

Why China is NOT Scared of the USA | Zhang WeiWei

At the East-West Forum in Istanbul, Professor Zhang Weiwei presents China's vision of a multipolar world. He explains the civilizational state, contrasts Chinese and Western approaches to governance, and argues for peace, development and regional cooperation. Addressing fellow panellists, Zhang discusses the United Nations, ASEAN, the Belt and Road Initiative, relations with India, and Donald Trump's diplomacy. He challenges Western definitions of democracy and concludes that Asia's future depends on integration, strategic patience and shared prosperity rather than military confrontation. Zhang Weiwei's Links: Fudan University profile: <https://cifufudan.edu.cn/14/1d/c521a136221/page.htm> China Institute, Fudan University: <https://www.fudan.edu.cn/en/2019/0514/c295a96680/page.htm> East-West Forum: <https://east-west-forum.com/> Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Support Neutrality Studies: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Neutrality Studies shop: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Time Stamps 00:00 Pascal's introduction 00:20 China as a civilizational state 04:45 Unite and prosper: China's strategic philosophy 06:51 Shared development, the SCO and ASEAN 10:27 Public order, regional security and India 12:34 Peace, common values and the UN Charter 15:06 UN reform, development and Trump's diplomacy 20:26 Democracy, border disputes and Asia's future

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today I'm sharing a video with Professor Zhang Weiwei, the director of the China Institute at Fudan University in Shanghai. The video was shot about two weeks ago in Istanbul during the East-West Forum, and what Professor Weiwei has to say is highly relevant, so here you go.

#Zhang WeiWei

Thank you, Madam, for your moderate, very, very exciting speech and encouraging words. Well, I will try to present my view on this whole topic of the world in transition and China as a civilizational state, as mentioned in the outline of the program for the conference. And as we all know, I think the world is already multipolar. If you look at the size of the GDP of four BRIC members, it's already larger than G7. Yet the multipolar world order is not yet born. So that's something we try to produce and shape, including our forum, East-West Forum here. And well, here comes the role of China. And China is indeed a unique country and can make an important contribution, perhaps already made a very important contribution to a new global order, a more fair and more just order.

And how to define a civilizational state? It is an amalgam of the world's longest continuous civilization with a super-large modern state. And I try to summarize this into four supers: super-large

population, super-large territory, super-long history, and super-rich culture. And all these four supers, each of which is a blend of old and new, ancient and modern. For instance, if we talk about the large population, yes, China has always been a populous country since ancient times. Yet this population is very well educated. Every year, we produce more scientists, engineers than the Western countries combined. Same with this vast territory. It's our inheritance from history, yet it's also very modernized.

Connected with first-rate infrastructure, best railway system, best highway system, and best digital infrastructure, 5G into every village, no exception. And super-long history. It's also a combination of old and new. If you look at China's political system, if the Western system is about election, the Chinese system is about selection plus election. Selection from the Chinese tradition, and election is from—we adapt from the Western tradition. Same with super-rich culture. If we talk about political culture, the most important political principle in China is people's livelihood first. It's very much Confucianism. Whatever you do, the state has to deliver to improve people's livelihood, both in material terms and non-material terms.

An inaccurate analogy, very inaccurate, just for reference, would be something like dozens of Islamic nations or countries today have amalgamated into one nation with a centralized government, with a very modern economy and speaking the same language. And yes, it's also a highly developed economy, but it's one nation. Or another inaccurate analogy, which is not politically correct, like the Roman Empire has continued to this day, with all these different, you know, countries uniting to one and speaking Latin. Yet in the case of China, with very strong philosophical tradition, we treasure peace. Peace above all, most important thing. Highly modern, but also from Asian tradition. This would be a kind of nation-state, a civilizational state, as I try to explain to you.

