters and their relationships at the end of each volume, so that the readers can turn to it when reading the book to understand who’s who.

As this edition is for the general reader, we decided not to add too many annotations, although the translation would lose some meaning. In the case of names which have many meanings, we added footnotes explaining them. Interestingly, when you read the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, you are so immersed in its world that you would be less concerned with the meaning of the names, jumping straight into the next chapter to find out what happens next.

The poetry in the book also has a wealth of meaning and literary allusions. If there’s one line by Li Bai or Du Fu (two great poets in ancient China), we can add a footnote. But if it’s a poem of 10 or 12 lines, we can’t add five annotations for just one line as it would affect the flow of the narrative.

Dutch readers have a different background from Chinese readers. The *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a Chinese classic, many Chinese have known it since they were children and have watched the TV series adapted from it. However, there is no such background for the Dutch readers. So the

first step is to turn the story into Dutch and make it readable; then organize events, such as lectures, to explore the depth of this masterpiece.

**CNS:** It's been some time now since the Dutch edition came out. What do the readers say?

**Anne Sytske Keijser:** Honestly, I am surprised. The reviews have been better than expected. The readers have liked it very much. The first print run sold out, and the publisher is ordering a reprint.

For Dutch readers, reading the *Dream of the Red Chamber* is like entering an entirely new world. As it is set in a very traditional feudal society in 18th-century China, they may find everything strange at the beginning and not quite understand why the characters behave the way they do, but usually, after the first 100 or 150 pages, they will be completely absorbed in the world that this story creates and become so fascinated by the characters that they won't be able to stop reading till they come to the end.

Some readers left messages on my Twitter account, telling me that they had just finished reading the book and were now officially "saying goodbye" to it. The director of the public library in North Brabant (a southern province in the Netherlands) has a special fondness for the book and plans to organize a series of events to give readers an insight into its background. Some readers who had read the Dutch translation of *Zhuangzi* (a Chinese philosophical classic) before reading the *Dream of the Red Chamber* associated it with some of the details in *Zhuangzi*. This is rather interesting. They read *Zhuangzi* first and then the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, so it appears that they know the traditional Chinese culture.

**CNS:** As a literary masterpiece, the *Dream of the Red Chamber* is considered a window to Chinese culture. How can the Dutch translation help to acquaint the Dutch with Chinese culture, especially the young people?

**Anne Sytske Keijser:** It will help in many ways. Most Dutch don't know much about traditional Chinese culture, but the *Dream of the Red Chamber* will resonate with them. For example, the girl who lives in the Grand View Garden knows that her good life will end soon because she will get married. She doesn't know what will happen after that, she might be miserable. This feeling of being confused and anxious about the unpredictable future is something that young people may particularly empathize with.

Another example is the struggles of Baoyu, whose family had great expectations of him. I remember when I first read the *Dream of the Red Chamber* in my early 20 s, I felt particularly empathetic toward him when I thought of the pressures of life and the feeling of not being able to handle the future. Then, of course, there are the romantic episodes and you wish that the young pair could be together. But for various reasons, they fail to become a couple, and readers realize the complexity of the storyline.

After starting to translate the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, I offered a course on its social background at the School of Chinese Studies. Some students were interested in the relationship between the *Dream of the Red Chamber* and Buddhism and Taoism, some analyzed Wang Xifeng's position in the Rongguo Mansion (where Baoyu lived) and some studied the status of women in the book. Some who were double-majoring in law discussed the laws of the society that the story was set in.

Also, the daily life in the *Dream of the Red Chamber* is depicted in a very realistic way and Dutch readers can learn about the life of the Chinese aristocracy back then through the descriptions in the book. After reading the novel, one reader thought it was "unbelievable" that some characters in the book felt lonely since they were always surrounded by a lot of servants every day. This is a perspective that had never occurred to me.

**CNS:** From an academic perspective, what role does your translation play in the Dutch translation circles and in Sinology?

**Anne Sytske Keijser:** I think a major contribution of this translation is that it justifies the translatability of masterpieces like the *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Some Dutch translators think that "certain books just cannot be translated" and there were voices that the *Dream of the Red Chamber* was untranslatable.

The three of us discussed whether the translation should be done by only one person, and we agreed that one person might collapse since it was so complex; two or three people working together would be fine, while four would be too many. The three of us, we all have our own strengths: Marijnissen is good at translating poetry, Leenhouts has translated challenging works of literature such as *Fortress Besieged* (a 20th-century Chinese satirical novel), and my specialty is traditional Chinese culture and Chinese history studies and I also know about classical Chinese writing. So the three of us started to work together. Now that

the full translation of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* is done, there are many other great works of Chinese and world literature to be translated, so we will keep working hard.

From a literary point of view, the full Dutch translation can also play a role in promoting the diversity of world literature. After reading the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Dutch readers may be interested in other Chinese literary works and want to read them. There is also the TV series and if it is available in the Netherlands, I believe many people will watch it and then read the book.

Overall, I think it is very worthwhile to learn about another culture and another world through literature. In my lectures, I often say that many students may not like Chinese literature, just like many Dutch students are not fond of Dutch literature either. I hope that my course can in some way invoke their curiosity about Chinese literature or even inspire them to work as translators or in the diplomatic service or in cultural institutions in the future, doing something to promote cultural exchange and communication between the Chinese and Western cultures.

(Interviewed by De Yongjian)

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## The Role of Translation in Promoting Sino-Japanese Exchange

*Matsuoka Eiji*

Matsuoka Eiji is an honorary professor at the Tokyo Gakugei University in Japan and a visiting professor at several universities in China. He is also President of the Japanese-Chinese Translation and Cultural Education Association, director general of the Japanese-Sino Youth International Exchanges Association and a consultant at the Shanghai Jiao Tong University. He is the chief editor of several Chinese-Japanese dictionaries and the author of *On the Streets of Beijing, Japanese Kanji vs. Chinese Characters* and other books on Chinese characters. His translations include sociolinguist Chen Yuan's *Language and Social Life*, Wang Yao's *Studies of Chinese Ancient Literature History* and the *Grand Dictionary of Chinese Medicine-Medical History Literature*. In 2015, he translated the complete *Shi Jing*, the oldest collection of Chinese poetry, and in 2017 the *Anthology of Song Ci* as part of the Library of Chinese Classics project.

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M. Eiji (✉)  
Koganei, Japan





Matsuoka Eiji

Sino-Japanese cultural exchanges have a long history, spanning a wide range of areas. Throughout history, Japan sent envoys to China to learn about Chinese culture. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, when Japan sent assistance materials to China, in a moving gesture, the packages were printed with ancient Chinese verses expressing solidarity and the close bond between the two nations.

Matsuoka Eiji talks about the role of translation in intercultural communication. Japanese and Chinese literature have always influenced each other, with excellent literary and academic translations making important contributions to the Sino-Japanese cultural exchange.

**CNS:** You translated *Shi Jing* and *Anthology of Song Ci* into Japanese and you also participated in the Library of Chinese Classics project, which introduces readers to many Chinese classics, providing a translation along with the original Chinese text. In the past, other Japanese scholars attempted to translate *Shi Jing* and some of them followed *kun'yomi* (the Japanese pronunciation) while others used *on'yomi* (Chinese-based pronunciation). Why did you choose to translate *Shi Jing* in modern Japanese?

**Matsuoka Eiji:** When I was translating *Shi Jing*, the readers were my first consideration, particularly those in the future. When our children and grandchildren read *Shi Jing*, what kind of translation will they read? For example, *Guofeng* (literally meaning Airs of the States, this is the first part of *Shi Jing* comprising 160 “airs” from different states) consists of folk songs collected from all parts of China at the time. One of them, *Zhengfeng-Qinwei*, is about a young man and woman expressing intense romantic emotions. It is difficult to convey the emotion accurately if it is translated rigidly based on *on’yomi*. Therefore, I chose to translate it in modern Japanese. It is also important to consider the importance of style while translating. The poems in the *Ya* (Court Hymns) and *Song* (Eulogies) sections of *Shi Jing* are solemn ritual songs that were sung in the court, different from the folk songs in *Guofeng*. When translating *Guofeng*, I used softer and emotional Japanese phrases and more *hiragana* (Japanese phonetic lettering system.) When translating *Ya* and *Song*, on the other hand, I used more Chinese characters and Chinese words to convey a sense of solemnity.

**CNS:** Both *Shi Jing* and *Song Ci* are poetry, and rhyme is a key component of that. How similar or different are the rhyme schemes and meters in Chinese and Japanese poetry? How did you handle the differences?

**Matsuoka Eiji:** Japanese verses are mainly written in the “five/seven syllable” format, that is, a line is composed of five characters followed by another with seven characters. Two Chinese verse forms, *jueju* and *liushi*, are also composed of five-character lines and seven-character lines respectively. So I think the poetic meters in the two countries are similar. However, Japanese has fewer vowels and consonants, so its tone tends to be monotonous. In addition, Japanese tones are different from Chinese tones. As Japanese is a monosyllabic language, the rhythm of Japanese poetry usually lacks variety.

