Ezra Vogel: I wanna welcome all of you to our weekly session of critical issues confronting China. We are so fortunate today to have with us, coming from Singapore, through the technology of Zoom, one of the greatest China historians, Wang Gungwu. He has a long relation with us here in Cambridge. John Fairbank discovered him way back in the 1960s when he was writing Chinese world order. And somebody recommended this very bright, young scholar who had gotten his PhD in London School of Economics, who is writing on the Ming and the relationship of Southeast Asia. So John Fairbank brought us very young scholar into his very early volume on the Chinese world order by Wang Gungwu.

Ezra Vogel: Wang Gungwu has a very unusual background. He grew up in Ipoh, Malaysia, in the 1920s, mainland China decided they wanted to have better Chinese education for some of the overseas Chinese and so they sent to Ipoh a fine scholar who was completely steeped in the Chinese tradition. that was Wang Gungwu's father. So he was the principal of the school to educated Chinese Malaysians and Gungwu had the privilege of being tutored by his father at a very young age and having a depth of a classical Chinese education. That was way before any of the us in the West could have such a comparable education. And then when he finished that, after a few years later, he went to Nanjing University. That was the university that later became Nanjing University. And it was a place just at the end of the Civil War when a lot of the bright, young people who later became leaders in mainland China and Taiwan were studying at the same time as Gungwu. And then after that, Gungwu went to London where he got his PhD, and he's out an extraordinarily distinguished career. And then he just a day or two ago in Singapore accepted the celebration of the new book, which is here, My Home is [Indistinct] Wang did this with his long lifer for over 60 years, Margaret, who unfortunately just passed away shortly before the book came out. So just a couple of nights ago, Gungwu in Singapore was celebrated by all the people who appreciated what he had done.

Ezra Vogel: And not only his Home Is Where We Are, but everybody wanted him. He spent 18 years in Australia and became the director of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies in Australia. And they wanna claim him. Of course, England wants to claim him. We would love to claim him in the United States. And then Hong Kong, after initiating, became the vice chancellor of Hong Kong University for nine years, and in fact, the president of Hong Kong University Then, Wang went to Singapore, or in addition to holding various jobs, I think of him as the Sage wise counselor of the smartest politician in the world, political leader in the world. And that's a position that one Wang Gungwu held, and he also then became, among other things, chairman of the board of Lee Kuan Yew School. I don't wanna take any more time. We're so fortunate that Wang Gungwu is willing to address us as a historian who's had real experience in the real world, and to have him help think about how the Chinese tradition is shaping the future. So without taking any more of your time, come with cheers. Thank you so much for coming.

Nick Drake: Ezra, if I might also jump in and just say anybody who wants to ask questions, we will do questions at the end. There's a Q and A tab in the bottom that you can enter your
Wang Gungwu: Thank you very much. Ezra has concentrated on my past, studying the classics in Chinese literature from my father, but I have to start with one small point. My father was not interested in history and paid no attention to history. So my history education is actually very much a product of the British Colonial University, University of Malaya in Singapore, and after that in London, and so. And then ever since then, I've worked in history departments, which are really of the west Anglo-American tradition, certainly the British Commonwealth tradition of history departments. So my history training is very much more conventional, more like the history training that most American or European students would have got.

Wang Gungwu: So I came to history the wrong way around, so to speak, not from within China, within my father's framework, although he, of course, teaching the classics and literature, there's always something about history, but he never taught me what the Chinese thought about history, or what they really did with their history. So then I came, as a roundabout way, from the kind of history training I received from the Western University. So for me, learning about Chinese history was a kind of voyage of discovery. I was discovering what it was like to think in Chinese historical terms, which they differ from what I was trained to look at. At least that's how I found it.

Wang Gungwu: I found it strange. It took a while for me to grasp it, but there was the obvious things. Why I wanna start with that is because what I mean by political heritage is very much the heritage of the historical state in China, how the politics of power, wealth, of defense, war, empires, all that rooted in the Chinese view of what the past might mean. And there are interesting differences which I discovered for myself. I don't know that they are necessarily the key to it, but it's just how I see it. So when I talk about physical heritage, I have to go back to my own historical experience of discovering how the Chinese thought with certain different premises about the past, which were different from mine.

Wang Gungwu: To begin with, for example, we take for granted the linear nature of history, certainly the idea of a distant past and ancient or medieval or modern and contemporary. All these are modern terms. And we have a time span in that which suggests that things move from distant past, graduates towards us, and each step of the way is meaningful. That those events are done nearer to us, must be more important than those that are further away. And that's what I mean by my understanding of linear approach to history.

Wang Gungwu: When I learned about the Chinese cyclical view of domestic history and so on, I found it strange, but I tried to understand what it meant for the Chinese. And at first, it's very obvious that they do not think in linear terms at all. It doesn't terribly matter how distant the period is, to them what's important is that what is there to learn from the history? The moral lesson, the political lesson probably are even more important than a moral lesson. How does a state flourish? How does it survive when they are attacked? And how it can rise again after having fallen. And these are the lessons that are much more important to them. And they look
upon each period of history as it will stand by itself and be treated as equidistant from our own times. And it depends on what lesson you want to learn. What is it about that past that might become useful to you or meaningful to you and help you deal with the present? And therefore, the linear part did not interest them a great deal.

**Wang Gungwu:** In fact, when I heard the Chinese historians talk in terms the Han and the Tang or the Song and the Ming, very often, as if they will equidistant from us, it really took me a while to grasp what that could mean to the way they thought about their heritage. And so it was in that context that I came to the idea that dealing with the past is so crucial to the nature of the Chinese state and the way it dealt with its problems internally and externally.

**Wang Gungwu:** The fact was, internally, it was very much a continental civilization. The state was developed in the central part of a great river valley system very distant from the sea, and very far away, also, from the deserts and the steps of Central Asia. So somewhere in between, in these great river valleys, especially the Yellow River, this civilization began and they took on the neighboring areas, mainly those which are still very much related, very dependent on agriculture, what they call the land of the sewn, areas of the great river valleys, and increasingly distinctive different from the steppe lands and the nomadic life and the husbandry of the Central Asia and North Asian plains.

**Wang Gungwu:** So from the beginning, their past was couched those terms. A continental power of great wealth and developing high standards of literacy and moral values and ideas of the state and the relationship between the state and its citizens and people, all that was conceived entirely in that framework. And the enemies outside were people who were nomadic, freely roaming the great steppe lands and plains and deserts of Central and North Asia, but constantly threatening to the agricultural areas. And this was cyclical. It was always happening. It happened again and again, back and forth, back and forth. Sometimes the steppe lands won and invaded China and took over, other times the agricultural peasantry pushed back with the state, organizing its own powerful defenses, and so on. And the idea of putting back and forth the rise and fall, or the fall, and then rise again, all these successive dynasties created the basis of their understanding of their world order as they understood it. If you could call it order. So, they took that as a given, that is their norm.

**Wang Gungwu:** Now being trained in the West, I had a completely different view, which probably you are familiar with more than I am. And that is it's very much a civilization rising out of an edit that was both land and sea. I call it the Mediterranean. This nice word. It is Mediterranean, between land and sea. And it was a mixture of different cultures, cultures which depended on the sea and cultures who depend on the land. It had them both, and they mixed, they fought, they developed ideas of city states, develop ideas of empire, and they fought over all kinds of things, including about God, God and gods, as it were. And that in the end became an extraordinary mixture of a very secular, multi-god kind of background with ultimately a monotheistic background, which dominated and eventually conquered the minds and spirits of most of the people in that area.

