

The China-West Dialogue: Toward a Global Order for All

Background Note for Global Solutions Summit “Global Table on the Global Order”

The China-West Dialogue (CWD) is a broad network of thought-leaders from various countries whose purpose is to avoid a bipolar competitive era from emerging due to the toxic bilateral relationship between the United States and China. The central focus of the group is that this problematic relationship is not just an international relations issue or a foreign policy problem but rather is rooted in a clash of national narratives derived from different mindsets and perspectives between the West and China.

Current geopolitical tensions are based on dichotomies between individualism and communitarianism, market versus state driven economies, and democratic and authoritarian modes of governance. By blending these binaries by recognizing that human beings are *both* competitive *and* cooperative, that all economies are mixed economies, and that governance requires a mixture of representation and control, the China-West Dialogue seeks to mediate the centrifugal dynamics involved by deepening understandings of complexities in China-West relations and bringing diverse perspectives to the challenges presented by it.

Pluralizing the US-China relationship by involving Europeans, Canadians, Chinese, Chileans and Americans in the CWD, the network is attempting to defuse the bilateral tensions by reducing the focus on value differences and concentrating instead on the severity of the social challenges that are at the center of the systemic crises revealed by the coronavirus outbreak.

New Concepts for a 21st Century Global Order

The group has advanced new concepts as foundations for a 21st century global order, based on a virtual workshop hosted by the Global Development Policy Center at Boston University at the end of March. (www.bu.edu/gdp)

Chen Dongxiao, a founding member of the CWD and president of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, has proposed that the notion of “multiple narratives” be the dominant discourse for global governance now, replacing the “one size fits all” mantra in international economics during the Bretton Woods era.

Paul Martin, the former prime minister of Canada known as the “father” of the G20, has argued that the members of that group need to accept their differences as they are and focus on the global challenges facing the world.

The CWD principals, Alan Alexandroff, Colin Bradford, and Yves Tiberghien, have proposed that “strategic engagement” describe the mixture of cooperation and competition in geopolitical relations based on “effective multilateralism” (www.thevision20org) and the coordination

imperatives imposed by global challenges, as contrasted with other approaches which are more accepting of the geopolitical rivalries and their implications.

International economist, Colin Bradford, put forward the concept of “mixed economy” pluralism to convey the idea that “all economies are mixed economies” to counter the false dichotomy between free market fundamentalism and state-run economies.

Iain Johnston, Harvard professor of politics and a leading China expert, has argued that the intensity of the current tensions derives from the singularity of the idea that there is only one global order when in fact Johnston has demonstrated there are more than half a dozen global orders. The multiplicity of global orders reveals that the behaviors of China and the US both converge and diverge in complex ways in the different global orders that already exist. Since this is so, the stereotype picture of the US and China spiraling off in diametrically opposite directions gets defanged and opens up to new perceptions of more pragmatic dimensions of the relationship.

Kerry Brown, professor of Chinese studies at King College London, has highlighted governance modalities in China that demonstrate capacities to “embrace contradictions” and “incorporate opposites” which strengthen the representativeness and legitimacy of the ruling party in China.

Awareness of these political complexities and modalities that engaging with China brings forward could help alleviate current tensions by reducing the expectations that conformity and uniformity are necessary hallmarks for 21st century global governance. Regime differences do not necessarily dictate policy differences or predetermine irreconcilable corner solutions that stymie agreements. And agreements on regime types are not necessarily prerequisites for finding common ground in dealing with social progress, pandemics, or climate change.

Challenges Ahead

The call of the China-West Dialogue is to *seize this moment* of maximum public awareness of the inter-connectivity of 21st century life and the social impact of it on the under-represented, under-paid, and under-appreciated, to dig deep, to find empathy and develop solidarity, to forge strategic visions of new futures, to innovate in politics and economics, to imagine new ways to invest in people and in systems that generate social outcomes that are politically sustainable.

This is the central challenge now clearly visible in all our countries. Together, combining our national commitments to addressing social inclusion, human health, and planetary sustainability as the common global purpose, can be the new foundations for a 21st century “global order for all” which can galvanize national efforts and mobilize global cooperation for the benefit of the world’s people.

China-West Dialogue (CWD) Founding Members (*) and Participants

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CHINA – WEST DIALOGUE LINKS:

Boston University: www.bu.edu/gdp/cwd

University of British Columbia: www.thevision20.org

University of Toronto: <https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/program/global-summitry-project/>

Chatham House, London: www.chathamhouse.org/research/regions/asia-pacific/china

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