

## I. Schiller Conference

Professor Zhang Weiwei

# Turning the ‘Curse of Geography’ into a ‘Blessing of Geography’

Dec. 12— The following is an edited transcript of the presentation (as delivered via video) by Zhang Weiwei, Professor of International Relations, Fudan University, China, from Panel 1 of the Dec. 7-8 Schiller Institute conference, “In the Spirit of Schiller and Beethoven: All Men, Become Brethren!” The panel was titled, “The Strategic Crisis: New and Final World War, or a New Paradigm of the One Humanity.” The video is [here](#). Subheads have been added.



Schiller Institute

Prof. Zhang Weiwei

Thank you, Madame Helga Zepp-LaRouche, for your kind invitation to address this important conference to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Schiller Institute, who have done so much in promoting peace through development, and dialogues between civilizations over the past decades.

Indeed, the world is faced with many crises and challenges. Nothing more accurately captures the overall mood today than the Munich Security Conference report for the year 2024 entitled, “Lose-Lose?” suggesting that the post-Cold War optimism regarding security and development has dissipated, and much of the world is faced with a situation of lose-lose for all. Is there any possibility of achieving a win-win for all rather than lose-lose for all? We draw with this short presentation a comparison between Europe’s lose-lose ways and Asia’s win-win, from my point of view; so as to shed some light, hopefully, on this hugely important issue facing mankind today.

As far as Europe is concerned, the Ukraine crisis has caused so much human toll and destruction as well as deep anxieties across Europe, from inflation to human migration, from energy crisis to economic recessions

and more. And above all, the loss of peace for Europe; even the prospect of a nuclear war is a realistic and disturbing concern for many people in Europe today.

In contrast, as far as Asia is concerned—especially for what I call the China-ASEAN space, with two billion people, or three times the population of Europe—this space has enjoyed peace, development, and prosperity for nearly five decades. A remarkable win-win in contemporary world history. Facing lose-lose scenarios in much of Europe today, one cannot but ask, at least from a Chinese perspective, a simple honest question: whether China and the China-ASEAN space have been right, and by extrapolation where Europe may have gone wrong, and then draw some lessons for the world as a whole. To my mind, this China-ASEAN space, their win-win is attributable to what I call 3 + 1, or three structures plus one key factor. Namely, a development structure, a political security structure, and a cultural civilizational structure; and one factor, the China factor.

### The Three Structures

Let me start with the development structure. Different from Europe, whose economic structure is very much politicized, the China-ASEAN space gives top priority to development per se, which is viewed as the indispensable condition for stability and security and development. This development structure includes well-institutionalized China-ASEAN free trade area and RCEP [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership], the world’s largest free trade area [by members’ GDP], and the China-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and more. This space has now become an epi-

center of world economic growth. China alone contributes more than 30% of the world's economic growth for close to a decade running. Europe is first in the world to declare a Green Deal with much fanfare; yet, how many people still remember that, in contrast, China has completed its Green Deal within a decade through its own down-to-earth mode of development? And ASEAN is its main external beneficiary. So, Bill Clinton may be right when he said, "It's the economy, stupid!"

Second, the political security structure. ASEAN has established the famous ASEAN centrality principle, maintaining a non-alliance stance, not picking sides, actively promoting regional integration, and creating a set of dialogue mechanisms for major powers such as 10+1, 10+3, 10+8, and more. Likewise, fiercely independent itself, China firmly supports the ASEAN centrality principle. China was the first country to join the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia to establish a strategic partnership; to sign the protocol of the treaty on the Southeast Asian nuclear weapon-free zone.

Third, cultural civilizational structure. China and ASEAN are both committed to beauty; the China-ASEAN community of shared destiny with emphasis on cultural and civilizational exchanges on what's called the ASEAN or Asian wisdom, including strategic patience, negotiated solutions to territorial and other disputes, the law of informal diplomacy, two steps forward one step back, adhering to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality; and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence). This region—Asia, China plus ASEAN—rejects categorically the so-called liberal hegemony, or NATO's expansion into Asia in whatever form.

Thanks to the three structures, Southeast Asia, often described as the Balkans of Asia with all its diversity in race, ethnicity, ideology, and political systems, and with the so-called curse of geography, has been turning into a blessing of geography. This positive trend is now being extended into Central Asia, and its so-called curse of geography is also being changed into a blessing of geography, thanks to the BRI, as this landlocked region is now land-connected and becomes an indispensable bridge between Asia and Europe. As a result, the geopolitical dilemma for ages and centuries in this space, is now turning into what may be called a new geo-civilization. Rather than being pitted against

each other, people here share more of the Chinese BRI philosophy; that is, discussing together, building together, and benefitting together.