If I translate Chinese poetry into classical Japanese, the rhythm problem may be easier to deal with, but the meaning would be hard to comprehend. Translation into modern Japanese, on the other hand, is easy to understand, but it cannot handle rhythm properly. However, I still want to maintain a sense of rhythm in my modern Japanese translation. When working on the translation, I invited several young teachers and students to read my translated poems and we had many discussions about their rhythm. My translation of the *Anthology of Song Ci* also employs the

melody of Japanese ballad songs from the 1960s to the 1990s, which may strike a chord in older readers.

**CNS:** Chinese and Japanese cultures are similar in some ways but different in others. You must have encountered some Chinese concepts that have no equivalent in Japanese. How did you address them?

**Matsuoka Eiji:** It's difficult to explain it simply. Even in China, there are many concepts that have changed over time. *Shi Jing* has a detailed classification of different types of horses according to their color, mane, etc. Unfortunately, I could not present those types completely. When translating *Anthology of Song Ci*, I basically focused on how to accurately convey to Japanese readers the emotions in the original text, which may be demonstrated through an object or a scenery. For example, the concept of *hanchan* (cicadas chirping in the cold) in (Song Dynasty poet) Liu Yong's *Yu Lin Ling (Bells in the Rain)*. It would be difficult to convey the atmosphere of the cicadas' song in a literal translation. So I used an onomatopoeic Japanese word with the Japanese word for cicadas to make it easier for Japanese readers to sense the loneliness in late summer. There is a line—"On miles and miles of misty waves where sail the ships," where I tried to combine the scenery with the author's emotions—"the tears induced by parting"—so that the reader would understand that when these two elements overlapped, the author could only see "misty waves" (because of his tears).

**CNS:** We know that Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi is very popular in Japan, and the Japanese classic *The Tale of Genji* was inspired by his work. How did Bai Juyi become so popular? How do different cultures' mutual influence impact their literary creations?

**Matsuoka Eiji:** Japan's environment and climate are similar to southern China's. Japanese botanist Sasuke Nakao describes this similarity in customs, cultures and the ways of thinking as "laurel forest culture" (since the cultures in the regions where the evergreen laurel forests grow are generally similar). Perhaps it is because of the similarity of the climate and terrain that the readers can more easily empathize with the poets' thoughts. Indeed, poets like Tao Yuanming, Li Bai and Su Shi, who grew up or spent their childhood in southern China, have always been popular with Japanese readers.

It is true that the literature of Japan and China has influenced each other. For over a thousand years, Japan has been studying Chinese culture. The words of the first part of *Nihon Shoki*, the oldest extant

book of classical Japanese history, were taken almost verbatim from the *Huainanzi*, an ancient Han Dynasty text. The earliest collection of poetry in Japan, *Man'yōshū*, was also influenced by China's *Shi Jing*. During the late Qing Dynasty, the number of Chinese studying in Japan increased, and in return a large number of Japanese literary works were introduced in China at that time. Lu Xun, Yu Dafu, Guo Moruo and other well-known figures were also inspired by modern Japanese literature and created many literary works with novel ideas and styles.

**CNS:** What role can literature play in promoting exchanges between the two countries?

**Matsuoka Eiji:** Many Japanese aphorisms and proverbs originated from Chinese classics. Works by Lu Xun, such as *Hometown* and *Mr. Fujino*, are often included in junior and senior high school textbooks in Japan. These were translated into Japanese and read by many Japanese, forming a foundation for Japanese readers to know more about China and grow fond of China. It demonstrates the importance of translation, and the important role excellent literary and academic translations play in promoting Sino-Japanese exchanges. The Japanese-Chinese Translation and Cultural Education Association aims to do the same—promote exchanges between Japan and China by cultivating excellent translators.

(Interviewed by Su Jingxin)

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## Lu Xun's Korean Connection

*Park Jae Woo*

Park Jae Woo is the first Korean chair professor of literature in China's Chang Jiang Scholars Program. He is also a researcher at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences of Shaanxi Normal University in China. Besides, he is President of the International Society of Lu Xun Studies and Korean editor-in-chief of the Contemporary Korea journal of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. His books include *A Comparative Study of the Records of the Grand Historian and the Book of Han*, *Essays on the Study of Lu Xun in Korea*, *A General Examination of Korean-themed Novels in 20th-Century* and *A Study on Contemporary Chinese Literature*.

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P. Jae Woo (✉)  
Xi'an, China



Park Jae Woo

South Korea's first introduction to Lu Xun came in the 1920s and over the past century; despite various social changes, Lu Xun studies have remained uninterrupted, becoming deeply associated with the country's own historical and political developments. Some scholars say South Korea is one of the countries where Lu Xun has been read the most and most profoundly. Why does the man regarded as the founder of modern Chinese literature have such deep influence in South Korea? What makes his work resonate with Koreans?

**Park Jae Woo** traces the history and significance of Lu Xun Studies in South Korea and talks about how to boost cultural exchanges between his country and China.

**CNS:** What inspired you to study Lu Xun? What is your favorite book by him?

**Park Jae Woo:** In the early 1970s, I studied at the Department of Chinese Language and Literature of Seoul National University. At that time, South Korea was under a military dictatorship that had replaced the constitution with a new one, the Yushin or Restoration Constitution, to assume absolute power, and the result was social and economic monopoly and corruption. It was at this time that I became acquainted with Lu Xun's writing. I was asked to write an article on his literary thought for my school newspaper and while writing it, Lu Xun's image as a "spiritual warrior" touched me and resonated with me. It became a turning point in my life.

Lu Xun was also the subject of my undergraduate thesis. Later, while studying in Taiwan, I explored (ancient Chinese historian) Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*, a literary classic that Lu Xun admired. After I got my PhD, I continued research on Lu Xun literature, contemporary Chinese literature, and comparative Korean and Chinese literature. In 2011, I co-founded the International Society of Lu Xun Studies in Shaoxing, Lu Xun's hometown, with some of my international colleagues and friends who had also studied Lu Xun. I started studying classical Chinese literature because of Lu Xun, and I learned to read classical Chinese. Now, I have returned once again to studying Lu Xun's work. I feel as if I can have a heart-to-heart communication with Lu Xun through his writing and I am very happy about that.

Among Lu Xun's work, the book that resonates most with me is *Hometown*, an autobiographical novel that talks about rural life. The countryside in Lu Xun's writing is very similar to my hometown, Geumsan. Just like Xunge, the protagonist of the novel, I grew up in the countryside, and then went to school in a big city. I also had childhood playmates like Xun's 12-year-old friend Runtu, and some of them still live in the countryside. The scene in *Hometown* where Xunge catches birds in the snow is my own childhood experience. There is a part describing his mother's state of mind when she sells her big house in order to move to Beijing. It is a very familiar feeling to me. I saw the same expression on my mother's face. I concur with his observations on the problems in rural societies and the negative effects of feudal customs.

**CNS:** What kind of influence does Lu Xun have in South Korea? How do Korean readers know about him?

**Park Jae Woo:** It's been more than a century since Lu Xun first came to be known in Korea in early 1921. Since then, he's been popularized in six phases.

The first phase was from 1921 to 1945, when both Korea and China were invaded and occupied by imperial Japan. A few people translated some of Lu Xun's works but only a handful of intellectuals who had studied in Beijing or Shanghai knew of him. One of them was Yi Yuksa, the Korean poet and a dedicated independence activist. When Lu Xun died in 1936, Yi Yuksa wrote a condolence letter, expressing solidarity and support for Lu Xun's way of thinking.

The second phase was from 1945 to 1950, when Lu Xun's writing first appeared on the Korean Peninsula. It was the time when South Korea



went through U.S. military administration and then the administration of Syngman Rhee, South Korea's first president, looked for a new path of development and international progressive ideas were introduced into the country. A selection of Lu Xun's short stories was published in Korean for the first time, and the Seoul National University held a speech event on the 11th anniversary of Lu Xun's death. It was a rare commemoration event outside China. The drama society of Korea University staged a play adapted from Lu Xun's novella *The True Story of Ah Q*, which was another rare performance outside China.

The third phase was from the Korean War (between North and South Korea, which started in 1950 and froze three years later when an armistice was signed) to 1979. More of Lu Xun's short stories from two anthologies, *Call to Arms* and *Wandering*, were translated and published in South Korea in 1963. From 1974, there were more translations, and studies on Lu Xun began to appear in the South Korean academia.

The fourth stage was the 1980s. It was when reform and opening up kicked off in China and South Korea too began to undergo changes, witnessing remarkable economic growth. Around 1987, more essays by Lu Xun were translated. Lu Xun had a significant influence on South Korea's democratization movement. Lee Young-hee, a leading intellectual and social activist of the time, was instrumental in introducing Lu Xun to South Korean intellectuals and students, and Lu Xun's influence continued to grow. Lee would often quote Lu Xun to highlight and criticize South Korea's political and social problems and became known as the "Korean Lu Xun."