And now we look at the international order. See, let's say we try to build a kind of new order, much better than the one we have, from unipolarity to multipolarity. First, let's look at the ideas or philosophies, in what way China differs from the United States. Vastly different. For instance, if you look at the Chinese political philosophy, it's never about divide and rule. It's always about unite and prosper. Within China, we practice this way. Outside China, in the world, we do the same. And in terms of strategic policies, for the United States or the Western philosophy in general, it's friend or foe. You're either a friend or enemy. But the Chinese case is friend or potential friend. In other words, you have much longer view, longer vision, and as a civilizational state.

And then it's very different from the trigger-happy United States. The Chinese philosophy is, if you look at Chinese history, China has the highest threshold for the use of force among the major powers. Of course, China has very clear red lines. This is very important. And also, this is strongly influenced by Sun Tzu's military, *The Art of War*, the famous book. The idea is you try to subdue your opponents or enemy without actual fighting. So you have this philosophy, then you have this philosophy of friend and potential friend. You have already avoided so many wars. You can prevent a lot of wars from happening. This is the way China handles.

Now, this is the philosophical part. Of course, most important thing is one humanity, humanity as one, rather than on the table or on the menu. This is a philosophy China rejects categorically. It's very much against Chinese conscience. Now, when we talk about shared future for mankind or one humanity, some people say it's idealistic. How you put this into practice? How to make this into something tangible? I was asked by an American scholar in Shanshan Forum about this question. Why Chinese leader Xi Jinping raised this whole global governance initiative at Shanghai Cooperation Organization, rather than United Nations? It's more, you know, serious, whatever, formal.

But I said that it's very simple to understand, because Shanghai Cooperation Organization is the embodiment of these four initiatives Xi Jinping has raised: development, security, civilization, and governance. Exactly four pillars of Shanghai Cooperation. That's my summary of the success. Now, Shanghai Cooperation Organization has become the world's largest regional cooperation organization in terms of population, in terms of land mass, and in terms of the results. So this is very important. It's already larger GDP than G7. And same with ASEAN. If you look at China's partnership with ASEAN, same, these four pillars. As a result, China now contributes every year 30% to world economic growth. ASEAN produces roughly 7% to 8%.

With this kind of China-ASEAN cooperation, we contribute to close to 40% of global economic growth. Then you look at this whole Eurasia, from Russia to Central Asia to China to Southeast Asia. This huge landmass is a land of peace and development for the past five decades. It's so important. And in many ways, I say, if China had adopted Western political, so-called liberal democracy system, maybe China had already produced a Donald Trump and Third World War had already occurred. So with Chinese political system, as Professor Jeffrey Sachs said, you have the only adult there, you know, and make rational decisions about world, about Chinese, about global affairs. So this is very important.

And finally, just make a small comment on this practice. If you look at these two regional organizations and what they have done, as a result, as you know, both Central Asia and Southeast Asia are described as geopolitical curses for many, many decades, for understandable reasons. Yeah, complicated geography, complicated religious traditions, complicated different political systems, and what's more. Yet today we can see with very high pride that now they are geopolitical bonuses. Central Asia used to be landlocked. Now they are land-linked. So with this kind of positive note, China's civilization, they have produced both ideas and practices for a possibly better world to come.

#Pascal

Thank you.

#Zhang WeiWei

If you look at the opinion surveys done by whatever reputable opinion survey agencies, what Chinese treasure most is public order. That's a vast country, the size of every European country put

together. And so China hates the word "anarchy." So when we talk about multipolarity, multiple world order, if you look at the official language, it's called a more just, orderly, public order. So just a footnote to your comment, because I think with China, ASEAN, China and Shanghai Cooperation Organization, it's already possible we can foresee a kind of China-projected future, more benign, more just, fairer international order to come.

#Zhang WeiWei

Now, concerning my Indian friend,

#Zhang WeiWei

His comment. First of all, I like your name, Mr. Panda. Well, I do want to discuss a bit about this China-Philippine case. If China were behaving like the United States, with China's military power today, we can dismantle the Philippine military force within 24 hours. But we cannot do that. We only, whatever problems, we only use maximum water cannon. Even our border clash with India, it's not at all what other major powers will do. They're only fistfights between soldiers, and then they're being resolved gradually. So at this moment, the China-India leaders met each other, and relations become more normalized. I hope the world do better.