In this context, one may better appreciate Chinese leader Xi Jinping's three global initiatives respectively for development, security, and civilizations, which are based on the successful experience of China, ASEAN, and others, and will inspire many other countries and peoples.

As for the one key factor, that we borrowed NATO's phrase, "the decisive enabler," not in the NATO sense of accusing China of being the decisive enabler of the Ukrainian crisis, which is ridiculous and nonsense. But in the sense of China being the decisive enabler of the win-win for China-ASEAN space and more.

### **China's Different Vision for the World**

Here, I want to make a quick comparison between China and the United States, and their different ways of thinking and behaving as big powers. First, the U.S. treats other countries as either friend or foe, while China, with a much longer timeframe as a civilizational state, treats others as a friend or potential friend. Second, China does not have the Messianic tradition to convert others, or a militarist tradition for conquest, as compared with the United States or the former European powers. The absence of religious wars in China's long history was a source of inspiration for many European Enlightenment giants such as Voltaire, Leibniz, and Spinoza. It reminded me of my debate with Professor Fukuyama, the author of the end-of-history thesis. The debate took place in the heyday of the Arab Spring of 2011. He predicted China would experience its own version of the Arab Spring. I said, "No chance; and the Arab Spring will soon become the Arab Winter." Indeed, it became Arab Winter soon, and if Europe could have heeded the concept of Chinese scholars like me, Europe could have avoided perhaps this tragic refugee crisis, human migration crisis.

Third, of all the major powers, China has the highest threshold for the use of force. A great tradition from ancient times of China, from the time of Sun Tzu 2,500 years ago. When China first tested its first nuclear device in 1964, China declared that it will never be the first to use nuclear weapons; nor would it use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states. If all nuclear [states] can emulate China, there will be no danger of nuclear wars in the world. However, a civilizational state is first and foremost a modern state with powerful

defense capabilities. China has very clear-cut red lines which no foreign country can cross. During the Cold War, there were no hot wars between the United States and the U.S.S.R. But unfortunately, two hot wars between China and the United States—the Korean War in the 1950s, and the Vietnam War in the 1960s and '70s. Not long ago, China tested its ICBM as a stern warning against those trigger-happy war mongers. I, myself, have long ago coined a concept called “mutually assured prosperity,” MAP, for Sino-U.S. relations to replace the outdated Cold War concept of mutually assured destruction, MAD. Now, we have every condition to do that.

Fourth, China has an overall vision for the world vastly different from that of the United States. China stands for unite and prosper, not divide and rule. China stands for one human community, rejecting categorically the American philosophy of on the table or on the menu.

The Schiller Institute has put forward many great projects such as the Oasis Plan for the Middle East, in

part to overcome many crises like illegal whatever refugee crises and more. Technologically speaking, China today has mastered a good number of Green technologies to make use of deserts for producing renewable energy for the benefit of mankind. But it's necessary for the regions concerned to develop enough political will so as to achieve meaningful peace and development. Or better still, to develop mechanisms similar to the three structures of development I have just described for China-ASEAN for development, for political security, for cultural civilizational dialogues. And for this one key factor, that is, vision and support from one or two major powers; that's crucial for these kinds of projects to be successful.

I know this is not easy at all, yet I'm hopeful that this great vision, better for mankind, will become reality one day. With this optimistic note, I complete my speech today. Many thanks again for your patience. Thank you very much.

*Ambassador Chas W. Freeman, Jr.*

## The Politics of Tragedy, Or the Statecraft of Hope?

Dec. 12—*The following is an edited transcript of the presentation by Ambassador Chas W. Freeman, Jr. (U.S. Foreign Service, ret.), from Panel 1 of the Dec.7-8 Schiller Institute conference, “In the Spirit of Schiller and Beethoven: All Men, Become Brethren!” The panel was titled, “The Strategic Crisis: New and Final World War, or a New Paradigm of the One Humanity.” The video of his presentation is available [here](#). Subheads have been added.*



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*Ambassador Chas Freeman*

I stand before you as an American. I am acutely aware that my country's recent behavior has cost it its moral authority and turned much of the world against it. Some American travelers now avoid ignominy by impersonating Canadians. In the American homeland, the majority seek comfort and safety in denial or cautious silence. We inhabit a world in which who

says what seems to matter more than what is said. But any statement at odds with the official narrative is immediately branded as “disinformation”—denied a hearing and deleted from the public record.

In these circumstances, there is clearly a case to be made for self-deception and political cowardice—what might be called “ostrich politik.” But reality is immutably out there whether we acknowledge it or not. Saying and doing nothing does not and cannot mitigate the risks of the present global crises. But taking

the initiative to do so is essential if we and our species are to survive and prosper in peace.

### **The Danger Humanity Poses to Itself**

The human species has never posed as great a danger to itself as it now does. If human-induced climate