**Wang Gungwu:** And it was a battle of that time, a battle of ideas at one level, battle of land and sea fighting for supremacy, which always involved, and this is the crucial point, always
involved the sea. It was never fought away from the sea. It always were drawn by the Mediterranean towards that. Firstly, it was also equally threatened from the hoards, as it were, of the Central Asian nomadic peoples, who from time to time also pushed towards them, but they were further away and they were not so threatening most of the time.

Wang Gungwu: Occasionally, as for the Mongols and the Huns and Mongols and Turks and so on, but not as consistently as with the Chinese civilization. So ultimately, their linear approach really sprang from their one God idea. It was that one God that provided them with a very clear line between, as it were, the origins in the beginning, and then towards the day of salvation when everything would come to a glorious end and all that will be understood in the linear terms as a path towards a wonderful, wonderful future. And that linear approach, in the sense of timing and so on, derives from the ultimate victory of the ideational part of the monotheistic phase. But of course, at its base, there was still the many gods that became secular, and the Greco-Roman aspect of it, which ultimately merged the two together so that it had a mix, which was extremely fruitful, very dangerous, and very destructive at the same time, but nevertheless, in the course of fighting and so on, they developed a very distinctive civilization which was fundamentally transformed by what you call the Renaissance, the return of the classical traditions of the Greco-Roman traditions, which actually took over, as it were, from the spiritual side of the monotheistic heritage. And the combination was what created the modern world as we know it.

Wang Gungwu: Now, that's my understanding of the alternative from which I think America today, western Europe derives its strengths, its spiritual strength, as well as its military strength. That maritime part which was extended was, of course, brought about by the fact that they failed on land. They could not really get across to central Asia. They were blocked by their rivals and the fact that they were divided between these two major monotheistic religions that saw each other as dangerous enemies and fought each other virtually to a stand still, and still there after nearly 1500 years, still a division which continues to have to pay attention to. And you, too, in the West have to continue to pay attention to. All that is very foreign to the Chinese mind. They've had nothing to do with that. And when they came across it, as it were, to today they were attracted by it.

Wang Gungwu: And the reason for this is my next point. What do I mean by future progress? Future progress is a oxymoron, in the sense, of first progress means progress to as a future. That's the underlying assumption. But the future progress that I want to emphasize is how it struck the Chinese, because throughout all that domestic cyclical approach towards the past, they never really thought in terms of progress. At least the idea of progress, I cannot find anywhere in the Chinese classical tradition. In fact, if anything, they always look to a glorious past, the golden age, as it were, from which we have deteriorated and we must constantly try revise or return to that glorious past. At least, that is the rhetoric.

Wang Gungwu: In fact, it was not anything like that, but that was a rhetoric. But today what we have is that the Chinese in its context with the west, among the many things learned from the west, the most important ideational thing, I think, is the idea of progress. All the other things seem to me, in a way, to do with science, technology, economic development, wealth creation, capitalism, industrialism, all that, in a way, byproducts of this idea of progress. And
you really have to trace it back to the enlightenment. And if you trace it further back, it has to go back to the beginnings with the Renaissance with the idea of science and how science, the scientific revolution, and how science led on to technological changes that made the industrial capitalism possible. Now, all that flowed from that.

**Wang Gungwu:** And during the enlightenment in the 18th century, the idea of progress took precedent over everything else, be it debates between ancient and modern, as it were, the modern won over and ancient became less and less significant, except to precedents. Little bits to show why the modern is so important and why the modern has some way to go. And the direction that, of course, people argue about that, and you have many, many schools of thought, and the Chinese took the idea of progress very seriously. We started in the early days with people translating from, as Ben Schwartz did long ago, in search of wealth and power, [speaking in a foreign Language] in a way, celebration of this idea that we was getting from Darwinism, social Darwinism, and bringing it to China.

**Wang Gungwu:** And that, of course, took off in the Chinese imagination. And when this host system collapsed, when the Confucian state collapsed, what they'd look to was the Republican capitalist system that was developed in the west with such great success leading to the great national empires that virtually conquered the world, and in fact, globalized the world, particularly through maritime powers, and all that was brought together in their mind and connected to the fact that the west had developed the idea of progress. So the idea of progress caught their imagination right across the board, and in fact, I think that most Chinese, especially those who have gone to modern schools, had any education at all would have been very much attracted to this idea, and actually firmly believe that this is the future.

**Wang Gungwu:** So I call it future progress to underline the fact they link this idea of progress, which is material progress, of course, which can be measured, which can be seen, quantified, and so on, as their future. And this is why I have suggested in my latest book, donned China Reconnects. Why they have actually brought back the sage that they have decided, the sage that will not take the place but compliment the sage of Confucius that they still recognize, they do not deny that, they still recognize, but they link Karl Marx as the sage of progress because it was Karl Marx who, in dev terms, scientifically developed the idea of progress as a clear set of stages which are very clear. Marx draws out the road, the path towards the future. That future may be a utopian or otherwise. That doesn't terribly matter. The fact is that the future now is what it means.

**Wang Gungwu:** The past then takes a different shape and meaning for the Chinese mind. Why they've also not only not discarded the past, but actually turned around to say, "Maybe the past is not that irrelevant after all." The past may not have understood the idea of progress, but the past provided them with a stable sense of security, a sense of continuity, and the sense that you may succeed and fail, you may fall, but you will rise again. And this can happen again and again, provided you believe that you can rise again. The fall is never forever. We're not like those ancient civilizations that once fallen, belong to museums, and thereafter can be forgotten, written about with great pleasure and enjoyment, but not relevant to the present. China's past is different. It is alive. It's meaningful to us, and we have much to learn from it. And it's not just represented by Confucius.
Wang Gungwu: Confucius simply is a symbolic figure to remind us that that past is important. That past actually comes from the way it records the experiences of all the various centralized bureaucratic states that have survived, fallen, and risen again, at least four times in the last 2,000 years. And in that context, those records of the experiences of those states that rose and fell, and then rose again after having fallen, and in fact, even after a terrible fall, like for example, the end of the Song Dynasty, the complete conquest of Mongols, the Chinese never experienced that before. No corner of China was not part of the Mongol empire. That was an unprecedented. They didn't know how to explain that. Of course, what they did was, ultimately, they couldn't explain it, but they simply incorporated, ran history into that elastic system, and to enable them to fit in into the continuities that they understood and would provide them with a sense of security about how the past is always meaningful, has always been meaningful to them, and will continue to be meaningful to them.

Wang Gungwu: The brick that came, that cost them, in fact, considerable difficulty with dealing with this past was, in fact, at the beginning of the 20th century, a group of historians in China agreed and completely accepted that modern history for China began in 1840s, began with the Opium War, the opening of China to the West, that decision, I can't find out exactly who started it all and how it got fixed, but it was fixed by the May 4th Movement. It was already generally accepted. And certainly in the 1920s and '30s when the rivalry between the nationalists and the communists turned into a civil war. Both sides completely agree, among the historians and both sides, completely agreed that modern history began in the 1840s. And that was fine because having accepted that, they started to rewrite the history accordingly. Then, you have Zhongguo jindaishi you have modern history of China all starting about 1840s, thereabout. And that went quite well.

Wang Gungwu: It fitted into when the nationalists fell, and the Anglo American [indistinct] western tradition was abandoned and they turned to Marxist, Leninist, Stalinist, they started historiography, and the rewrote history again, in a different framework. When they did that, they still maintained that modern history began in the 1840s. Maybe blurred it a little bit about how capitalism began and included parts of the 18th century in their explanation, but ultimately, they were accepting that modern history began in 1840s. Now that created a big problem in the end. Probably for them because, as those Harvard would be very familiar with, and this is an example, there are many other many other challenges to this approach.