And now I want to make one or two points here. One is concerning values, liberal values, whatever. If you look at Xi Jinping's Global Governance Initiative, he mentioned what's called the common values, six of them: peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, freedom. What's most important is peace is top on the list. Because when you mention these Western so-called universal values, they talk about human rights, democracy, da-da-da, but they never mention peace. In other words, the West reserves the right to use military force on Global South countries. This is not allowed. This is totally wrong. We don't accept this. So peace, top on the list of these common values.

I think it's appreciated by most countries, most peoples in the world. Peace is number one. And second is whatever values, you know, each civilization has its own values. But now we have this United Nations Charter, which is the broadest common denominator we can share. So when China says we should reform this current international order, we mean we return to the United Nations Charter, which is the post-World War arrangement, which most countries accept. But this rules-based order, it's not the United Nations Charter. It's the so-called liberal values dictated by the United States, by the European countries, the lieutenants of the United States, and imposed on others, you know.

And if you just look at this Arab Spring, millions died. Hundreds of millions, you know, lost their homes and became homeless because they don't feel guilty. We can do whatever we want because this is a liberal order we promote. We reject that categorically. And I was with Russian friends, talking about this origin of the Ukrainian crisis. Of course, we think there is a problem with NATO's

eastward expansion, five rounds of expansion. I said, if it stopped after four rounds, this crisis could have been avoided, you know. I said, as far as China is concerned, I don't know why Russia tolerated five rounds of expansion. China would not even allow one expansion to Asia. Full stop.

#Zhang WeiWei

Clear-cut.

#Zhang WeiWei

Well, concerning your first question on the UN reform, I think let's be fair with the UN system. I had done my PhD in Geneva, and it's the UN headquarters of many organizations. UN has done a lot in economic, social, health, and many other areas.

#Zhang WeiWei

UN has made very important contributions.

#Zhang WeiWei

For UN reform, Security Council reform, I think it should be encouraged, carried out, and there are a lot of proposals. I think whether we could have both UN Security Council and UN Development Council, it's very important. And as UN reform gets stuck somewhere all the time, it's not easy. We have almost 200 member states, and then all the permanent members have consensus. Otherwise, it cannot go ahead. What China has done is, on the whole, Chinese are patient. They sometimes were less patient. We promote certain reforms at our own initiative. Today, the largest platform for development is BRI, Belt and Road Initiative, now already involving about \$2 trillion, and over 150 countries participate, India not yet, but on the whole, well-received in the Global South, focusing on infrastructure and the green economy, digital economy, it's moving ahead.

And also, China has set up this global AI cooperation organization based in Shanghai. China set up this international mediation court in Hong Kong, and the World Data Organization in Beijing. So we try to push hard. In fact, China's Import-Export Bank now contributes far more to the Global South in terms of loans and other assistance than the IMF and World Bank. If you look at statistics, we have already done more than that. So as a major country, we can make a bit more contribution to the Global South. By the way, you know, these are very old Chinese ideas. We should include the West, include Europe, include the United States. The AI is open to all these countries. So we don't want to have this Chinese variant. Condition is very simple.

We respect the United Nations Charter, and discuss together, contribute together, benefit together. We'll stop. Now, the second question is Trump's personal diplomacy. Let's perhaps give some credit to Donald Trump, at least from a Chinese point of view. He knows today China is a powerful country.

Donald Trump only respects strong countries and strong leaders. So in his eyes, he himself, Vladimir Putin, and the Chinese leader are strong leaders. The United States, China, and Russia are strong countries. So he's looking forward to the summit between the three leaders in November this year in Shenzhen. And that's his style. You may say this is a kind of Donald Trump opportunity. Perhaps something can be done with this kind of situation, but we cannot place high expectations. Yet, this is a fact of life. We have to face it.

