

**Goh Keng Swee Lecture
By George Yeo
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Multipolarity and China

Introduction

I thank Bert Hofman for inviting me to give this year's Goh Keng Swee Lecture. It is a great honour for me. I was involved with the establishment of the East Asia Institute (EAI) in 1997. Goh Keng Swee established the Institute of East Asian Philosophies in 1983 principally for the study of Confucianism. Later the mission was broadened and the name changed to Institute of East Asian Political Economy. In 1996, Goh Keng Swee recruited Prof Wang Gungwu to be the Director of the institute. Prof Wang was a Distinguished Visitor at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies at that time. He was the Vice Chancellor of Hong Kong University before the return of Hong Kong to China. I remember once chatting with him and rather boldly telling him that his centre of gravity was in Southeast Asia to which he was right to return. Not long after he took on his new responsibility in Singapore, Goh Keng Swee suddenly decided to shut down the institute. Prof Wang did not know the reason and came to see me. I was shocked, to put it mildly. I appealed to Lee Kuan Yew who must have then discussed the matter with Goh Keng Swee. Lee Kuan Yew agreed that, with the rise of China, Singapore needed such an institute. It was then renamed EAI. Prof Wang remained Director. In 2006, Zheng Yongnian took over from him and Prof Wang became the Chairman till 2019. I remember writing messages for both the 10th and 20th anniversaries and am glad to be here at the 25th. When I was Minister for Trade and Industry, I got EAI to give senior staff in the ministry short monthly lectures on China after ministry staff meetings.

A New Cycle in China's History

The rise of China is an epic story which began with the long decline of the Qing Dynasty in the 19th century. The rot began earlier during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor but did not become manifest till later. A sure sign was the dynasty's arrogance in believing that there was nothing it needed to learn from others. The decline and fall of the Qing Dynasty enabled the Russians to move in from the north and Western powers from the sea. To avoid China's fate, Japan transformed itself with grim determination and was able to join in the pillage of China. It wrested Taiwan from China in 1895, defeated Russia in 1905, annexed Korea in 1910 and invaded Manchuria in 1931 before China proper in 1937.

It took China more than a hundred years to fully rouse itself and expel the foreign invaders. Even after the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, China faced threats to its integrity - from the Americans in the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Straits, the Americans and French in Indo-China and from the Soviet Union along its entire northern border. The economic revolution of Chinese society proved harder than the political revolution which was hard enough. China's economic system had to zig zag before Deng Xiaoping put it on the path of reform and opening up in 1978.

Chinese civilization has been able to organize far more human beings in its long history than other civilizations. There are many reasons for this of which the one which stands out the most for me is the invention of paper. Paper enabled huge amounts of data to be stored and processed. A whole civilization grew out of this data intensity including the imperial civil service, country-wide examinations as a way to sift out talent from all corners of the realm and a culture which makes careful gradations in human relations and which reveres education and scholarship. For such a large population, the Chinese people has one literature and recognize a common set of heroes and

myths. The ideographic nature of the Chinese writing system, which did not change with changing pronunciations, also played a major role. It is interesting that China has again become the most data intensive society in the world.

China's re-emergence on the global stage repeats another cycle. Its effects like in previous cycles are felt throughout Asia and, this time, around the world. Unlike the peoples living on China's periphery who have memories of China's previous incarnations, the West is feeling the force field of an ascendant China for the first time. Long accustomed to its own superiority over others, China's growing influence is felt as a challenge, even a threat.