Wang Gungwu: In fact, from the very beginning, as it were, when people like Paul Cohen and others were questioning the Fairbank challenge and response, they were already referring to dates that were earlier, which cannot be fitted into this modern period, of course, starting from 1840, and the internal dynamics of Chinese past was functioning under the surface of western imperialism. All that, of course, they took into account, but the fact that you were able to show through the re-interpretation of Qing history that something was missing in their Chinese history writing, whether it was under the nationalist or under the communist, something was missing by having abandoned the dynastic histories.

Wang Gungwu: I think we all are familiar with the fact that the Manchu loyalists did try to write a Qing history Turned out to be a draft history. And the Guomindang also tried to write
Qing history, but never really quite convinced themselves or anybody else that they could get it right. And interestingly enough, about 20 years ago, people like Dai Yi at Renmin Daxue, and so on called on a big team to rewrite the whole of Qing history, which they've spent the last 20 years, I believe there are hundreds of historians involved in this to try and rewrite Qing history. This is simply just a historical interest and a curiosity only to academics or something more than that.

**Wang Gungwu:** Now, I actually have come to the conclusion that the difficulty they have with the Qing history and the idea of modern history starting 1840, has got them into a very big, you might say, paradoxical situation where they can't quite explain the continuities of Chinese history clearly or in an accepted way that everybody could agree on, unless they can sort this one out. Now, this may not happen. It may take a long while. But what I think has happened in the last few decades, particularly since that the Deng Xiaoping reforms, in the attempt to, on the one hand, abandon the straightforward Leninist, Stalinist, or the other thing, abandoning that, and then learning from the historiography that had been developed in the mainstream historiography of west, apparently, ultimately Eurocentric in its origins, but nevertheless universalized by the modern historians.

**Wang Gungwu:** Taking all of that, and yet at the same time wondering how to merge them, how to bring the sense of continuity into that story without this filling this gap between the end of the Ming and the 1840s. It was simplifying, but it was a really difficult question that was left unanswered in the Chinese minds. Now, the west has no problem with that. For historians, and some were fantastically creative and extraordinarily eye opening, and they are actually in accordance with their linear history. They have actually done it in that context and therefore, the whole rhetoric, the whole language of history writing has been couched in those terms, the Universalist terms, that modern historiography as we know today, accept; and the Chinese have found that to be a very difficult proposition when it comes to that Ming, Qing period. And I'm giving you this as an example. There are many other things. Crucially, and this, I think, is the turning point.

**Wang Gungwu:** The recognition that during the period from about 1949 to 1990s or up to 2000, they really did not know how to handle the past, even the immediate past, of the 18940s to the present, and the fact that they did not want simply to see it as complete breaks with the Ching and the Qing and the dynastic Confucian state, and then complete break with the liberal nationalist or pseudo illiberal nationalist Guomindang period, and then to go and to try and explain where the Maoist 40 years, or 30, 40 years came from, all that was extremely difficult to explain away or to fit into any kind of theoretical ideological frame. And I think in that context, we found it returning to a Chinese sense of continuity with the past to recognize that all that in the past is relevant to what is happening today, and that you need to understand that all is one leading to the other, even as you couch it in linear terms it has to be couched also at the same time in the context of the people who made the history at the time.

**Wang Gungwu:** So if you're going to go back to thousands of years and you claim that this is an ancient civilization with this long past, do we simply say that all of this futile, as we used to call it, futile, and therefore irrelevant, and therefore can be set aside or can been read for pleasure and enjoyment, and from time to time, learn a lesson or two from it, but not really all
that important to what is happening today and the future that China has ahead of it. If you do that, something was missing. That's, I believe, how most the Chinese have been feeling all this while, and you can see that in even some of those contemporary, political scientists in China when they are talking about the politics of the state in China today, or about international relations, how often they go back to look at the warring stage, look at the beginnings of the Qing Han period, and to go back because they find themselves unable to explain a lot of things that are happening in China without referring to all those developments in the past, from which they still feel there are lessons for the Chinese people today.

Wang Gungwu: Now that seems intangible. I can't pin it down. I can't say for certain where it comes from and why it is so persistent and why it is so strong, in fact, why it is being restored and encouraged today. And I don't think it's only a nationalism. It's more than that. It is almost a spiritual need, an emptiness that needs to be filled. I got the sense from the fact that, at the end of Mao Zedong's period, when they he had succeeded in turning away from the past, at least openly, destroying everything from the past, the literati traditions, all the Confucian, the temples, and all the historical remains of the past to try and have a fresh start and be continuously revolutionary. While he was doing that, he was also rejecting the west, even the heretical west of Soviet Russia. They're not just rejecting the liberal bourgeoisie capitalist west. They're also rejecting the heterodox or the heretical Soviet West.

Wang Gungwu: And having done that, if you reject your own past, the immediate past of the Soviet period, and then the earlier paths of the liberal nationalist, or capitalist period, of bourgeoisie period, what have you left? And I think this left, at the beginning of the Deng Xiaoping reforms, left the historians as they came out of their sheds and their hideouts and tried to write the history again, and when they turned to the west to try and catch up with the historical writings that had been making progress over the last few decades, they just caught up with the social sciences and all the other things that had added and enriched the historical field and generally made historiography much more sophisticated. As they're learning all that, they you realize that they cannot do away with the long historical past.

Wang Gungwu: They have to use that to try and understand where they're coming from and what sense of direction would they have about the future. Again, I'm simplifying in the brief period, in the few minutes I have, that I would simply say that this is where the political heritage and the idea of progress, or future progress, underlined the future part is coming together in order to make the whole story of China meaningful. In fact, we try and define what is China. A question which many of you all familiar with, and this is not a question only in the west. You can now very seriously argue it in China.

Wang Gungwu: All this, of course, has created a new sense of the past. If you don't know enough about the past, what do you know about China? What is China? And in fact, for Chinese, the word China doesn't actually exist or is very meaningful. I remember having a great deal of trouble trying to translate the word China into Chinese. There are so many ways you can do that. The most, of course, common today is Zhongguo, but that is probably the most misleading of all. Zhongguo has so many layers of meaning that I have difficulty myself being sure what I mean by Zhongguo at any one point. And certainly one thing is quite clear. If you use the modern rhetoric of universal mainstream history then Zhongguo today or Zhongguo ren
today, meaning a Chinese must be from the borders of a country or a nation, defining United Nations as a nation, with the borders of China of the people's Republic of China. Unless you belong to the people's Republic of China, you really are not Zhongguo.

**Wang Gungwu:** And indeed, politically, as you can see in the debates between Huangnan and Taiwan historians and historians in China, they have problems with the word Zhongguo. These are similar to the background to it. So even with translating, it's Zhongguo and that's so new. When I was learning about modern Chinese history, I was so struck by the fact that we use the word Zhongguo really for the first time right at the end of the 19th century, and largely because of influence of Japanese historiography of China, that we finally brought to the fore books which have title Zhongguo something. And for example, one of the first thing that caught my mind, and a book that influenced me a great deal, was zhengshe Zhongguo renminshi and you've got three volumes of it. And then you call it Chinese civilization.

**Wang Gungwu:** Zhongguo renminshi is not the shi of all of those dynasties or how they went up and down because each dynasty had his own emphasis in different stresses on different parts of what was glorious. But now he's got Zhongguo renminshi with a continuity from way back to Xia-Shang-Zhou down through the present. And I remember Zhongguo. That was when it caught my attention. Zhongguo all the way back. It's always been Zhongguo. And that raised a question mark in my mind. And I confess, I've been swinging back and forth on when and where to use Zhongguo when I'm in China. So that illustrates some of the problems, some of the dilemmas that modern Chinese face, but to come back to firelight, just the last few minutes, just to say that this idea of the heritage, I emphasize a political heritage because that's where the state, the history of that state, and how that dominates the minds of all the thinkers and the literate people of China remains a very powerful factor today, and how it is linked to the future, because it's to them the most brilliant idea of that should be progress.