The fifth phase occurred in the 1990s when there was a growing number of doctoral dissertations on Lu Xun's work.

Thus, Lu Xun had a continuous yet different influence throughout different historical stages in South Korea, bringing hope to the people. The intellectuals empathized with Lu Xun's writing, while the young people were encouraged and inspired. Eventually, these young people grew up to become leaders of the Korean democratization movement.

The twenty-first century is the sixth phase. In this period, we are sitting quietly at our desks and doing research on Lu Xun, compared to the enthusiasm for him in the past. The most important achievement in the past 20 years has been the publication of *The Complete Works of Lu Xun* in Korean in 20 volumes. It is the second overseas edition. A 10-volume Korean edition of *A Selection of Chinese Studies on Lu Xun* has become a major reference for Korean scholars.

**CNS:** How do young Koreans learn about Lu Xun? And in today's modern era, what can we learn from Lu Xun's thoughts?

**Park Jae Woo:** In South Korea, the college entrance exam has a segment for which students have to know about the classics in world literature. As Lu Xun is one of the most influential figures of modern Chinese literature, his works such as *The True Story of Ah Q* and *Hometown* were once included in South Korean textbooks and are likely to feature in the exam. So today's Korean students who go to high school have heard of Lu Xun. They also know Ah Q and often use the expression "spiritual victories" from the novella. The media often uses this Lu Xun quote in *Hometown*: "There was never a road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence."

The study of Lu Xun in South Korea today is different from what it was during the Japanese occupation and the military administration. But despite a milder voice today, we can still learn from Lu Xun's critical spirit. His critique holds up a mirror not only to one's own self and others, but also to the society and the nation.

Some Korean scholars do not think of Lu Xun as a foreign writer. They feel he is close to our lives. Certain scenes from Lu Xun's works are reflections of our own life. We also reinterpret his writing to help us find solutions to the problems we face. In other words, we reinterpret his work to help us think about how to resolve the real social and mental issues in today's South Korea.

For example, we reinterpret Ah Q and his "spiritual victory" from the Korean perspective. Although Ah Q is a typical Chinese peasant living during the 1911 Revolution, his "law of spiritual victory" embodies a sense of the universality of human beings. South Korea too has its Ah Qs and we have discussions on how to transform from being Ah Q to becoming the master of our own destiny. However, in today's complex society, there are two opposing interpretations of "spiritual victory." Some people think it is self-hypnosis or self-anesthesia; some view it as a mental health tactic for self-protection for the weaker side in a relationship.

**CNS:** China and South Korea celebrated the 30th anniversary of their diplomatic ties in 2022. How do you see the role of cultural exchanges in enhancing the bilateral relationship? What efforts can be made to promote cultural exchanges?

**Park Jae Woo:** Korea and China had exchanges long before the founding of the two republics. Back then, we were looking forward to the

establishment of diplomatic relations and subsequent formal exchanges. Over the past 30 years, the cultural exchange between South Korea and China has developed very rapidly and extensively, with people-to-people exchanges as well. So I think there is no big psychological barrier between the people of the two countries. Today, young Korean and Chinese netizens may have arguments on some topics, but these minor debates should not become mainstream. We should have a positive attitude and seek common ground while reserving differences. We should continue to carry out humanistic exchanges and promote friendly exchanges at the political level through people-to-people interactions.

On a personal level, I have been working on an Asian classics translation program since 2021, a project proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Conference on Asian Civilization Dialogue in Beijing in 2019. I am the Korean chair of the Korean-Chinese Expert Committee, and we are working with Chinese institutions to promote mutual translation of cultural and literature classics. We have already decided roughly on five books from each country to be translated. These are books on subjects like culture, literature and aesthetics. We hope to promote cultural links between South Korea and China in this way.

(Interviewed by Liu Xu)

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## The Universality of Humor

*Mark Rowswell*

Canadian language educator, cultural envoy and comedian Mark Rowswell is known to his Chinese audience as Dashan, his stage name as a traditional Chinese crosstalk artist, a genre called *xiangsheng*. He studied the art from *xiangsheng* maestro Jiang Kun and became a bilingual performer, appearing on stage as well as TV shows.

Over the years, Rowswell has become a leading figure in the cultural exchange between China and the West. He was the team attaché for the Canadian Olympic Committee at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, a member of the Chinese media delegation at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver and Canada's Commissioner General for Expo 2010 in Shanghai.

In 2006, he was awarded the Order of Canada, the highest distinction in the Canadian honors system, and in 2012, was named "Canada's Goodwill Ambassador to China." In 2018, he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Alberta.

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M. Rowswell (✉)  
Edmonton, AB, Canada



Mark Rowswell

In 1989, when China Central Television (CCTV), China's national broadcaster, aired its popular annual gala to celebrate the Chinese New Year, a blond Canadian student dressed in a Chinese military coat appeared in a skit, speaking Chinese with a foreign accent. It was Mark Rowswell and the appearance was the start of a special relationship with China.

He was the first foreign *xiangsheng* performer to formally study the art from a Chinese maestro, and his solo show "Dashan Live" was loved by many Chinese viewers.

As an artist who has "walked back and forth between the Chinese and Western cultures for many years," Rowswell shares his thoughts on the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western comedy and the universality of humor in promoting cultural exchange between the East and the West.

**CNS:** How did you wade into Chinese comedy? What made you adhere to the art for decades?

**Mark Rowswell:** In 1988, I went to China to study at Peking University. I had already studied Chinese at the University of Toronto for four years, so my Chinese language skills were a little bit better than other international students', and my teachers suggested that I participate in CCTV's new-year gala. I took part in a skit along with two popular comic pairs, Jiang Kun and Tang Jiezhong, and Hou Yaowen and Shi Fukuan, and that was my first introduction to *xiangsheng*. It was also my performance for a large viewership and the skit got rather good reviews. My stage name Dashan came from that performance.

When I was studying Chinese in Canada, textbooks were my only medium, so I was captivated by the vivid and expressive *xiangsheng*. Then an unexpected opportunity came my way. I was delighted to have a chance to formally learn *xiangsheng*. So I became a student of Jiang Kun and paired up with Chinese artist Ding Guangquan.

I continued to learn and perform until the late 1990s. At the beginning, for publicity our show relied on the novelty of a foreigner speaking Chinese dialects and tongue twisters, and singing the Peking Opera. But these were all very superficial things that anyone could do after some memorizing and practice. When Dashan became a public figure in China, I felt I needed to improve the content of my show.

After several years, I returned to comedy with “Dashan Live.” I began to explore a new type of monologue, breaking away from the old “teacher vs. student” mode. Dashan Live was a cross between stand-up comedy and monologue, with elements of both classic comic genres. To enrich my *xiangsheng*, I tried to incorporate some elements from my own cultural background.

**CNS:** What do you think is the charm of *xiangsheng*? How does it differ from the traditional stand-up comedy of the West?

**Mark Rowswell:** In my eyes, the greatest appeal of *xiangsheng* is that it is emotional. The pursuit of emotional communication is a very lofty state. Don’t underestimate the element that makes people laugh during a performance. The laughter means that the actor has resonated with the audience.

I was particularly inspired by one act of his. In one of his programs, taking a dig at the free market, Jiang Kun said, “Eggs are precious, but duck eggs even more so. However, for century eggs (a kind of preserved egg dish), you have to add 50 cents more.” When the audience heard this, they burst out laughing.

Why was it funny though it was true? Then? Because it mimicked a famous poem by Hungarian poet Sándor Petőfi (that was popularized in China by Lu Xun and also taught in middle schools). A line from the poem says, “Life is precious but love is even more so. However, for freedom, I can sacrifice both.” It was a cross-cultural comic creation, full of wisdom.

Chinese comedy is a highly individualized form of artistic performance that is unique and needs to be followed and promoted by generations of successors; Western stand-up comedy is a common form of Western oral

comic performance, loosely styled, in which the actors are more casual and impromptu.

Compared to Western comedy, Chinese comedy has two additional dimensions. First, you need certain techniques or skills, such as *guankou* (the skill of reciting a speech in one breath). In some traditional shows, the audience appreciates the performer's techniques, while Western comedy pays less attention to this aspect. The other dimension is cultural inheritance. Western comedy focuses more on the present, and almost no one performs traditional works that are decades or even centuries old; but for *xiangsheng*, traditional content is important, and the audience will evaluate the performance by the standard of artistic appreciation to judge its authenticity.

**CNS:** Of the various forms of art, comedy requires sharing more common cultural practices with the audience. How does Chinese comedy resonate with popular foreign comedy?

**Mark Rowswell:** Compared with music, opera, drama and other art forms, comedy requires more active participation by the audience in the form of laughter, and demands more shared cultural practices in the audience.

For example, the traditional comedy show *Wai Pi San Guo* (*A Funny Review of The Three Kingdoms*) is based on the audience's familiarity with the Chinese classic *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. The audience can understand the comic review only if they are familiar with the novel. In the West too, there are many classic comedies that allude to famous sayings or events like Biblical happenings.