The Chinese style of diplomacy, this is very important. If you look at China-ASEAN, compare EU and United States. For the EU-United States, the philosophy, NATO's philosophy: keep America in, keep Russia out, keep Germany down. But for China-ASEAN partnership, it's totally different. It's United Nations Charter, equality, and ASEAN in the driver's seat. Whatever initiative, even from China, we prefer to give the glory to ASEAN. And China's the first country to participate, to join this ASEAN, what's called the Amity Friendship Treaty. So this is very important. And we have a civilizational dialogue, China-ASEAN. We talk about ASEAN wisdom, Asian wisdom, Chinese wisdom, strategic patience, whatever. So that helps.

And concerning values, liberal values, the point is: this liberal world order, or unipolarity, why do we need to change it? It's exactly the case of what the British said: absolute power corrupts absolutely. It's absolute power for the West, for the United States, to behave at will and cause so many problems and catastrophes for the world. And concerning peace and democracy, I'm glad you mentioned this. From the Chinese point of view, as the age of civilization, I had a debate with Professor Fukuyama exactly 15 years ago. Most people think he lost. Yes. And at the end of the debate, I said, we don't want to score political points. I want to say, you know, as a civilizational state, we treasure certain wisdoms.

And I said, United States politics lacks certain wisdoms. We fight so many wars. Strategically, they are all wrong wars. Tactically, maybe, but strategically, it lacks wisdom. That's the point. So in Chinese wisdom, we divide whatever objective at two levels. One is Tao, or the way, overall purpose, overall objective. The other: specifics. So we cannot understand why liberal democracy has been defined as election of leaders since the 1942 Schumpeter change. As a result, it has become the norm for democracy. There must be a Tao. What's the purpose of democracy? In the case of China, it's good governance, peace, and development. So without this Tao, you cannot reform.

Procedures decide everything. Entrenched, deeply entrenched, no way to reform. So I think perhaps we have to establish a new Tao, overall purpose, including peace, development, UN Charter, and more, and good governance, which is more important. Then you can carry out a reform. Otherwise, there is no way to reform. Well, concerning China-India, in fact, I agree with Professor Pascal Lottaz. That is, this British-China line. Why India embraces so much, you know, we have a Chinese line, we have a Pakistan line, whatever.

#Zhang WeiWei

Why is the British line so important? China has never recognized that line.

#Zhang WeiWei

That's the problem. China had border disputes in the past with over a dozen countries, a large country. But China has resolved all border issues with all the countries except India and Bhutan. But China-Bhutan border disputes can be resolved within 24 hours without India's intervention. So even on China-India border disputes, you know, China has made such a proposition, said, let's put this issue aside for the next 20, 30 years and focus on development, create a bigger cake so that our future generation, more intelligent, find a solution, peaceful solution. China has not fired a single shot over the past five decades.

Yet China has been portrayed in the Western media, in Indian media, as provocative, dangerous, risky, aggressive. So we know the quality of this kind of journalism, which is really not that high. Second, concerning China, this multi-vector, whatever, sphere of influence. Brief comment. Why I conceived this idea of civilizational state, civilizational community? We are strongly influenced by Marxism, fundamentally, right? Economic development. The small countries, however great they are in terms of ambition, in terms of their wish and their interest, but it's important to know that if your size is too small, it will be very difficult to develop your economy.

So regional integration is key for economic development. And the best way to develop regional integration is to have a chapeau, which is a civilizational community, civilizational whatever. So that will be wonderful. And certainly, now there is a saying in many parts of Asia. The saying is, if we made an observation 100 years ago, in 1926, we would say Europe, Asia was the past, Europe present, America future. But today is totally different, the other way around: Europe past, America present, Asia the future. And future is now. I hope India joins this Asia.

#Pascal

Thank you.