Globalization under an American Peace

During the First and Second World Wars, the European peoples consumed themselves in orgies of mutual slaughter using industrial methods. On both occasions, it was the US which eventually helped to bring the carnage to an end. Its own infrastructure and production capacity not physically damaged by war, the US emerged out of the Second World War as the most powerful country on earth. Its economy accounted for an astonishing 40% of global production. US global leadership was however contested by the Soviet Union. While we often say that the world was divided into two camps during the Cold War, the reality was more complicated. Many developing countries joined the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 (G77). After Khrushchev renounced Stalin in 1956, furious exchanges took place between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of China. In 1957, Khrushchev pulled out all Soviet advisers from China causing many projects to be paralyzed. Relations between the Soviet Union and China got from bad to worse. In the 60's, the Soviet Union became a mortal threat to China. Mao Zedong prepared China for nuclear attack. Heavy industries were dispersed and tunnels were dug in all the major cities. Pingpong diplomacy led to Kissinger's secret visit to Beijing in 1971 and Nixon's historic visit in 1972. In 1974, Deng Xiaoping gave a speech at the United Nations clustering countries into Three Worlds. The First World consisted of the two superpowers - the US and the Soviet Union. In the Second World were the countries in their camps, more or less the members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The Third World consisted of most developing countries which proclaimed themselves non-aligned even though many looked to the west, like Singapore, and a few, like Cuba, to the Soviet Union, for support and inspiration. China put itself squarely in the Third World.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was followed by the peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. That the Soviet Union could be dismantled without the agony of war and revolution was indeed remarkable. This opened a heady chapter in world history. Globalization gave hope to developing countries that they could take off by plugging into the international marketplace. It was the age of Davos. There was talk of the final triumph of the liberal idea and the end of history. Learning from the experiences of Japan and the Four Dragons, China rode this wave of globalization and achieved double digit growth for many years. In 1994, the Uruguay Round of trade liberalization was concluded. GATT became the WTO in 1995. The first WTO ministerial meeting was held in Singapore in 1996. After tough negotiations, China joined the WTO in November 2001 at the same time as negotiation for a new round called the Doha Development Agenda was launched. As Trade Minister, I was deeply involved as the Chair for Agriculture in the WTO ministerial meetings of Seattle, Doha and Cancun. They were some of the most stressful periods in my life.

Looking back, we were perhaps tilting at windmills. The pendulum of undiluted globalization had reached its limit. In fact, the globalization which enabled trade to be depoliticized was the result of an American peace which for twenty odd years encompassed the entire world following the end of the Cold War. At the WTO, it was clear to me that without US leadership, no progress was possible. Some saw the US as the new Rome. There was a touch of hubris when the Neo-Conservatives laid for the US an ambitious agenda to reshape the Middle East after September 11. It ended in grief when US and NATO forces evacuated Kabul in 2021. The overwhelming US dominance of the world following the end of the Second World War was unnatural. But it had a long tail. The US still has some 60,000 troops in Europe, 70,000 in the former Soviet Union and

80,000 in Asia, and eleven aircraft carrier battle groups which police the world's oceans and seas. But as other advanced countries recovered from war and developing countries with much larger populations made progress, the relative economic weight of the US had to come down.

When it could not prevail in Vietnam and after Nixon took the US dollar out of the gold standard in 1971, many wondered whether the US was in decline. But, somehow, it always did manage to recover. Painfully, Volcker squeezed inflation out of the system. The Reagan years were a time of optimism. His Star Wars program drove the Soviet Union to bankruptcy. For a few years, Japan looked as if it could overtake the US. The Plaza Accord in September 1985 prevented that from happening. The innovativeness of the US economy enabled it to surge ahead again especially in IT and the biomedical sciences. There was also much advance in finance but whether one should count that as a good thing is open to debate. When Obama ran for the Presidency, few in Asia believed that the US could have a black President. He did and went on to win a second term. Now we have a US Vice President who was partly Tamil in her early upbringing. The US is a society which seems to be constantly in ferment. But it does face deep problems now. Many of my American friends freely acknowledge that the US has become a divided nation and do not know how the divisions can be bridged. The US is an ongoing experiment in forging unity out of diversity. From that perspective, the entire world has a stake in the outcome of the American experiment.

US Response to the Rise of China

US attitude to the rise of China went through a progression. After June 4th 1989, George Bush Sr genuinely wanted to help China rejoin the world. I was privy to his conversation with Lee Kuan Yew when he visited Singapore in January 1992. Under Bush Sr, the US helped broker the admission of China, HK and Taiwan into APEC as economies. During Clinton's Presidency, US-China relations went through two major crises: the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1996 following Lee Teng-hui's visit to Cornell, and the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999. Both sides exercised strategic discipline and kept relations on an even keel. When the Asian Financial Crisis happened in 1997-8, the US was happy that China played a stabilizing role in containing it. After the Hainan spy plane incident over the South China Sea in April 2001, not long after Bush Jr became President, both sides again found a face-saving way out. After September 11, China almost became an ally of the US in the war against terrorism. I was in Shanghai both for the APEC Trade Ministers meeting in June and the Leaders' Meeting in October and saw how dramatically relations improved within a few months. After North Korea exploded its first nuclear device in October 2006, Bush Jr wanted China to do more to curb North Korea. He told me at an APEC Leaders Meeting that if China did not do so, it would have to live with Japan and South Korea also going nuclear. The US could no longer take such a relaxed view once North Korea made rapid strides in its ballistic missile development program. In November 2017, North Korea developed an ICBM which could reach most parts of Continental US. The US knows it needs China's help to address the North Korean threat.