However, today, comedy focuses less on techniques and traditional stories and more on contemporary everyday life, which can overcome cultural barriers more easily. The difference between Chinese and popular foreign comedy is diminishing largely due to the growth of the Internet. With more and more young Chinese watching Western stand-up comedy on the Internet, the Chinese form of stand-up comedy is growing rapidly.

*Xiangsheng* is still popular with Chinese audiences. Some performers can switch between the Chinese and the Western style smoothly, sometimes using the format of stand-up comedy and sometimes the traditional style of *xiangsheng*. The development of stand-up comedy provides a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between Chinese and foreign comedy.

**CNS:** You once said that Dashan Live is a mix of Eastern and Western cultures. What do you think is an ideal mix of the East and the West?

**Mark Rowswell:** Dashan Live followed a Western style because I was stepping out of the fixed pattern of previous performances intentionally. As a 60-minute solo show, it had a complete structure from beginning to end, telling an autobiographical story with a clear narrative logic. It was different from the monologue of *xiangsheng*, which tells only one story, and was also different from Western stand-up comedy, which is loosely structured.

If I compare it with stand-up comedy, my language was not as colloquial as some young stand-up comedians'; instead, it was carefully designed and had a structure, complete with a punchline. These elements were reminiscent of the techniques of *xiangsheng*. Although my performance didn't have the typical features of *xiangsheng*, it still had some of its basic traits due to my long period of *xiangsheng* training.

I wish a new form of performance could be created by combining Chinese and Western performing arts and by combining traditional and contemporary arts. With some innovation comedy can become a medium to promote exchanges between China and the West.

**CNS:** In China, Dashan is considered "non-Chinese but not an outsider." What do you think of China and Chinese culture from your decades of studying and working in China? And what do you think about the misunderstanding of Chinese culture that sometimes exists in other countries?

**Mark Rowswell:** I love the phrase "Dashan is a non-Chinese but not an outsider." When I started appearing in front of a Chinese audience, China was going out to the world and the world was approaching China. Maybe my appearance was also a symbol of the cultural exchange phenomenon at that time.

Since then, I have also made videos reading ancient Chinese poems, behind which is a long period of learning as well as my respect and love for traditional Chinese culture.

When different cultures first come into contact, people only see the differences. But differences are not a bad thing and somehow create mutual attraction. Living between the Eastern and Western cultures, I have come to increasingly appreciate that living in two or more cultures for a long period of time leads to a greater sense of cultural commonalities. Many things may seem different on the surface, but when you



understand them more, you realize they actually share a common nature; only it is expressed differently.

I think it is not the difference that causes the problem, the problem lies in lack of tolerance and acceptance. Over the years I have been studying the differences between Eastern and Western humor. In China, there are differences in the humor of southerners and northerners; in Europe too, English humor and French humor are different. Each place has its own characteristics, and if you look at them in depth, you will find that the essence of the humors is still similar and understandable to each other.

That's my thought as a person who has been "walking back and forth" between the Chinese and Western cultures. Comedy needs empathy between the actor and the audience. As a foreign performer, most audiences I faced were Chinese, so I always looked for the commonalities in the differences. And the responses proved that we have a resonance.

(Interviewed by Gao Kai)

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# The Chinese Labor Corps of World War I: Pioneers of China's Cooperation with Europe

*Philip Vanhaelemeersch*

Noted Belgian Sinologist Philip Vanhaelemeersch is the director of the Confucius Institute at Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen, the University of Applied Sciences in West Flanders, Belgium. An expert on the history of Chinese workers in World War I, also known as the Chinese Labor Corps, he has extensively interviewed the descendants of many of those workers who came from China's Shandong and Hebei Provinces. He is also the Dutch translator of the memoirs of two World War I workers, *Reminiscences on My Work During the European War* by Gu Xingqing and *Memoirs of a Chinese Worker* by Sun Gan and his descendants.

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P. Vanhaelemeersch (✉)  
Kortrijk, Belgium



Philip Vanhaelemeersch

On November 11, 1918, the Allied Forces and Germany signed an armistice to end the tragic World War I that began in 1914. China has a significant, though often overlooked, association with the war.

From 1916 to 1918, the British and French armies recruited about 140,000 Chinese farm workers and sent them to various battlefields in Europe to dig trenches, repair fortifications and build roads and bridges. They also did other more hazardous and grueling work like rescuing the wounded, burying corpses, cleaning up battlefields and clearing mines. They came to be known as the “Chinese workers in WWI,” dubbed the Chinese Labor Corps by World War I historians.

These men, mostly in their 20s and 30s, were not soldiers. They “used shovels instead of guns” to contribute considerably to the victory of the Allies in World War I and even beyond that, to post-war reconstruction. Nearly 20,000 of them died in the course of their backbreaking work. Mostly illiterate farmers, they worked more than 12 hours far from home with little rest or emotional support. Qu Xing, UNESCO Deputy Director General and former Chinese ambassador to Belgium, graphically described the overwhelming work they did, “If one person dug one meter of trench a day, that would be 140 kilometers dug by 140,000 people a day. If one person carried one shell a day, that would be 140,000 shells carried by 140,000 people a day.”

Thanks to these workers' contribution in the Allied victory in World War I, China was able to attend the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 as one of the victorious nations. However, the conference disregarded China's status as a victorious nation due to its weak economy and lack of political strength at that time. The slight triggered protests by the workers and Chinese students, who surrounded the Paris Peace Conference venue where the Chinese delegation was in an attempt to prevent the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. It was regarded as a detrimental treaty for China since while ending the war; it betrayed China's interests and gave Japan control over parts of Chinese territory. The slight to China continued at the sports tournament in Belgium hosted by Britain. The flags of all other victorious nations and participating countries were flown at the venue save China's. It led to more protests by Chinese workers.

The Chinese Labor Corps gave their blood and sweat for a war in Europe that was far from their home but their contribution remains underestimated and even forgotten. Philip Vanhaelemeersch shines a light on the invaluable role they played and how that has created a legacy for China's exchange and cooperation with Europe today.

**CNS:** Why has the Western academic circle, including their war historians and scholars, forgotten the Chinese Labor Corps?

**Philip Vanhaelemeersch:** One reason for that is technical. Most of the experts who study the history of WWI do not know Chinese. In some battlefield sites in France and Belgium, we have the areas called the "Chinese Corner" where you can see the gravestones of some of the Chinese Labor Corps, carved with their names, the places they came from, and the identification numbers assigned to them. But if you don't know Chinese, it would be impossible to decipher this information. This has resulted in the lack of detailed historical information that is necessary for in-depth research.

Another reason is the misconception about their work. Although they were in the battlefield, they were considered logistics personnel who did not fight. So many experts on the military history of WWI think they were not important and do not include them in their research. Some people, in particular, see the Chinese workers in WWI as mere laborers who did simple menial work like carrying bags of supplies at the port docks. Although some Chinese workers did do that, many of them were skilled hands who could repair the machines and tanks in the battlefield. Besides,

the corps also included educated men who knew foreign languages and acted as translators. The Chinese workers in WWI had their own stories and their own way of thinking, and it is very biased and inaccurate to regard them as only manual laborers.

**CNS:** Now that their historical status is being increasingly recognized, how do people look at their contributions in the Allied victory in WWI?

**Philip Vanhaelemeersch:** During WWI, while Britain, France and other Allied powers recruited laborers from India, Egypt, South Africa and other countries as well, about 140,000 men were recruited from China, accounting for the largest group of foreign laborers. Therefore, you can say the history of WWI is incomplete without mention of the Chinese laborers.

These men, though they did not actually fight, probably still influenced the course of the war on a daily basis. When they arrived in Europe in 1916, the Allies were facing a serious shortage of manpower as battles such as the Battle of the Somme saw tens of thousands of casualties in one day. So, the Chinese workers made up for the much-needed manpower of the Allied powers and provided vital logistic services. Many in the West think that without the Chinese workers, the Allied victory might have been pushed back.

Even after the war ended, the workers had to wait for several months before they could return home due to the insufficient transport, and the last batch returned home only in 1919. While they waited to return home, many of them took part in post-war reconstruction work such as cleaning up battlefields, continuing to contribute to the Allied Force work. Some even stayed on in France, becoming the first Chinese immigrants there.

**CNS:** You translated and published *Reminiscences on My Work During the European War* by Gu Xingqing, a member of the Chinese Labor Corps. On November 11, 2018, the centenary of the end of WWI, a ceremony was held in Paris to commemorate the armistice, and a Chinese-American girl read out from the diary of Gu Xingqing. It was an entry he had written on that very day 100 years ago. What do you think of that?

**Philip Vanhaelemeersch:** I was personally involved in that. I was contacted by the organizing committee through a French documentary maker. The director wanted to have young people from different ethnic groups read out articles on the armistice, and these articles had to be written on November 11, Armistice Day. Gu Xingqing's memoir had a

chapter on the armistice, including a diary entry written on that day, so I sent that section to the organizing committee.

