

# “The USA and China should assume shared responsibility for the global community”

by Prof. em. Beat Schneider,\* Bern



Beat Schneider. (Picture sv)

(Ed.) This contribution arose from a lecture given by Beat Schneider as part of an event organized by the “Swiss Standpoint” on the topic “Thoughts on Chinese modernization. Is China a capitalist country?” on March 22/23, 2024. He is referring to his current publication “China’s Long March into Modernity”. It is characterized above all by the following two characteristics: In its portrayal of China, it starts from a consistently non-Eurocentric point of view and it presents Chinese culture as a culture of “as well as”.

## On the Chinese culture of “As well as”

China cannot be understood without understanding it as a 5000-year-old culture of As well as. In China’s spiritual tradition, the principle of the unity of opposites stands in the One, the concept of the path to harmony (Chinese: dao), the concept of the Middle (Chinese: zhongyang) and the idea of availability are at the centre.

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*On the principle of the unity of opposites:* All phenomena in the world can be traced back to opposing polar forces, such as yin and yang, hard and soft, high and low tide. They are not mutually exclusive but produce each other and are the same thing in one. The same side of the valley is in the sun in the morning and in the shade in the evening. Brightness can only exist in relation to darkness, beauty only in relation to ugliness.

*On the concept of the Middle:* In Chinese culture, a lot of things happen from the middle. Middle does not mean staid mediocrity of cautiously keeping your distance, but rather that you can do One as well as the other by being open to both. Only in this way can compromises be found and contradictions reconciled. That’s what makes up the middle: the category of as well as.

This is also the core of the idea of so-called availability, which means that you keep yourself open to all possibilities based on the wisdom of the moment. Adaptability and flexibility have negative connotations for Western people. They are not understood and are wrongly viewed as an expression of unreliability, cunning, opportunism and slyness.

## On the Western-Occidental culture of “either-or”

The Chinese culture of as well as is in fundamental contrast to Western culture. The focus there is on the category of “either-or”. Western culture is trained to think of the world in strict dichotomies, into friends and enemies, freedom and bondage, black and white, good and evil. The German sociologist Max Weber spoke of a fundamental difference between Confucian and Western rationalism, which consists in the Confucian adaptation to the world and the Western domination of the world.

## Reactions on a geopolitical level

On a geopolitical level, we are confronted with the conflict between the two world powers, the USA and the *People’s Republic of China* (PRC). The USA is reacting to the rise of China with dominance and exclusive behaviour, with either-or: either the

USA or the PRC. China must be pushed back by all means and decoupled from the economic and political world system (English: de-coupling). US President *Joseph Biden* bluntly called for the “rival to be destroyed”, and his Foreign Minister *Anthony Blinken* said that China had to be “beaten out of the field” and that the USA would certainly win in the power struggle against China.

China reacts to this with the typical *as well as*: There is both the USA and China. Both have different systems and very different basic attitudes. Nevertheless, both can and should coexist, cooperate and assume shared responsibility for the global community. Accordingly, Chinese President *Xi Jinping* believes that humanity shares a common destiny (shared future for mankind) and that the international community must therefore stick together and cooperate in order to overcome the economic and health crises together.

#### **On a domestic political level**

The *as well as* of unleashing and state taming of the productive forces, of competition and long-term state planning, of innovation and control, is the great strength of recent Chinese development and at the same time the systemic advantage of the PRC over the states of the capitalist West. It triggered an incredible economic and social dynamic that was unparalleled and only aroused amazement in the West.

In relation to one's own history and tradition, the *as well as* means that the cultural strength of a people lies in the fact that it develops a strong identity between the present and the past. And in fact, China played and continues to play on two mental keyboards at the same time in the combination of present and tradition and it knows how to deal with it excellently. That is why it has appropriated the instruments of the capitalist West without “Westernizing” itself. This makes the Chinese political system partic-

ularly vital and resilient and is what is special about the so-called “socialism with Chinese characteristics”.

#### **On Eurocentrism**

If you want to understand today's China, you have to be able to put yourself in a non-Eurocentric point of view. But what is Eurocentrism?

It sees world history narrowly as Western history, as a process of appropriation or expropriation of the non-European world, to a certain extent as a one-way street for the westernization of the rest of the world, as an export of the superior Christian-Occidental and Western-capitalist civilization: be it in the form of missionization and crusades, be it in the form of colonization and optionally also of enslavement, be it in the form of export of capital, war and democracy. In any case, the result was the subordination of non-white civilizations.

In the 19th century, this led to the division and polarization of the world into two unequal halves. Here the rich “developed” world of the minority of the privileged of the global North, there the poor “underdeveloped” world of the majority of the colonized and underprivileged of the global South. For a long time, the dichotomy was a very successful and unquestioned business and accumulation model for Europe.

Eurocentrism is not just a question of perspective or a mental state with a claim to superiority, but above all also an economically profitable and culturally, religiously and philosophically well-cushioned business model. As is well known, it is also a model with serious consequences or a devastating one. Its victims were primarily the colonized peoples of the global South and then, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the millions of dead in the great wars launched by the West. They all paid a high price in blood for this business model.

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