Bush Jr convened the first G20 Summit in response to the Global Financial Crisis in 2008. It was clear that the G7 on its own no longer had the economic heft to prevent a global depression. In 2009, at the second summit chaired by UK PM Gordon Brown in London, China stepped up and undertook to increase spending massively. This was the high point of globalization. For a few years it seemed that the G7 would be replaced by the G20. China's expansionary policy however created significant distortions in its own economy which took many years to massage out of the system. There was also no gratitude for what China did which suggests to me that when the next global financial crisis hits us, China will be more calibrated in its response.

Under Obama, bilateral relations gradually got worse. China's growing economic and political strength became threatening. Around 2011, Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton began the pivot to the East which was a pivot against China. Many moves were made. I remember being asked about the deployment of 2000 US marines to Darwin by PLA students in China's National Defence University in Beijing, after my lecture on US-China relations from a Singapore Perspective in November 2001. The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) which Singapore established together with

New Zealand, Chile and Brunei as a platform for freer trade and investment in the Asia Pacific was turned by the US into a coalition against China. Pointedly, Vietnam was brought into the TPP by the US. Even though Vietnam's economy was obviously not ready for the disciplines of the TPP, the US was prepared to give it special and differential treatment. In the South China Sea, the US supported, and probably encouraged, the Philippines to take China to compulsory arbitration over its maritime claims under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea. Without China's participation, clever American lawyers argued the Philippine case and outwitted China in the legal game. China seized the opportunity before the tribunal gave its verdict in 2016 to carry out with incredible speed the enlargement of seven features in the South China Sea. At ASEAN Regional Forums, there were sharp exchanges between the US and China over the South China Sea in one of which American believed that China browbeat Singapore.

It has often been said that the US would not have acted or reacted so robustly against China if Xi Jinping had adhered to Deng Xiaoping's dictum of keeping a low profile. Feeling its own growing strength, China under Xi Jinping took initiatives to launch the Belt and Road, the Made in China 2025 strategy and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, among others. The Dual Circulation Economy was seen as a way to make China less dependent on the world and the world more dependent on it. Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong were added to the list of western unhappinesses. Living in Hong Kong during the months of violence demonstrations in 2019, I was relieved when the National Security Law was wheeled in because it restored peace and public safety. Far from uniting us in a common fight against a common enemy, the Covid pandemic added to the division between the US and China. Under Trump, bilateral relations took a sharp turn for the worse. They did not get better under Biden. The repeated use of Taiwan as a bargaining card has been dangerous because Taiwan is a clear red line for China.

Looking back and with a certain detachment, having left government for many years, the current conflict between the US and China was probably not avoidable. From the end of 2001 when China acceded to the WTO to the beginning of Covid at the end of 2019, China's economy grew seven times in PPP terms, nine times in RMB and 11 times in USD. China was getting too big to hide even if it wanted to. In fact, China's GDP in PPP overtook the US a few years ago, around 2016. China might want to bide its time but the US was not going to wait. Sooner or later, the trial of strength and the contest of will had to come.

In the short term, Russia's invasion of Ukraine may have taken some US heat off China. All the protagonists in that conflict - Russia, Ukraine, Europe and the US - now find themselves in positions they rather not be. But there is no way to put Humpty Dumpty back on the wall. The US cannot allow Putin to win and Putin cannot afford to lose. Little by little, they are inching into a dark tunnel where no light can be seen at the end and from which there is little possibility of backing out. Sooner or later, there will some kind of a ceasefire but without a peace agreement. Like the situation on the Korean Peninsula, in Kashmir and in Cyprus, the partition of Ukraine could go on for decades. China and India are determined not to be dragged into the tunnel. So too the other two members of BRICS - South Africa and Brazil. Over time, it will be harder for the US to hold the western alliance together as tightly as it does now. Western European countries like Germany and France have their own national interests to look after and know they have to live with Russia till the end of time. Both have invaded Russia in recent history to their great regret.