On November 11, the day of the celebration, I did not go to Paris, but to the Nolette Chinese Cemetery in France with students and teachers of our Confucius Institute. The Nolette Chinese Cemetery in the town of Noyelles-sur-Mer in northern France is the largest Chinese Labor Corps cemetery in Europe with over 800 graves, and we paid tribute to them together with the Chinese living in France. Then I received a photo of the girl reading from Gu Xingqing's diary in Paris.

I was overcome with emotion. A grand event remembering the Chinese workers in WWI was being held in Paris, a city that most of the workers had never been to, and at the same time, we were having our commemoration at the cemetery. I think of that day as one of the most meaningful ones in the history of commemorating the Chinese Labor Corps.

**CNS:** In 2017, your translation of the memoir of Sun Gan, another member of the Chinese Labor Corps and his descendants, came out. Sun Gan was a teacher before he went to Europe, and some scholars consider that educated men like him, who were recruited to the Labor Corps, opened a window for the Chinese to know the world.

**Philip Vanhaelemeersch:** When I translated the memoirs of Sun Gan and Gu Xingqing, I was impressed by the Chinese curiosity about the outside world. After work, Sun Gan would sit in the classroom of the elementary school in France and jot down what happened in the class. Gu Xingqing, on the other hand, wrote about many common daily activities, like how Belgians drank beer and how the French dressed. At first, I thought, is this worth translating into Dutch? Later, I realized it was significant because it reflected the Chinese passion to know the world.

Sun Gan returned to his hometown in Shandong in 1919. After his return, he was often asked to talk about his work and life in Europe, and those who heard him told the stories to others. In this way, probably thousands of people got to know the Western world through Sun Gan, and satisfied their curiosity about the West. Many of them never had the chance to go abroad in their life, not even to any large city in China, so Sun Gan's tales served as a window to the outside world for them.

Sun later founded a school in the village. He told the students about his work and life in Europe, just the way teachers at the Confucius Institutes today tell students about China. That was a real cultural exchange between China and the West.

**CNS:** You once said that the Chinese Labor Corps are an important link between Europe and China, and have left a valuable legacy for exchanges and cooperation between Europe and China.

**Philip Vanhaelemeersch:** We always talk about “exchange” and “cooperation.” I think communication can be as simple as two people sitting down and talking. Cooperation means working together for the same goal, which may be more important than simple communication.

The Chinese Labor Corps can be regarded as an important group of Chinese laborers sent overseas. There were Chinese working abroad even before that but it was not a normal labor relationship. The situation of the Chinese workers in WWI was certainly not “normal” either, as it was a time of war, but Britain offered labor contracts when recruiting them, which had never been done before. In my opinion, the Chinese workers in WWI opened a new chapter in the history of Chinese laborers working overseas.

After arriving in Europe, although most of the workers had to do heavy manual labor and the local Europeans were their supervisors, still they worked together and to some extent, an embryonic form of cooperation emerged, which I think laid the foundation for future exchanges and cooperation between Europe and China.

(Interviewed by De Yongjian)

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## What Makes TCM a Treasure Trove for Modern Drug Development

*Evangelos Tatsis*

Greek scientist Evangelos Tatsis is a group leader at the Centre of Excellence for Plant and Microbial Science in Shanghai, a collaboration between the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the John Innes Centre in Norfolk, the UK. A recipient of the Royal Society's Newton Advanced Fellowship in 2019; his research includes engineering metabolic pathways for the biosynthesis of natural products from Chinese medicinal plants. He is the author of several publications in international scientific journals including *Nature Communications*.

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E. Tatsis (✉)  
Shanghai, China



Evangelos Tatsis

**Why did Evangelos Tatsis come all the way to Shanghai in 2016 to study traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and improve the database of modern drug molecules? Why does he consider TCM to be a treasure trove for modern drug development?**

**CNS:** Tu Youyou, the Chinese pharmacologist who's also the first Chinese Nobel Prize winner in physiology or medicine, researched TCM and its integration with Western medicines for years, leading to the discovery of the antimalarial drug artemisinin. How do you regard her discovery?

**Evangelos Tatsis:** Tu Youyou discovered the Chinese remedy for malaria from an ancient Chinese medical text, *The Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergency*, which can be traced back to the 3rd to 4th century. She followed the clues from this prescription and discovered that extracts of sweet wormwood (*Artemisia annua*) had anti-malarial properties.

This is an absolutely remarkable discovery. A pointer to the modern drug artemisinin, regarded as the most effective anti-malarial drug, was found in a millennia-old Chinese medical book. It also shows that no matter which age we are in, there is the possibility that human beings will discover new drugs from plants. I think more modern drugs can be discovered from Chinese medicine.

**CNS:** Chinese medicine, guided by Chinese medical theory, is used to prevent, treat and diagnose diseases, as well as for rehabilitation and healthcare. Most of them are plant-based and it is commonly believed that all medicines are based on herbs. Why did you choose to study Chinese medicine?

**Evangelos Tatsis:** TCM is a treasure trove for human beings because it is a large and sophisticated scientific system, with detailed records of herbal resources, numerous descriptions of remedies, and detailed descriptions on the effects of different diseases.

Chinese medicine has important implications for modern drug development.

Western medicine emphasizes the study of the therapeutic effects and side effects of a single ingredient while TCM focuses on the integrated use of medicine and often uses multiple ingredients at a time. This means that for the same disease, different drugs can be used on different parts of the body to achieve a holistic treatment. This is a form of (today's) highly active antiretroviral therapy (which uses a combination of drugs). If a single drug does not work well, one can draw inspiration from TCM and extract a combination of multiple ingredients with integrated effects to treat the same disease, so that we can develop new modern compound drugs. Of course, this requires complex research and considerable investment.

Secondly, from TCM we can learn how to customize. Many TCM prescriptions are tailor-made (for individual patients), a concept that may influence the future direction of modern medicine, enabling prescriptions to be tailored to the needs of each patient.

**CNS:** TCM is a method of diagnosis and treatment based on thousands of years of clinical practice. *Huangdi Neijing* (*The Yellow Emperor's Canon of Internal Medicine*), a medical treatise written more than two thousand years ago, laid the foundation for Chinese medicine. In 2018, the World Health Organization for the first time included TCM in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, which is a globally used diagnostic tool. How do you see the difference between TCM and Western medicine?

**Evangelos Tatsis:** I don't want to define the development of medicine in terms of geography or culture because biologically, we are all human beings, the same kind of creature.

In my opinion, there is no difference between TCM and Western medicine, but rather, the difference between traditional and modern medicine. What we are comparing is the difference between traditional, empirical research methods and modern, more evidence-based scientific research, whether it is TCM, traditional Greek medicine, or traditional Indian medicine.

TCM is a valuable asset to humanity. In the future, the Chinese will be proud to see elements of TCM in modern medicine. But to make the world accept TCM in the future is not only about medicine but also about the acceptance of a culture, which is not easy.

**CNS:** The Centre of Excellence for Plant and Microbial Science, established by the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the John Innes Centre with a joint investment of £12 million, invites top scientists from around the world to join it. Why did you decide to come to Shanghai? Which specific area of TCM are you working in now?

**Evangelos Tatsis:** China has developed rapidly over the years. I came to China to do research for three reasons: First, I wanted to set up my own practice research group, and some practices are easier to carry out in China; second, China's research has been developing particularly well in the past few years; and third, China has a large variety of plants and abundant research resources.

We have 10 staff members in our international research group. In addition to Chinese researchers, there are also researchers from Greece, Israel, Brazil, Portugal and Poland.

Two of our projects are funded by the Shanghai (local) government. In collaboration with the John Innes Centre, we have discovered a molecule with anti-cancer property that could potentially open up new directions in the development of anti-cancer drugs in the future. The application of this type of molecules can be found in TCM treatments, but its medicinal value has not yet been systematically studied.

These plants grow only in China and some other Asian countries. Our research has two study directions: to understand the specific anti-cancer components through plant extraction; and to figure out how to genetically exploit the plant to obtain more of these components. I believe that in-depth research on TCM herbal plants will not only benefit China, but the world.

**CNS:** Both Greece and China are countries with a long history and rich culture, and ancient Western medicine originated in ancient Greece. Has traditional Greek medicine been modernized and is used in other countries?

**Evangelos Tatsis:** In ancient Greece, people suffering from diseases tended to turn to nature for treatment. I think the best medicine comes from plants. From ancient times to the present, plants have been used to

treat basic diseases. We can find traces of the medicinal use of plants in both cultural history and religious beliefs.

Today, Greece no longer distinguishes between traditional and modern medicine. Many of the modern medicines we use today actually come from plants or traditional medicine. Greece and many other countries look for clues in ancient medical methods and traditional medicines to facilitate modern medicine.

But Greek traditional medicine does not have the systematic classification that TCM does. The advantage of TCM is that it is well documented and categorized systematically, with a large number of texts and prescriptions handed down over centuries. China also has a lot of rare plants, and I hope to study this treasure trove and discover potential medicines from it.