**Wang Gungwu:** And there's no question about golden age. Things will be better in the future than in the past has caught the imagination of every Chinese, and the fact that science and technology, material progress is measured in wealth and ultimately to wealth, to power, all that is all linked together with the idea of progress makes it even more important. It isn't just a brilliant idea. It is a reality that we must aim for. That progress must be ensured so that China will always be better than it is today. And it will be better than it is today is something that is worthwhile at all costs. Now what really is a crucial part is that when you believe in that idea of progress, how do you deal with the past? And this, I think, is what is now engaged in a lot of Chinese writers, thinkers in China today, and they want to enable the people of China, and of course the Chinese state already assumes that to be a desirable goal, but to enable the people of China to reimagine the whole of China contain or at least explain in terms of this continuity from this, what I call the deep rooted past, and reconnect it with a new world order in which there would be progress. But this progress is not a fixed thing.

**Wang Gungwu:** Incidentally, this is also another thing which I think is important to bear in mind. The idea of progress is linked to the idea of change. The Chinese have always believed in change, but change did not be linear. It could be cyclical. But nevertheless, there will always be change and you must always be prepared to change, adapt, rethink what to do. The future is even more so, that there will be change. You do not know what changes will come, necessarily.
You hope certain things will occur, certain things would not occur or reoccur, but you know that there will be change. Change is inevitable, it's the norm, and we must be constantly ready to deal with change. And when change occurs and you see the change, then you must be prepared to rethink what to do, rearrange things, nothing is fixed. Everything can be renegotiate when you recognize the conditions have changed. And when you link up that fundamental idea that the Chinese have with the idea of progress, you're gonna see how that is driving the Chinese today.

Wang Gungwu: On the one hand, essential, it will get better, but at the same time, recognizing that it's not a moving target. It's continually moved and you constantly got to adjust to it and make preparations for change, and whatever change occurs, you must be prepared to deal with it. And that, I think, is governing the whole thing. And I think this is what is shaping what I call the China challenge to the west, particularly, specifically to the United States today. And that is that United States would like to believe that they have set up a global world order, which is not ideal, but as good as it can be. And it did out of wars, maybe, very cruel, terrible wars, but after that, they had learned from it, and they have helped the world to understand its ideal global order, which we should do our best to sustain, maintain, protect, defend against possible enemies and rivals and competitors, and so on.

Wang Gungwu: And I think this part is where the tension begins. When one decides that this is it, and you must all conform to it or at least accepted as being the standard by which we should all behave, and thereafter, keep it that way so that we can keep the peace in the world. And those, when they see, there's people who say, "Hang on. There will be changed surely. And when things change and conditions change we must be prepared to change accordingly." In other words, things are manmade. It's all done by us, as human beings through states, through armies, navies, to wealth, to capital, corporate power, whatever it is. But we bring about change. Science and technology changes all the time. And as we change, we must be ready to reconsider, rethink the whole framework, or for that matter, rethink the new world order, if and when necessary.

Wang Gungwu: Now that part, I think, is creating a lot of challenge, lots of difficulty, and a lot of tension. And you can see the China challenge comes from the fact that it continues to feel that this is moving target, improving, offering greater and better world to come. And the other side, saying, "We've got that already. We're pretty, nearly perfect. It's universal. We've discovered the universal values common to all humankind. We all share it. Don't ruin it. Don't spoil it by trying to change anything." Now this is, again, I simplify it, but I wanna draw attention to why the China challenge is looked at so seriously by people in America today. Thank you.

Ezra Vogel: Gungwu, thank you for that wonderfully broad, deep analysis. One of the things, of course, that we westerners now worry about is the Chinese are thinking about progress. And the question that a lot of westerners are wrestling with is does progress mean that the Chinese progress surpasses that of progress of the west? And I wonder if you have any thoughts about the Chinese now thinking of progress? Obviously progress China is progressing and match China's progress with the rest of the world.
Wang Gungwu: I think the obvious differences, the idea of progress may not be the same, but what is even more striking is that the way of achieving it could be very, very different indeed. And this is where the political heritage comes in. I didn't wanna go into that for the political heritage of the west. Heritage of the west includes being immersed in the ideal city States who had freedom for citizens, citizenry, their civilization is urban, that it has political relationships, which are fundamentally based on the individual rights, protected by law. All of these things have been put together in a very logical and, I think, very complete framework, which stands by itself. The Chinese act outside that framework. They hadn't had the same experiences. Their experiences are just the opposite. If anything, they see the experiences in terms of being unified, having a stronger state, which can keep the place together against the marauding enemies to come constantly threatening this civilization and that, when they're divided, they're almost always taken advantage of.

Wang Gungwu: And then bits of vision pieces get conquered, and from time to time, they get totally conquered. And so the context is so different that you get a defensive sense of protecting something, you prepare for war or you war in order to protect what you have, but you don't wanna over-extend yourself and get yourself into unnecessarily trouble because in the end, you're just wanting to protect what you have. Whereas the other side of it is a continual division because it is the very strength of the Mediterranean political heritage is that out of division, they made progress. It's another side of it. You made progress because you fought each other, become better for fighting each other, better organized, better weaponry better methods for making money, and so on, to competition, division, continuing to debate, and guaranteeing the rights of people to have the right to say this or do that, participate. You have developed a completely different tradition, which of course, at the top, you have a single God, which looks after everything, before which all men are equal. These are ideal for... Chinese can't understand the hierarchical system. These are so alien to the hierarchical system. But in your system, you've taken that for granted that every individual is equal before God, at least in most of the face that I understand from the west.

Wang Gungwu: Now, these are so fundamentally different. Now, whether they play part in the political heritage or not depends on different times in different countries and what role they play. But the kind of competition and rivalry and ultimately, it's more than competition, it's deadly rivalry between the two interpretations of God itself has been a major factor in determining the shape of the Mediterranean history and it's extensions across the Atlantic, and so on. All that has been rooted in something that is based on a historical experience, a set of experiences that are totally alien to the Chinese, and how they can reconcile, how can they understand that and incorporate all that into interpretation of Chinese history, I think has foxed them and they're, in a way, giving up. And they're now going back to their own understanding of the historical past to help them deal with the future, deal with the kind of progress that they now want for themselves.

Wang Gungwu: That's that's about all I can see in how the Chinese see it. I don't see them as actually trying to challenge the west. I really don't. I know it can be interpreted that way, but I see that as primarily their way of learning from the west, the science, the technology, the idea of progress, having learnt all that then the question is, does that now overtake and take over from their own historical continuities and lead them in a direction which is more like yours and into
the kind of competitive rivalry that will lead wars and continued division in order to better yourself. That's the only way you can improve yourself is a fight and debate, as it were. And the Chinese really, I think, shudder at the thought of that as their future, but they don't know what to do. They want to catch up, they want progress. They're now doing very well by becoming a maritime power because that's what they missed. They found that the lack of maritime power was the source of their ultimate destruction, as it were, in the 19th and early 20th century, and that we must never make that mistake again.

Wang Gungwu: That kind of thinking is now, I think, very, very strong, and they have now found out that whole economic progress of the last few decades depends on this freedom of the seas and the maritime free market economy that is based on maritime access to markets and to resources. So where else can they go? So the belt and road initiative is just a double headed way of approaching it because they're both continental and maritime. They got to have both directions. But as they see it, it just enabled them to defend what they've successfully incorporated from the west into this new state capitalist system that they now treasure, and believe is a secret of their success.

Wang Gungwu: So I make one final point about this is that I'm not sure that there's any ideological difference between the Chinese and the Americans today. There's not really. I know people use the word. I don't think the Chinese use the word much, but you use a word, but ultimately, now it's a competition of systems. They have developed two systems. One system, both of them, identically, derive both these systems and derive from the industrial capitalism of post enlightenment west. The Chinese have taken that on, but it has taken them in a different kind of state structure with a different political heritage. And then, as a result of which the idea of progress itself is guided by the particular heritage they have. So the idea of progress itself may also divert from the idea of progress that the Mediterranean civilizations would have.