The US and its western allies are currently carrying out a hybrid war against Russia. It is a complex operation with many parts involving many branches of government in many countries. There is no guarantee that this strategy can break Russia's will. It is also unlikely that the US and its allies will put their own soldiers at risk. China is carefully analyzing the Ukraine War in all its aspects, knowing that a similar but larger hybrid war may be unleashed on China should it decide to move forcefully on Taiwan. From time to time, like the bombing of a Polish village, incidents happen on the ground or at sea requiring the full concentration of political and military leaders before life and death decisions are taken. Provided China is not provocative on Taiwan, the US must prefer to focus on Ukraine for the time being. I suspect the Ukraine War was a key consideration underlying the long meeting between Biden and Xi in Bali which put a bottom to the deterioration of bilateral relations. Both sides reaffirmed old positions on Taiwan. The US has been

reminded that Taiwan is at the core of China's core interests. Overwhelming support of the KMT in Taiwan's local elections last month despite President Tsai Ing-wen making them a referendum of her China policy must have been disappointing to anti-China hawks in the US.

Overall relations between the US and China are however unlikely to get much better. The US sees China's rise as a challenge to its dominance in the world and would want to slow or put it down if it could. It is determined to deny China cutting edge technologies especially those which can be put to military use like AI and quantum computing. China does not like what the US is doing but is surely not surprised. After all, China in its history closely guarded the secrets of making paper and gunpowder for centuries. One reason for Xi Jinping's tightening of controls in China is preparation for the possibility of war with the US in all dimensions. Pointedly, he donned army uniform and told the PLA to be prepared for war before his recent meeting with Biden. On the US side, successive Indo-Pacific commanders remind US servicemen to be prepared to fight "tonight".

Is Multipolarity Bad or Good for the US?

What will all this lead to? For the US, its global dominance is good not only for the US but for the world. Without embarrassment, the US describes itself as "exceptional" with a "manifest destiny". What it does others may not do because there is no "moral equivalence". Under an American peace, economists described the US Dollar and the international financial system as public goods for the world to avail themselves of. These and other institutions have been increasingly weaponized by the US in recent years. Countries which have been adversely affected like Russia and China must surely be working on substitutes. For the time being, however, there is no credible alternative but the more unrestrained the US is in weaponizing the international economic and financial system, the earlier alternative arrangements will be found which blockchain technology will make easier.

There are two levels to US concern about its loss of global dominance. The first is that China will eventually replace it as world leader. For many Americans, this is not only a political challenge to the US, it is also a moral challenge of what is good for the world and humanity itself. The long years of western dominance in the world has led many westerners in general and Americans in particular to believe that their values are universal values. For a period of time, Singaporean intellectuals who asserted the legitimacy of Asian values were roundly criticized by western commentators. China has repeatedly disavowed any intention to spread its values and system to other countries even when it becomes the world's biggest economy. But this disavowal is generally not believed in the west due to a lack of understanding of Chinese civilization. The Han people are homogenous and like their homogeneity. They are not xenophobic but they do not want to lose their own distinctiveness which is a trait shared by other ethnic groups like Jews and Parsees. I don't think the Chinese want Beijing and Shanghai to ever become like New York, London or Paris. Unlike Jews and Parsees, however, the Han people make up a large part of the world's population and are partly feared because of that. Hence the often quoted remark by Napoleon to: "Let China sleep, for when she wakes, she will shake the world".

The second level of fear is that, even if China does not replace the US as global leader, its distinctiveness is a bad example to others. And if enough countries follow China in also wanting to be distinctive, then the US will lose its dominance to a multi-polar world. The Ukraine War has quickened this development. Even though China does not condone Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it has not condemned Russia and does not want Putin to lose. If there is regime change in Russia and the country joins the western camp, China will come under great pressure. China much prefers a multipolar world and sees it as inevitable. It wants Russia to be a separate pole and supports it as a separate pole. India with its long history and size of population will always be a pole unto itself and would not be a satellite to anybody. China also supports Europe's autonomy from the US even though it knows they belong to one western civilization. Thus China has always favoured a strong EU and a strong Euro. China's attitude to the current unity of the west is to wait it out and let cracks gradually appear as national interests assert themselves. China knows that the Five Eyes enjoy a special unity but will still patiently try to separate them as much as possible by working on their separate interests. Chinese statecraft is predictable because it is rational from

the game theory point of view, and rooted in its own historical experience. In the Chinese mind, enduring good relations have ultimately to be based on mutual long-term interest and not only on the sharing of values.