We do not expect our research to produce quick results as it is a long process. But in the long run, this kind of research will help improve human health in the future, and will benefit not only the Chinese, but also people in Africa, the United States, Europe and other regions.

(Interviewed by Zheng Yingying)

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## Seeing the Real China Through a Filmmaker's Lens

*Takeuchi Ryo*

Japanese film director Takeuchi Ryo came to China in 2010 to shoot a documentary series on the Yangtze River and decided to make the country his home. In 2014, an unscripted documentary series, *The Reason I Live Here*, followed based on his life in China. His 2020 documentary, *Long Time No See, Wuhan* received rave reviews in China due to its firsthand portrayal of life in the central Chinese city during the COVID-19 outbreak. In 2021, his film on the Tokyo Olympics, *Double-Sided Olympics*, was released, providing a different perspective on the Games.

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T. Ryo (✉)  
Beijing, China



Takeuchi Ryo

**China and Japan observed the 50th anniversary of the normalization of their diplomatic relations in 2022 but the relationship remains rocky due to their complex historical legacy. Public opinion polls in both countries have found negative opinions about the Chinese abroad among the Japanese and vice versa. As the complicated relationship between the two countries makes cultural exchanges difficult, people like Takeuchi Ryo, who has been making films on China for nearly 10 years, play an important role in bridging the gap in understanding and resolving misunderstandings.**

**CNS:** What made you start telling the China story through documentaries?

**Takeuchi Ryo:** The reason was unhappiness. I was unhappy.

I had been making documentaries in Japan for 20 years. Then I met the woman I would marry, and she is Chinese. As I started living in China, besides my wife, I had more friends in China and I began to know more about China.

There is a lot of criticism of China in the media in Europe and America, as well as in Japan. People who are poorly informed and know nothing about China read these reports, thanks to the Internet, and tend to believe and echo this criticism. They know nothing about China but still criticize it. It made me sad. I wanted to make films on what I have seen in China and its culture and show them to the Japanese, and the rest of the world.

**CNS:** How would you describe the China that you film?

**Takeuchi Ryo:** If I use one word to describe China, it will be “fun.” This is because of my thirst for new things. China is changing so fast these years. If I leave China for two or three years, I would not be able to keep up with the changes when I come back.

Japan, on the other hand, has not changed much. I’ve lived in China for almost 10 years, and recently, when I went back to Japan, I could still keep up with the pace of living in Japan. But I prefer a life that is fun and changing.

I have been filming China for the past 10 years, and one of the documentaries is about Wuhan during COVID-19.

I made this documentary because I saw that the Wuhan reported by the foreign media was very different from the Wuhan that I observed and experienced. So I immediately decided to film the real Wuhan in my eyes. When *Long Time No See, Wuhan* was released online, some Japanese media asked me, “Did the Chinese government ask you to make this documentary?” I told them that my team and I shot all the footage ourselves on our own initiative. From their questions, I could see that they came to interview me with preconceptions.

There were two more films that received a lot of attention in Japan: a documentary about Chinese advanced technology and one about the Daliang Mountains in southwest China. They were two very different topics and yet received great attention in Japan. In fact, the Japanese are very interested in the real China that they cannot see.

**CNS:** The core feature of a documentary is truth. How do you portray China in an objective and realistic manner? How do you deal with the negative comments?

**Takeuchi Ryo:** My documentary advocates subjective truth. It means I shoot what I see and then show it. The problem with some Western and Japanese media is that their reports do the opposite. They report on China by saying the opposite of what they see, making things up.

I don’t really care about criticism or even attacks, I am a very “self-centered” person in my work. There are voices that agree with me, and there are also negative voices. Those who dislike my work may not know about China. What I am doing is to provide more perspectives to understand the real China. Actually, the negative comments are the motivation that keeps me going.



**CNS:** You have traveled to many places and interviewed many people in China. What are the biggest similarities and differences between the Chinese and Japanese?

**Takeuchi Ryo:** After interviewing so many people and recording so many stories about China, I feel that the biggest similarity between China and Japan is their view of family. In fact, many aspects of Japanese culture can be traced back to Chinese culture as they are influenced by Confucianism.

As for the differences, I feel the Chinese are more generous, very efficient in what they do, and value scale and speed. For Chinese, efficiency is priority.

Since Japan is an island nation, the Japanese care more about details and are more conservative. Japan was in a state of isolation for a long time, and it was not until the Meiji Restoration (the restoration of imperial rule under Emperor Meiji in 1868) that the situation began to change, but the conservativeness has not changed. For example, when I returned to Japan the last time, I saw Japanese TV cameramen still using videotape for recordings, which is almost no longer used in the Chinese media industry.

Japan still uses paper money extensively, and electronic payment is far from popular, which makes it very difficult for Japanese like me, who live in China most of the time and are used to cashless transactions, to adapt when we go back.

**CNS:** Currently, the average Japanese generally does not have a favorable view of China. Data shows that only 10 percent viewed China positively in 2020. So how do they regard your documentaries about China?

**Takeuchi Ryo:** I've seen this data, but it's a bit different from what I see. I think it's impossible that 90 percent of Japanese don't like China. I used to do public speaking in Japan when I would ask my audience two questions: "Do you like China personally? Do your friends like China?" Most of them would reply, "I'm not sure about it," and then say that they see negative reports about China on TV every day. So if you ask them to choose between liking and disliking China, they would choose disliking.

Therefore, if we present positive and interesting things about China to the Japanese, whether through our documentaries, Chinese movies, cartoons or even variety shows, I think the power of culture will eventually change their attitude toward China.

Today, there is an interesting phenomenon in Japan. Many young Japanese like watching the videos of Chinese beauty bloggers, and Chinese apps such as TikTok are also very popular in Japan. A recent poll by a Japanese media organization found that young people have a more favorable view of China than older people. Therefore, I think young people may be the force to promote mutual understanding between the two countries.

**CNS:** Are you going to keep on making documentaries about life in China?

**Takeuchi Ryo:** I am very interested in Chinese culture and Chinese people, and the incessant changes in China continue to whet my interest. So yes, I will continue to do what I am doing.

My next film is going to be another documentary on the Yangtze River, which will introduce the customs and cultures along the river to the Japanese and global audiences.

(Interviewed by Xie Ping and Li Xiang)

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## Is Chinese Cuisine Overrated Abroad? Or Underestimated?

*Fuchsia Dunlop*

Fuchsia Dunlop is a British author and cook specializing in Chinese cuisine, especially Sichuan food. She went to Sichuan University to study Chinese on a British Council scholarship and also trained at the Sichuan Higher Institute of Cuisine. Her books include *Sichuan Cookery*, her debut book in 2001 which won an award and the semi-autobiographical *Shark's Fin and Sichuan Pepper*.

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F. Dunlop (✉)  
Chengdu, China



Fuchsia Dunlop

**Fuchsia Dunlop says her exploration of Chinese cuisine and culture has made her realize that in traditional Chinese culture; the ability to appreciate food is as important as the ability to appreciate music, art and poetry. Chinese dishes are actually a reflection of the geography, history and culture of the different regions of China.**

**CNS:** Why did you decide to write about Chinese food culture? Since your first trip to China in the 1990s, you have written nearly a dozen books on Chinese food culture besides writing for different publications like the *Financial Times*, *The New Yorker* and *Gourmet*. You are also a four-time winner of the James Beard Award, one of the top awards in the culinary industry. How has the perception of Chinese food in the West changed over the past decades?

**Fuchsia Dunlop:** In 1994, when I went to study in Sichuan (a province in southwestern China famous for its hot peppers and pandas), Sichuan cuisine was the rage in China, but most foreigners knew very little about it. It was hard to find authentic Sichuan recipes in the UK, let alone authentic Sichuan spices, chefs and food experts, and few people had actually experienced the lip-tingling sensation caused by Sichuan peppercorns.

I thought the Chinese food culture was so vast and inclusive that Westerners should know about its richness and diversity, so I wrote my first book *Sichuan Cookery*. (When she revisited Sichuan later, she added almost 50 new recipes and *The Food of Sichuan* was published in 2019.) In 2020, it was translated into Chinese and published in China nearly 20 years after the original book was first published in the UK.

During that time, most Westerners' understanding of Chinese food culture had changed dramatically, with mapo tofu becoming a must-order for international diners and Sichuan becoming an important culinary destination for Westerners. In the streets of London, diners can eat Cantonese, Sichuan, Hunan, Northeastern and Huaiyang (the region surrounding the lower reaches of the Huai and Yangtze rivers with the Jiangsu Province at its center) food and even taste authentic snacks from Xi'an (a city in central China known for its Terracotta Warriors.)

One of the reasons for this change is that more and more Chinese are traveling, studying and working in the West, while a large number of Westerners are coming to China or have Chinese friends. This has led to a rise in the demand for authentic traditional Chinese food in the British and American markets, and Chinese restaurants overseas have an incentive to offer more Chinese dishes.