Wang Gungwu: But these are, I think, negotiable positions because if you accept that these are part and parcel of the world changing over time, and the changes are normal and bound to happen, and we must be prepared to renegotiate when things change. If that is accepted as a fundamental starting point, then at first, everything is manageable. But if they don't and the system say, "It's either this or that," then of course. But I think the Chinese are not saying it's gotta be our system. What they are saying is, "Respect our way of doing things. We understand the new global order. It has to be capitalistic, with some socialist goal in the sense of sharing, being fair, being equitable in some abstract way," but actually they're no more equitable than any other capitalist country that I know. So given that fact they're not all that enthused about the ideological aspects of it at all. In fact, I don't believe the Chinese people are ideological, not seriously so. However, mushy [indistinct]. Ultimately, they're more interested in the system that protects them, defends them, and would make them more wealthy and more powerful in the end.

Ezra Vogel: You have attracted today our best modern historians. And so I like to call on each of them to make a comment. And then, if they were like to ask a question. We have Mike Szonyi from Ming, we have Mark Elliott from Qing, and we have Bill Kirby from the Republican period. So we'll go in chronological order. Mike, your comment, and if you wanna ask your questions. We can't hear you.
Wang Gungwu: I can't hear you.

Ezra Vogel: Okay. Is he unmuted? Mark, is he unmuted?

Michael Szonyi: How about now?

Ezra Vogel: Okay, okay.

Michael Szonyi: All right, sorry about that. I think we were both hitting on mute simultaneously. Professor Wang Gungwu, thank you so much for such a thought-provoking talk. It's such an honor to host you here at Harvard. We wish we could do it in person, but this will have to do. Ezra left out, I think, one minor detail in your biography and it sort of falls to me to wish you a belated happy birthday. You have already outlived Confucius by 18 years. So we don't know what Confucius would say he was doing at 90, but I think it's a good bet that he would say at 90, he would say, "Wang Gungwu's doing a good job."

Wang Gungwu: I dare not add anything to what Confucius said.

Michael Szonyi: It felt a little bit like a return to the past, looking at the lack of gender diversity on the screen. But I see that our interim director, Winnie Yip, has now joined us. It reminds us we need to try hard on this issue. So it's my job, it falls to me to, I suppose, pose a question about the Ming, but you only actually mentioned the Ming in two sentences, if I'm not mistaken. So I'm gonna ask a slightly different question. You talked a little bit in your presentation about the very fruitful exchange between scholars from China and scholars from the United States, including Philip Kuhn and Paul Cohen and so on in presenting new new approaches to how we think about whether Chinese history is linear or cyclical.

Michael Szonyi: In a piece that you published a few days ago, you use the term pluralist sinology. And I think that that really describes what you were talking about today. I'm frankly, very worried, and I think a lot of us here today are very worried that we may be moving away from a pluralist sinology towards what we might call a decoupled sinology, simply by virtue, not as an intellectual move, but simply by virtue of the larger political shifts.

Michael Szonyi: And so my question for you is what should we be saying to political leaders, both in the United States and in China, about the merits of a pluralist sinology? It's easy for political leaders in both countries to see the benefits of a decoupled sinology, where the different scholars in the two countries serve the political agendas of the leadership. But what's the argument to the leaders of our two countries for the utility and benefit of continuing and promoting and maintaining this wonderful plural sinology that you and many of the faces I see on this call have devoted so much of our lives to? Thank you.

Wang Gungwu: Actually, that's a very, very good question indeed. Actually, you use the word decoupled. I've hesitated to use it. The reason for why I hesitated is because I believe that nobody actually wants a decoupled sinology or decoupled history. In fact, the Chinese actually accept the days, a universal history by the beginning of the 20th century. They were very much
thinking along those lines. If you look at all the historians... So out the 20th century, whether they were nationalists, bourgeois or Stalinist, Maoist, they all accept that there's one history. They may not agree about how that history is explained or understood, but they accepted that there's only one history for all of us. And that the only argument was, and I think this is very old, where there's Eurocentric or sinocentric. There's that argument. But it was never a decoupled. It was simply an argument of your starting point, how you look at that history, but there was no need to decouple it.

Wang Gungwu: And the decoupling actually comes from, I would say, power differences, power rivalries, that it's not among the historians, nor even among the political leaders in their own normal thinking. But when they talk about decoupling between two rival systems and the fruit and threats to one another, if you put it in those terms, then the word decoupling, of course, comes out. It's likely the trade war is what I think led to us to use the term decoupling more and more, and the decoupling of technologies, and what that would mean to all of us. But I think you're right to say that there is now use of the word ideal decoupling in history, which is, I think, interesting. And it comes really from the most obvious differences right at the beginning. I remember as a young student in one of the books that influenced me a great deal when I was starting off was Rupert Emmerson's book "From Empire to Nation."

Wang Gungwu: As a political scientist book, it's not a history. But what he described was when all these empires were decolonizing and all of the empires, the nationalist, imperialists went home, the rest of us became nations and 150 nations came out of the dozen or so empires of the previous century. So suddenly we are now a world of nations. And in fact, the whole post-war ideal was there will be a family of nations, all equal, like individuals, equal before the eyes of God. It's that kind of ideal. Obviously untrue, but nevertheless an ideal as a system, of a way of legal protection of the small and the weak nations. Very welcomed to all the small ones. The big ones, of course, not too happy. So they had some reaching of powers and so on. We can see that the empire to nation stage was a crucial stage, and this is what I think is worrying to Chinese, because what happened was, as you know, the Chinese Republic of China in 1912 inherited the Qing Empire, and the reasons for that, very complex.

Wang Gungwu: I won't go into that, but it was something that was necessary because nobody would recognize Sun Yat-sen's Nanjing government because it didn't control the whole empire. Whereas all the embassies in Beijing would recognize the Qing emperor, and hence, handover to Yuan Shikai that allowed the application to occur so that it was legitimately handed over Qing power to the Republic of China. Now, having done that, you have now created a Republic of China that is given a border. This border, not totally accepted, as you know, the Mongols immediately broke away. And I think the Tibetans assumed they were different, but nevertheless, internationally, the map of Qing, the Qing map was adopted as a map of the Republic of China.

Wang Gungwu: And this is now a sovereign nation in the eyes, indeed, in national language, as well as in the eyes of the Chinese. They're a sovereign nation. This is one state. But ever since then, from day one, Mongolia and Japanese and Russian ambitions in Manchuria, Russian ambitions in Turkistan, Anglo-Russian rivalries and the great game over Tibet, as well as
Xinjiang, all that immediately make this idea of a sovereign nation state called the Republic of China a big question mark, already challenged from the beginning.

**Wang Gungwu:** But nevertheless, all that time, every nation, including the United Nations, recognized the borders of China, never questioned it. But all that time, without stop, there were efforts undermine it. It started with the Japanese and Manchu, the obvious ones, the Russians are all over the place in the Cyrus, and even the communists, when they abandoned the idea for a little while. Before long, they were intervening in exactly the similar sort of way. And the British passed on the tradition to the Indians to take on the responsibility of Tibet. And that has created a series of problems down to the present. So we can see from the beginning, the Chinese were never free from the idea that this transition from empire to nation did not apply to China. Somehow, Republic of China was the empire of China. And this, I think, is a threat on China all the time. So even the question of Taiwan is actually seen in that larger context because in 1945, Taiwan was part of that sovereign state, again, recognized by everybody till 1971, until the PRC became part of the United nations and Taiwan was kept separate, and no longer...