Another important reason is that now you can find much more information about Chinese food culture in the West than in the past. Many Chinese food bloggers and chefs like Li Ziqi and Wang Gang post cooking videos online, familiarizing Western netizens with authentic Chinese food.

**CNS:** What are the common misconceptions about Chinese cuisine in the West? What are the Chinese misconceptions about Western food culture? How do you view these prejudices?

**Fuchsia Dunlop:** When it comes to Chinese cuisine, many Westerners think it is “greasy” or “unhealthy” because most of the Chinese food they have is from restaurants, not Chinese home-cooked food. For most Chinese families, the staple food is usually a bowl of steamed rice or noodles, with plenty of simply cooked seasonal vegetables, a variety of soy products, and a little dried fruit and a little fish to add flavor and nutrition. This is the best diet in my mind, as it is a combination of meat and vegetables, rich in variety, seasonal, and balanced in nutrition, and greatly satisfies the eye, nose, tongue and the stomach.

Although oil is essential for the heat and flavor of Chinese cuisine, not all the oil in every dish is consumed. If Westerners follow the Chinese way of eating and use chopsticks, most of the oil will be left on the plate. Also, most Westerners have difficulty in appreciating the taste of Chinese food. Once, during a talk, I gave each member of my audience a duck tongue that I myself had cooked. The traditional Western view is that duck tongue or chicken feet are inedible while the Chinese add flavors

to the “uneatable small things.” I told my audience to throw away their insular ideas and get the taste of the East.

Chinese cuisine’s openness and inclusiveness in its choice of ingredients demonstrates a philosophical wisdom. A truly skilled chef does not label an ingredient “edible” or “inedible” but uses technique to highlight its strengths and cover up its weaknesses. Sichuan chefs even turn the chewy upper jaw of the pig into a spicy snack called “heaven.”

In China, some of my Chinese friends gave me their opinions about Western food, and most of them had common misconceptions about Western food culture. Western food culture encompasses the cuisines of different countries, and it is difficult to describe Western cuisine with only one type of food or one country.

The root cause of these prejudices is lack of understanding. Although there are fewer misunderstandings in recent years with more extensive communication between the East and West, it will take time to eliminate them completely. Each country’s food culture is unique and needs to be experienced with heart.

**CNS:** Sichuan cuisine was created by collision between Western and Eastern culture. If chili peppers had not been introduced into China at the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), there would have been no spicy and tasty Sichuan dishes such as mapo tofu and boiled beef, not to mention the Sichuan cuisine known for its rich flavors. What do you think of the inclusive food culture created from the collision of East and West?

**Fuchsia Dunlop:** As early as the fourth century, the people of Sichuan had already developed a preference for spicy flavors. The ancient Chinese historian Chang Qu once commented that “(Sichuan) people love flavorful dishes filled with spices.” However, it must be noted that this spicy flavor did not come from chili peppers, but from ginger, pepper and dogwood. The cuisine section of *Lüshi Chunqiu* (an encyclopedic Chinese classic text compiled around 239 BC) also regards Sichuan ginger as a prime ingredient.

It was not until the late Ming Dynasty in the late sixteenth century that chili peppers were introduced into China. Because of their lovely white flowers and beautiful red fruits, chili peppers were once considered an ornamental plant in China, and it was one century later that records of chili peppers being used in dishes appeared. According to research by Jiang Yuxiang, a professor of Sichuan University, chili peppers did not become a common crop in Sichuan until the Jiaqing period (1796–1820)

of the Qing Dynasty, although one source mentions cultivation of chili pepper in Sichuan in the mid-eighteenth century.

Western food culture has also been influenced by the East. In the 1980s, a famous Chinese-American introduced Chinese cuisine in Britain when he did a television program. Many British households now have a Chinese wok, and many Britons have mastered the “stir-fry” method of cooking. They cut vegetables and meat into small pieces and stir and fry them in a wok, but of course it’s much simpler than Chinese stir-fry.

In fact, all existing food cultures, whether Eastern or Western, are constantly evolving, with new influences and new collisions. Some of the dishes I ate and loved in Chengdu in the mid-1990s have nearly disappeared today. When I returned to Chengdu in 2019, I found new ingredients such as salmon and wheatgrass had appeared on the local menu.

**CNS:** Is it Chinese cuisine or “Western-style Chinese cuisine” that is sweeping across the world? Is Chinese cuisine overrated or underestimated overseas? Is it possible to understand Chinese culture through cuisine?

**Fuchsia Dunlop:** There are many people in the UK and the U.S. who love Chinese food. But the food most popular with them is not the best Chinese dish or the most iconic one. In this regard, the real Chinese cuisine culture is underrated overseas.

But the dishes that are popular around the world also belong to the Chinese food culture. In addition to the numerous dishes in Chinese cuisine, there is often a tale behind each dish. For example, there is a legend about the dish called Dongpo pork. Su Dongpo, a member of the literati of the Song Dynasty (960–1279), once taunted the people who despised this dish as a common meat dish by writing an *Ode to Pork*. There is also a tale behind the American favorite “General Tso’s chicken.” It was created by a Hunan chef in Taiwan for a banquet and named after a Hunan hero. Subsequently, it was introduced in New York by his apprentice. This story is not only interesting, it is also a story of the Chinese people and Chinese cuisine. “General Tso’s chicken” originated from China and was a local dish but today it has fans globally.

It is an eternal feature of Chinese culture that you can never take enough care over a dish. Early Chinese philosophers and poets used food as a metaphor for many things. Lao Zi (the founder of Taoism), said, “Ruling a great nation is like cooking a small dish”; Confucius

compared human conduct and behavior with food, and emphasized an eating etiquette in which different meats had to be eaten with different dipping sauces; and the eminent poet Qu Yuan wrote that delicious food had the power to summon the soul of the dead.

In traditional Chinese culture, the appreciation of food is venerated and can even be compared to the ability to appreciate music, art and poetry. Today, the variety of Chinese dishes reflects the geography, history and culture of the different regions of China. If Westerners want to explore Chinese culture, food can be a very interesting window.

(Interviewed by He Shaoqing and Shan Peng)

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## The Recipe for Chinese Cuisine's Popularity in Japan

*Sato Takako*

Sato Takako, the editor-in-chief of *80C*, a popular Japanese website on Chinese food, is a food critic who specializes in Chinese cuisine. She has written on the cuisine of Sichuan, the southwestern Chinese Province famed for its hot and spicy food, for a leading hotel industry magazine in Japan and contributes to other Japanese and Chinese publications such as the Japanese Airlines' in-flight magazine *Skyward*, and *Go Chengdu*, an online portal about Chengdu, capital of Sichuan. Sato, a frequent flier to China to explore food and ingredients and learn traditional food preparation techniques, founded Roundtable, a Chinese food and travel website, in 2019.

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S. Takako (✉)  
Beijing, China



Sato Takako

**Sato Takako has a theory about why food brings such enjoyment to people, creating an additional pleasure besides appealing to the taste buds. Over the centuries, various food cultures have merged with one another and learned from one another, giving rise to new foods and flavors. It is this long tradition, history and integration that makes any dish much more than food, a part of culture.**

**CNS:** What was your early impression of Chinese cuisine? Has that changed over the decades? How is Chinese cuisine in China different from Chinese cuisine in Japan?

**Sato Takako:** Chinese restaurants in Japan often offer two types of cuisine, “Japanese-Chinese” and “Chinese.” The latter mainly serve authentic Chinese food. In the early days, most Chinese restaurants were run by overseas Chinese, and they mainly served high-end Cantonese food (the cuisine of southern Chinese city Guangzhou, earlier known as Canton). Such restaurants hire highly-paid Chinese chefs to ensure they are serving authentic Chinese food.

Japanese-Chinese restaurants, on the other hand, serve localized Chinese food. These are mainly street food stalls where customers can taste dishes from different regions of China under one roof. The Japanese generation born in the 1970s grew up with Japanese-Chinese cuisine. When I was young, it was regarded as affordable, and the cuisine was synonymous with the common dishes people made at home, such as mapo tofu and dry-fried shrimp.

The two styles of Chinese cuisine emerged in Japan primarily because of the ingredients and the historical and cultural differences. When

Chinese cuisine was first introduced in Japan, it was difficult to buy authentic Chinese seasonings. For example, in 1957, Chen Kenmin, the founder of a prominent restaurant in Tokyo, introduced “stir-fried pork and cabbage with sauce” during a cooking show on Japanese TV channel NHK. It was the first time that Japanese viewers learned how to cook Sichuan-style stir-fried pork, which then became a popular dish in Japan. However, bean paste, an ingredient of that dish, was not available in Japan at that time, so Chen improvised by adding his own version, a brand of Japanese miso (a paste of fermented soybean and an essential ingredient of Japanese food). This makes Japanese stir-fried pork sweet and full of flavors, very different from the salty and spicy Sichuan-style stir-fried pork.

In addition, the Japanese use raw pork when cooking stir-fried pork because they think it is too much work to boil the meat first and then cut it into slices. But the original Sichuan-style stir-fried pork is called “twice-cooked pork” in Chinese and a Chinese folktale explains why it is cooked twice. The ancient Chinese did not like to make offerings of raw meat during their traditional religious rituals, so they offered boiled meat instead, which would be cooked again with other ingredients after the ritual was over.

Today, the Chinese restaurants in Japan are becoming much more diversified. With more people-to-people exchanges with China, more and more Japanese chefs are heading to China to learn how to cook authentic Chinese dishes. Besides the big cities like Chengdu and Hangzhou, which are famous for their cuisine, some Japanese chefs also travel to remote mountainous areas or regions where the Chinese ethnic groups live to learn local cuisines. In recent years, Tokyo has seen new restaurants specializing in regional Chinese cuisine such as the food of northeastern China, Yunnan in southeastern China, and Guangxi in the south. We can see that Japanese-Chinese cuisine has begun to take on the characteristics of regional Chinese cuisine. The chef of a Chinese restaurant in Tokyo, Yoshiki Igeta, learned to cook Sichuan dishes at a legendary traditional Sichuan cuisine restaurant in Chengdu. His repertoire includes stir-fried pork with seasonal vegetables, making the authentic Sichuan dish available in Tokyo.

Some Japanese-Chinese restaurants are transforming into upscale ones. For example, in Ginza, a district in Tokyo, there are some restaurants where the average bill can come up to 30,000 to 50,000 yen (around \$200–350) per customer.

**CNS:** According to Japanese market research data, Chinese food is one of the most popular cuisines among the Japanese, whether they are eating at home or eating out. Akutagawa Ryunosuke (1892–1927), regarded as the father of the short story in Japan, and poet-lyricist Aiyū Kobayashi (1881–1945) both praised Chinese cuisine and a large number of Chinese dishes feature in popular Japanese animes such as *Cooking Master Boy*, *Doraemon* and *Solitary Gourmet*. How did Chinese cuisine become so popular in Japan, especially the spicy Sichuan cuisine?

**Sato Takako:** Curiosity is a major reason the Japanese are interested in Chinese cuisine. Some Japanese writers or celebrities have detailed descriptions of Chinese food in their writings, and many popular animes and comics also depict Chinese cuisine and its charms, whetting people’s appetite for it.

For example, mapo tofu often features in Japanese films and animes, and some variety shows have produced mind-blowing creative adaptations of the dish. The manga *Iron Wok Jan* about a teenager’s ambition to be the best chef has influenced a generation of Chinese cuisine chefs. Many Chinese cuisine chefs in Japan, who are in their 40 s today, began to take an interest in Chinese dishes after reading the manga.

Whether a cuisine is accepted and adored depends not only on restaurants but also on whether it can be cooked at home. Japanese seasoning companies have played a key role in bringing Chinese cuisine into Japanese families. In order to make cooking Chinese food at home easy, Japanese companies have introduced “Chinese seasonings” and adapted the flavor to local taste. We even have ready-to-eat versions of some dishes that people can buy at supermarkets and convenience stores, then just heat up them at home and tuck into them.

The popularity of Sichuan cuisine especially has fueled the popularity of Chinese cuisine in Japan, making it a popular food culture. Chen Kenmin deserves additional mention as the “father of Japanese Sichuan cuisine.” In the 1960s, he began to appear on the NHK cooking show, teaching Japanese how to cook classic Sichuan dishes at home.

The Japanese began to grow fond of the spicy Sichuan cuisine because the spicy food creates a sense of stimulation that can relieve the pressure of the fast pace of life and heavy work pressure, and also because they now have fewer children, which means they don’t have to cook additional non-spicy food for the children. In 2013, Japanese gourmet Masamichi Nakagawa, who studied in Chengdu, started a website to

introduce Sichuan cuisine to the Japanese. Then he founded an organization that ran a Sichuan food festival in Tokyo from 2017. Once the Sichuan Food Festival attracted 100,000 visitors in just two days and was covered by more than 300 Japanese media. In addition, the organization often conducts trips for Chinese cuisine fans in Japan to Chengdu to taste authentic Sichuan food.

**CNS:** Chinese cuisine has become a part of Japanese lives today. Japan is even making innovations on Chinese food, such as strawberry mapo tofu, boiled *xiao long bao* (Chinese steamed buns), bubble tea dumplings (in which tapioca balls are used as the dumpling filler), mapo tofu with stir-fried noodles and mapo tofu burgers. What do you think of these recreations?

**Sato Takako:** I've only heard of strawberry mapo tofu and boiled *xiao long bao*, and they may have been produced by one or two restaurants or cook shows merely to get attention. I dislike such innovations because every Chinese dish has its own history and flavor. The unique flavor of mapo tofu is its numbing spiciness, so adding strawberries changes its taste.

The people of Sichuan often eat mapo tofu with animal brains and spinal cords. The Japanese chefs transformed this dish into shirako mapo tofu instead, using shirako, the seminal fluid of fish or mollusks, in place of brain and spinal cord, which the Japanese do not eat. In this way, the dish not only maintains its original flavor, but has also been accepted by the Japanese. This is what a good recreation should be. Foods such as Japanese hamburger patties and crab balls made with cream and crab meat are Japanese recreations of Western food which have become classic dishes at the Western cuisine restaurants in Japan.

In fact, Japan often borrows good things from other countries and integrates them with local conditions and culture to create a product with Japanese characteristics. After ramen (wheat noodles served in broth) was introduced in Japan from China, Japanese chefs, with their well-known creative spirit, conjured up a variety of ramens, some with a strong pork bone flavor, and others with a very light flavor. You can see that when a food is introduced in Japan, different flavors of the dish will emerge, and this is related to Japan's national character.

In Tokyo, there is a Chinese restaurant which recently got three Michelin stars. It showcases the concept of "Japanese spirit with Chinese talent." It has a specialty, Yunbai pork, which is made of eggplant and

pork belly slices. In addition to the special ingredients, every step, from steaming the meat and heating the utensils to serving the dish at the table, is completed within a fixed time calculated to the second. This reflects Japan's deep respect for the Chinese food culture.

**CNS:** As a signature dish of Japanese cuisine, Japanese ramen is popular all over the world. The oily and salty meat soup, coming from China, was once considered different from other traditional Japanese dishes. Is the food culture evolution the result of exchange of ideas? What impact does Western food have on Japan?

**Sato Takako:** From raw ingredients to cooking methods and dining styles, Chinese food culture has influenced Japanese food culture in many ways. Rice came to Japan from the south of the Yangtze River in China more than 2,500 years ago, and a large number of Chinese vegetables, fruits and cooking methods were introduced in Japan from the period between the Sui Dynasty (581–618) and the Qing Dynasty (1636–1912).

The most important stage in the food and cultural exchange between China and Japan was during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). At that time, the Japanese “envoys” to the Tang court included “students” who specialized in various kinds of cooking skills. The Chinese monk Jianzhen also brought a lot of Chinese food with him when he traveled to Japan finally in 753 after many failed attempts, during one of which he became blind. During this period, books about Chinese food also made their way to Japan, such as Lu Yu's *The Classic of Tea*, the first known monograph on tea written between 760–762, which had a profound impact on the Japanese tea ceremony later. The Japanese *kaiseki* meal, a multi-course traditional dinner, derived from the tea ceremony.

The cuisine of Europe and the United States also had a huge influence on the Japanese diet. In 675, Emperor Tenmu introduced a meat ban, and subsequently, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi, the fifth shogun or military leader of the Tokugawa shogunate, a military government of Japan, issued a ban on killing animals. Consequently, the Japanese almost no longer ate beef for a long time. Then in 1853 the “Black Ships” arrived at the Uruga Harbor under the command of United States Commodore Matthew Perry and marked the reopening of Japan to political dialogue after more than two hundred years of self-imposed isolation. Subsequently, Japan's first beef restaurant opened in Yokohama for the foreigners living there. Gradually, Western food culture was introduced in Japan, and the Japanese began to have not only beef and milk, but also Western pastries and drinks such

as beer, coffee and wine. Today, *sukiyaki*, Japanese hot pot that usually contains sliced beef which is slowly cooked or simmered, beef with rice and other Western dishes have become the best known Japanese dishes.

Food has no boundaries. Exchange, collision and fusion between different foods are happening not only in Japan, but throughout the East and West. Tea went to Britain from China, but today tea is undeniably an important part of the classic English breakfast, like baked beans and fried eggs and bacon. Then there are restaurants in Sichuan making sushi with animal brains, and office workers drink coffee with Japanese rice balls for breakfast. Such scenes occur every day everywhere in today's era of food globalization.

For thousands of years, various food cultures have integrated with one another and learned from one other, so that new food and flavors are served on tables thanks to breakthroughs in recipes and ingredients, expanding people's understanding of food. That is the classic enjoyment that food offers us.

(Interviewed by Shan Peng and He Shaoqing)

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