**Wang Gungwu:** But even then, internationally, all the countries have recognized the people's Republic of China, except that the borders of China, include Taiwan, with a few exception. Now, the Chinese say, "What does that mean? You say we are a sovereign state with a border, internationally accepted. And yet all that time, every effort is made to try and undermine it and undo it, unravel it, as it were, and carve it up again." And this is something that has been a threat from day one, or actually, from 1912 down to the present. I don't think the Chinese can get round it. And to them, this is because that single universal history, which is Eurocentric, has rewritten the whole of history in terms of empires and nations for the modern times, and that everything's got to fit into. If you're not an empire anymore, you've got to be a nation state. If you're a nation state still looks like an empire, something is wrong. We must break it up.

**Wang Gungwu:** Now, if that is the logic, and regard it as legitimate logic to change the conditions on the ground, the Chinese must feel terribly frightened all the time. And Taiwan is an obvious case because this is a singularly distinctive case, but all related, and the Chinese say, "This will never end." And the way it is building up today, even more so, every moment of the day the threat is on. Every item every day in the newspapers, there's something other which really suggests the bits of China which shouldn't be part of China. And that's constant. And I don't think it really has stopped, no. That is decoupling in fact, if not even in theory. Already a kind of decoupling. How could the Chinese accept a world history, a new world history, which allows that to happen as something legitimate and even good? It is humane. It's humanitarian. It is protection. It's an intervention, protective intervention.

**Wang Gungwu:** All that becomes justified in legal terms, international law terms. And all this simply increases the pressure on the Chinese to say, "Something is wrong. How can we go on like that?" So your word, decoupling, I think comes out of that. It's no longer a trade war question. It's so deep now, it goes back to this question of linking your deep rooted past to a new world order. How can you reconcile the two?
**Ezra Vogel:** Mark Elliott is, as you know, someone who's done a lot of work on the Qing, and also on the Manchu roll in the Qing. Mark?

**Mark Elliott:** Thank you, Ezra, and Professor Wang. It's good to see you. Thank you again so much for joining us this morning, or this evening, depending on where you are. There's so much here to talk about. I'm having a hard time deciding how to frame this, but when you've talked about the Qing history project, the Qingshi gongchang which, as you point out, was begun nearly 20 years ago, and we have yet to see any of the many pages that were certainly written, but have yet to be published. And the reasons for that are reasons that... There's lots that we could say about that, but actually I think I'm gonna ask you to say a little bit more about the China challenge and about the role of overseas Chinese. 'Cause this is something about what you have written a lot, and you've lived that life yourself.

**Mark Elliott:** So you mentioned the China challenge as a challenge for the United States a challenge for Japan, I suppose, for Europe, for many places. Would you agree that the China challenge, it sounds to me as if you would, the China challenge is also a challenge for China, trying to understand where it is in its history right now. And we are in the middle of another process, it seems to me anyway, and you, I think, were alluding to this, another process of re-imagining what China is. And I have the very same trouble as you when I talk about China in Chinese. What word do I use? It's so context dependent. That's another kind of a China challenge, I guess. But if we look in the past, and I was just reading again your 2013 book, "Renewal," in which in the very end you offer a really interesting survey of the role that overseas Chinese played in the re-imagining of China in the early 20th century, and you talk about people whose intellectual profiles are not so unlike your own, people like Wu Hong Ming and others as well.

**Mark Elliott:** And my question for you is, and you mentioned Marx. So Marx was obviously important in the re-imagination of China in 1949. Clearly the pressures are great to make this re-imagining work. You've alluded to some problems with that. What role do you see that overseas Chinese or outside forces might play in helping in this instance of a re-imagining of China, of addressing this China challenge? The Mongols helped remake China once, the Manchus did it, Marx did it. It's often an outside force that comes in to shape things in very fundamental ways. What is that outside force right now? What role? Is it overseas Chinese? Is it students who've done their education abroad and they've come back? I'm just curious to know if you have any thoughts on this.

**Wang Gungwu:** That's a lot of questions there. I have to say that in a way I can't handle this, except to say how much has changed. What has changed? The idea of overseas Chinese has changed so many times. It's so confusing, partly because of that. It began when they were offered. Nobody in China cared about overseas Chinese. The Ming and Qing couldn't care less. To them, they were illegal immigrants and they ran away from home. Buxiao bujing buzhong buxiao So why do you care about them? Whatever happened to them? They got killed or intermarry. You had absorbed and assimilated with others. What does it matter to us? We've got plenty of people anyway. We won't miss them. I think a long time, that was it. And it was not until then again, interesting now, this comes back to the ultimate challenge for the Chinese is that it had to be something from outside.
Wang Gungwu: And when the Chinese were asked about when the Chinese got massacred in Manila or were massacred in Java, Batavia, but a Chinese emperor basically said, "Well, too bad. Sorry to hear that, but what's it gotta do with us?" kinda thing. That's what it was. And yet, it was in the 19th century, you have the opening of China. And then suddenly, swarms of Chinese went out, largely encouraged by the external forces. There's labor, there's coolies, there's entrepreneurs, as a gold rush adventurers. All directions, and they were all sailing no longer in Chinese chunks, in great danger, traveling in good western ships, the British steamers were taking them all over the world. And not only British, others, and traveling in much better, safer condition, but they went everywhere. And the Chinese didn't know what to do to begin with. At the beginning, they questioned the roles. This is not proper. They challenged it.

Wang Gungwu: But in the end, they recognized, they discovered, I think, a very famous report. I've forgotten which ambassador it was, a minister to Britain past through Singapore in the Malaya states and reported that these guys are rich. They're entrepreneurs in Indonesia, in Batavia, and in Manila. They're pretty rich. They got money. And the Chinese are very poor. And these guys should be asked to invest in China. And also, many of them are very modern. They understood about modern capitalism. They knew about finance. They knew about investments. And they understood the western styles of doing things, knew a lot about western law. They should be encouraged to help us develop China, in their home towns, at least.

Wang Gungwu: And then of course, the opening of the treaty ports brought some many of them back. Some of the famous shops, as you remember, the shopping malls in Shanghai were created by a bunch of Australian Chinese. I forgot. Sincere company, those companies. And a lot of them. To Hong Kong, to the treaty ports. They were coming back and they were showing how not only had the money and the skills, they also had tremendous entrepreneurship, tremendous networks out there. And the Qing government paid attention. They started to send out council generals and establish connections and the Chinese welcomed them, because at that time there was no clear idea of what his nationality.

Wang Gungwu: That is why this word, nation, is a real distraction for all of us because it really is a post 1945 creature. Before that, all the nations were all in western Europe, and there were only small number of them. But after 1945, it became a global thing. And the whole world is struggling to decide to find out what it means, what the responsibilities of each nation is, and how each nation should deal with each other. And applying this international law invented after the Congress of Vienna to apply to everybody has actually confused people more than help. People are just trying to learn, "How does it work for us? So if we only started after 1945. How does it work for us?"

Wang Gungwu: And in any case, many of the principles of international law were based on Christian civilization. It was actually defined as such because it was among Christian nations, and non-Christian nations were actually only reluctantly accepted since the 20th century as being part of the international system thanks to America with the League of Nations and then the United Nation. So this is also very new. So the idea of overseas Chinese, what were they? Theoretically, they were stateless. They didn't belong to anybody. The Qing government didn't recognize them officially. Not until 1893, the ban was lifted. Then it was officially recognized
that they were Chinese citizens of some kind. And it was not until 1909 that the law was passed in China that this Jus sanguinis law, which said anybody born of a Chinese father, Chinese father, not even mother, a Chinese father was a Chinese.

Wang Gungwu: That's as late as 1909. So what do we mean by all this Chinese? There's no such concept. The beginnings of it, that's why some people trace it to Sun Yat-sen is to be linked up with the beginning of Chinese nationalism. The Sun Yat-sen needed help. And when Xingzhonghui in Hawaii, "Oh, we are all Chinese," and you always say, "You're just Chinese." And therefore we have the right to fight for our cause, for the Chinese cause, and throw out the damn Manchus. That's the kind of language they used, which were very popular among the southerners. For Guangdong people, particularly. Many of them were, unfortunately, suffered under the Qing. They probably would have suffered under the Ming, but they'd forgotten that, but they suffered under the Qing and they remembered that. The Manchus, we gotta get rid of them. So, Sun Yat-sen made a lot of headway. Kang Youwei, when he fell, he made a little headway among the Chinese. Although they were not anti-Manchu so much as for a stronger China who can protect them. So there were really a variety of motives behind why Southern Chinese supported what was happening in China, and such other Chinese couldn't care less what has happened in China.

Wang Gungwu: They were abandoned anyway, so what do we care? So already the divisions were clear, but as the Chinese nationalism progressed, it became clearer to some Chinese that there were advantages in being recognized as Chinese. Having a Chinese nationality gave you some advantages for doing business in China, to going back to China and to be respected as a citizen of this country called the Republic of China. So the nationalism added to that and the introduction of modern Chinese schools among those overseas Chinese, right across the board after the Republic of China led by the Guomindang, the Sun Yat-sen followers. That was tremendous. The modern Chinese schools were introduced into China were introduce at roughly the same time among all overseas Chinese, maybe a few years later, not much more than that.

Wang Gungwu: So it was almost simultaneously nationalism in China and then the modern schools among the [indistinct] And they were linked together, the ministry of education in Nanjing, under the Guomindang, directly supervised, and in fact, encouraged more and more schools to be developed. My father was one of those, encouraged to go out and teach to Chaozhou Chinese. And that was a mission almost a mission to enable those Chinese to identify with China again, and feel proud to be Chinese and know how to become a Chinese, something they'd forgotten. They didn't have the language, no knowledge of where these customs come from, very vague idea of certain practices, but didn't know what it meant. So now go out and teach them, encouraged them to link up not only with the state of China, to all the heritage of 2000 years of classics, and all that.

Wang Gungwu: All that was consciously done in the 20th century. It began slightly with the council generals, like people like Wang Jian-Xiang who went around in Japan, and also a few small schools start to come your way. But it was not until the modern schools introduced, after May 4th. Then of course, they brought in... This is an unfortunate part, which at that time nobody predicted. What it also brought was the division between the nationalists and the communists. Within a few years of these schools being established, already the school teachers
were divided into those who were pro-Guomindang and those who were pro gongchangyang. And they were together. And then when they split after 1927, it became a fierce thing in the schools, in every school in Southeast Asia, there were divisions. And then the Ministry of Education will intervene and make quite sure to clean out the communists and they asked for colonial government to support them.

**Wang Gungwu:** The colonial government would actually, on the whole, side with the nationalists against the communists under those conditions and the politicizing of Chinese education abroad among the Chinese education was begun then. It had nothing to do with business. It was the politics of China, brought to the schools, and to the journalism as well. The newspapers also took sides. Sun Yat-sen had his own newspaper, Kang Youwei had his own set of newspapers. And they fiercely, fiercely debated every day, they'd argue among themselves. So this has been going on, so this is a completely new phase which politicized almost all the Chinese who cared about China at all. Those who didn't care of course were assimilated, but those who are not began to be identify with either one side or the other, and time, 1949, decided with either Guomindang or communist for another 20 or 30 years until Taiwan became more and more Taiwanese, and Chinese in the eyes of many overseas Chinese, then they shifted and now they simply either don't care or they look to material progress, future progress, again, dealing with China, the business and economic benefits of dealing with China.

**Wang Gungwu:** And given the kind of developments that China has been through the last 40 years, it is understandable how powerful that has gone. It was very minor to begin with. To begin with it was Chinese welcoming them, encouraging them to come to help China. And some of them, of course, took advantage and made money out of it all. They Chinese said, "You made money out of us, so come on. Go on helping us." So that was part of the deal. The next stage of course, was to say, "Well, we are now very much together. Our networks are so closely locked and your interest and our interest hardly separable." That's another stage. But that's one side of it. That's to do with the so-called overseas Chinese of the past. The old huaxiao. Now we're dealing with something totally different, about up to 20 million xinyimin scattered around the world. These are people who left in the 1980s, and they are not the same kind of people at all. These are people who are educated, many of them university educated, many of them very much part of businesses, maybe state-owned enterprises or private enterprises in China sent out to develop business interest and so on, and many office government officials. And part of the [indistinct] who went out privately, private enterprises, and settled there.

**Wang Gungwu:** Now, they're out there. And the Chinese are now re-look the whole thing. And recently, they passed on the whole of the Chao Ban material. All that responsibility has been now taken over by the United Front department of the communist Party. Now that is a new stage altogether. As I said, we are observing changes all the time. So, as the Chinese themselves would say, "When things change, you have to change accordingly and rethink all your relationships accordingly." So what next? I don't know, but you got to watch those changes and try and see what those changes actually mean on the ground.

**Ezra Vogel:** Imposing your time limits, but I'd like to call on Bill Kirby, a Republican period historian who you know well. Bill, your comment and question.
**William Kirby:** Sure, thank you. Thank you, Ezra and Professor Wang. Thank you for a wonderful evening. We would listen to you all night and all day tomorrow, however much time you have. It's been just an extraordinary pleasure. Just one comment and one question. One comment is you said, I think, quite rightly, you articulated the great insecurity of the modern Chinese nation state faced with this challenge of defending the territory of the Qing, that it inherited from the Qing, and it has been a challenge at various times in the 20th century. One of the things that puzzles me a lot today is how is it the people's Republic of China today arguably has no enemies in the sense no one threatens Chinese territory? Put aside the question of Taiwan for the moment, but no one threatens Chinese territory, not Russia, not Japan, not Vietnam, not even India.

**William Kirby:** The only threat the Chinese territory that I can see in a physical sense comes from North Korea because you never know where one of their missiles might land. So why, nevertheless, this extraordinary and enduring sense of insecurity? We're in the longest period of peace since the Opium War from 1979 to the present, which is the foundation of China's prosperity today. And yet this pervasive sense of insecurity. That's just a puzzle to me. But I just wanted to ask you in some sense on the question of the ideas that you articulated in their modern transformation, thinking of the roles of scholars and modern universities, another part of your life. I think it was professor Tsiang Tingfu, chairman of the history department at Tsinghua University who really invented the idea of jing ya shi. And jing ya shi is a as a concept of modern history that comes from an interpretation of modern China's foreign relations. And he wrote what is still today arguably one of the best books in the history of modern China's foreign relations.

**Wang Gungwu:** Did he invent the term?

**William Kirby:** I think he's the first to use it in a way that would be adopted broadly, certainly by historians, because it's the first general survey of modern Chinese history. And he was, of course, the teacher of some of our teachers, my teacher, anyway, John Fairbank at Tsinghua University where Fairbank learn his Chinese history. So it's maybe no accident that Fairbank too took on this chronological division of Chinese history. But I just wanna ask you, you're not only a great historian, of course, but you are the very model of a modern scholar official.

**William Kirby:** You were president of Hong Kong University for a decade, at one of the world's great universities, but a university also it was an heir to multiple historical traditions. That university, when you were president, had a department of history, and it also had another department of Chinese history who almost never met together. Really quite an interesting place. I remember visiting it in those days. How did your experience at HKU help to shape your understanding of the articulation of these modern historical issues? And second, how do you see Hong Kong today in the context of the issues that you have laid out in this wonderful lecture?

**Ezra Vogel:** The question, of course, came from somebody who's had administrative experience in the university administration. So, you understand the issue.

**William Kirby:** Yeah, so thank you so much for your talk again.
Wang Gungwu: Good question that has some small historical footnote behind it. University of Hong Kong started very much like colonial university. It didn't call itself that, but that's what it was. So history was very much western history and there's no department of Chinese history. There's a department of Chinese, and the Chinese, of course, is in the classical traditional of wenshizhe - Chinology. So it was hanxue. In fact, I think one of the earliest people, that got to a head the department of Chinese was himself a zhuren who almost became a jinshi. The jinshi exam, he missed out and the examinations ended. Lee something. Lee Xiuren, I think. He was a zhuren. Very well-known Guangdong scholar. But in the absolutely great tradition of wenshizhe and the department was founded. In fact, I think the first European to head it was Drake, who came from Qilu Daxue in Shandong and he was also a very much a Sinologist in the traditional people, like Homer Dobbs, and that generation.

Wang Gungwu: And Chen Yingke for example, Chen Yingxue, he was very much seen in that way, a Sinologist with understanding of western Sinology as well. Very much traditional wenshizhe. You can't call him just a historian. He's everything. So that's the tradition that the Department of Chinese started with and remained very proud of, and the history department started as a western history department. And when the two talked to each other, as you say, and they didn't, they simply drew a line. The line was the history department would do only modern history. Jindaixue. Nothing before 1800, thereabout. In fact, I had one member of staff who worked on the 1790s. That's as close as you could get. And the Chinese Department all Asian history came out of Department of Chinese. Wenshizhe. And they didn't know modern history, or very few. Again, a few people on the edges did some modern history. It stopped, more or less, about 1800, or maybe after the Qing dynasty.

Wang Gungwu: They recognized the Qing dynasty. So that's it. So when I went there, it was very firmly entrenched. They had demarcated the boundaries, very clear. It was peace. I didn't wanna start a war. I just left them alone. I suggested that the history department, the history students were too shallow because they didn't have an ancient history and they acknowledged that, but did nothing. And the Chinese Department would like to do modern history, but we're reminded that it was a deal. They don't do modern history. Modern history is left to the history department. So that's what drew the line. So you can see as an example, also, of changing occurrence, but also renegotiating the changes. This one didn't work. It didn't renegotiate. They just continue to this day. And so, matter of regret, but I respect academic professionalism. So that's it. If that's what they want, that's it. So be it.

Ezra Vogel: You mentioned earlier in your lecture the name of Paul Cohen, who we now see on the screen. Paul, do you wanna have a word of greeting with Gungwu?

Wang Gungwu: I beg your pardon. Sorry, I didn't quite catch that.

Ezra Vogel: Can you see Paul Cohen?

Paul Cohen: Yeah, can you hear me?

Ezra Vogel: Yes, yes.

Paul Cohen: Okay. I don't know what happened to me. I got sort of lost.

Ezra Vogel: You're found.

Paul Cohen: Mr. Wang, I won't go through what I was going to say, but I do wanna raise one question. And that has to do with in the 21st century you have the advent of a period, which we are currently in in which China has, in certain respects, again become a model for the west to emulate and compete against as in the 18th century. For example, in the area of infrastructural improvements, such as the belt and road initiative, the extensive introduction throughout China, bullet train, rapid economic development, and dramatic expansion of Chinese political and economic influence over a vast area stretching from East Asia to Europe.

Paul Cohen: The BRI, the belt and road initiative, launched by Xi Jinping in 2013 has been referred to as a modern analog of the ancient silk road that arose during the westward expansion of the Han dynasty which forged trade networks throughout what are today such central Asian countries as Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, not to mention the modern day India and Pakistan to the South. The dramatic expansion of economic Chinese economic potential has been accompanied by enormous improvements in the lives of hundreds of millions of Chinese who have in a relatively brief stretch of time emerged out of extreme poverty into a literate educated middle-class Most recently, we see this economic expansion-

Ezra Vogel: I'm going to have to ask you to move quick, Paul. Could you conclude quickly?

Paul Cohen: Huh?

Ezra Vogel: Can you conclude your question quickly? We're a little over time, so I want your-

Paul Cohen: What has emerged in the past century and more is a new new world order to the extent that this trend continues to develop. One interesting question arises. Is it possible that as global collaboration becomes stronger a world divided into nation states that populations deeply patriotic will gradually give way to a single world order of the inhabitants of which have learned to accept the existence of certain problems, like climate change or the exploration of space, or for that matter periodic pandemics, that affect all of the world's populations and can be most effectively dealt with only by wholehearted cooperation and collaboration?

Paul Cohen: That's the question that I would like to pose to you, Professor Wang. How would you estimate the chances of such a new new world order coming into existence? Should the United Nations be transformed into something else with less emphasis on nations and more on humanity? Would such a transformation, even if desirable, ever be a live possibility? The competition between China and the United States with its apparent emphasis on spheres of influence, an old friend, seems to suggest that the world isn't quite ready for such serious collaborative effort, but I wonder what you think we do to get there.
**Wang Gungwu:** My first response to this very profound question is that I recognize that that's the sort of thing that I might think if I got out of the bed on the right side in one of my optimistic mornings. The other thing is to say that I recognize and admit I'm very much a creature of the 20th century, and I'm not sure that I'm quite into the 21st century yet about these highly universal global problems because I'm still very much, and partly because I'm obsessed with history now that I'm very much caught up with this, and it's something that I explained earlier on. My fascination with the Chinese struggle with this question about transition from empire to nation that is now troubling them.

**Wang Gungwu:** But it is also troubling to us. In my part of the world now, where I am at the moment, Malaysia and Singapore and all, all these countries have been struggling with their borders and trying to make nations out of a mixture of people who don't know what it means to be a nation, or really are trying to use the western definition and fit it in somehow. And that's the kind of struggle people are. So I'm still very much, because of my things I read, very much a creature of the 20th century, and the 21st century does frighten me a lot, not because I have no hope about the kind of things that you're talking about. An ideal world we need to have but because I just feel that the pace of change of various things, they don't seem to be any way coordinated in any way.

**Wang Gungwu:** For example, again, but you're sparking my old age, the technological changes are simply too fast for most of the people I know. Most people I know are really foxed what to do. What is going on? Every day, something is happening that we don't know much about. We've been told, "Do this, do this." They tell us which buttons to push and so on. But basically, we're just doing that. It's like the way, as a child of the 20th century, the way I learned about a car. I have no idea how a car works. All I know is how to drive it. And I'm taught how to drive it to get a license. That's all I'm taught. And after that, that's what I do with my car.

**Wang Gungwu:** But actually, because it is still at a pace that I can manage, I've learned to understand it. But the technological change of the 21st century at a pace I'm just not a clue how fast things are changing. And I hear my grandchildren talk about things, which I have no idea what they're talking about. And to them, they're taking it quite naturally. So I wish them luck, but I'm not the person to try and understand it. I, frankly, have given up. That pace is not my pace, and I'm actually much more comfortable with the 20th century than the 21st.

**Ezra Vogel:** Well, we're very lucky. The book you wrote, "Home Is Where We Are," and we like to think of you now that we have Zoom that this is one of your homes, too. And I think you can see that we all feel that you are very much part of our intellectual life and that we very much appreciate the gifts you've given to all the countries you've served and all the people you've served, and to all the scholarship that you've supported. And as somebody who also has entered their 90th year, I hope we can continue, even though you're not the person of the century, it's something I can understand, I hope you'll continue to write contributions to the new century. Thank you so much for coming, Wang Gungwu.

**Wang Gungwu:** Yeah.
Ezra Vogel: Thank you so much. Okay, thank you all for coming. We kept you almost a half hour beyond our usual time. Thank you so much. Okay.

Wang Gungwu: Bye, bye.