Let me use the Middle East as an illustration. China's policy toward the Middle East is completely different from that of the US. For the US, the dominant considerations have been hydrocarbon and Israel. In February 1945, after meeting Churchill and Stalin in Yalta, a few months before he died, FDR on board the naval cruiser USS Quincy met King Abdelaziz of Saudi Arabia in the Suez Canal. One of their meetings arose an agreement that in return for the US protecting the kingdom, oil would always be priced in US dollars. After the 1956 Suez War, the UK could only play second fiddle to the US in the Middle East and it was the US which ultimately ensured the security of all the GCC countries. After the Six Day War, the US took over France's role as ultimate guarantor of Israel's security. The US has a large military presence in the region with many bases and many thousands of troops in different countries. In contrast, apart from a small support facility in Djibouti for anti-piracy operations, China has nothing.

Every piece on the political chessboard in the Middle East is now moving. Russian intervention in Syria rescued Assad from defeat. Despite US sanctions, Iran continues to exert influence in the region especially among Shiite populations. Its links to Russia and China are growing. For the GCC, China has become a major purchaser of oil and gas and a major supplier of goods and services. Under the leadership of Abdelaziz's grandson, Saudi Arabia is moving into a more equidistant position. Xi Jinping made an official visit to Riyadh last week and received a spectacular welcome. King Salman and Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman hosted meetings for him to meet leaders of the GCC and the Arab world. Egypt with its large population has always been a pole in its own right but is currently preoccupied with getting its own house in order. Meanwhile, the Chinese are quietly helping to build a new Cairo. China also maintains good relations with Israel. On its own, Israel would like to cooperate more with China but is often prevented from doing so by the US. Despite good relations with Israel, China's relations with Palestine are also strong. China has little ability to interfere in the politics of the region and has no desire to do so. But where Chinese interests are concerned, it will reward or punish using the lever of trade and investment. At the UN and other international forums, China's speeches are usually anodyne except where its own interests are affected. Even when China's GDP overtakes that of the US, its behavior in the Middle East and elsewhere is not likely to change because of the nature of the civilization.

US fear about China's rise should therefore not be that China will replace it as global hegemon, but that China will help crystallize a multipolar world. The US is not used to the idea of a multipolar world but it is not necessarily bad for the US. In fact, I would argue that it will help extend the period of US ascendancy in the world, and in a good way. Multipolarity has many dimensions - political, military, economic and cultural. In all dimensions, the US by acting more subtly is hard to replace.

Take the Belt and Road Initiative as an example. The US currently sees it as an aspect of Chinese expansionism. The countries who participate generally want infrastructural development because it is good for them. But as they see their economic accounts with China grow, they naturally want diversification. If the US insists on a choice between it and China, the answer may not be to its liking. But if the US takes a more relaxed attitude, every country on the Belt and Road will naturally want a stronger US presence so that it will have greater negotiating leverage vis a vis China. I have expressed the view to American friends that the US should be a free rider. ASEAN understands this game well and encourages friendly rivalry among our partners. China is always keen to build the north-south links while Japan naturally prefers east-west links. By working with both, we build a nice grid for ourselves.

Currently, the US has some 800 foreign military bases around the world. They are very costly to upkeep. Part of the cost is financed by the exorbitant privilege of the US Dollar which acts like a tax on all of us in the world. The dominance of the US Dollar cannot however continue forever. Sooner or later, as the relative weights of other countries grow, other major currencies like the

Euro and offshore RMB, will play more important roles for the denomination of trade and as reserve currencies. When that exorbitant privilege of the US dollar is reduced, when a stark choice has to be made in the US between guns and butter, it will be harder to justify to American taxpayers the maintenance of these expensive military facilities. The UK went through the same progression after the dismantling of Empire. When Harold Wilson announced the pullout of British forces from Singapore in 1968, Lee Kuan Yew flew immediately to London and asked PM Harold Wilson for a delay. At that time, Singapore had just become independent and British military spending was 40% of our GDP. In response to Lee Kuan Yew's appeal, the pullout was held back three valuable years. By anticipating an eventual multipolar configuration in the world, the US can get into a more sustainable long term position. Instead of seeking dominance everywhere, the US should focus on the areas where its political and military power can tilt the balance. Such a position can be maintained indefinitely. But it means that the US has to accept many parts of the world for what they are, warts and all, and not try to transform them in its own image.

In the South China Sea, the US can help ASEAN by being less direct in its actions. In a private conversation I had with Australia Foreign Minister Bob Carr after I left government, I said that US naval ships should stay beyond the horizon but within radar range. In this way, ASEAN countries in their negotiations with China have a potential counterweight which is unspoken and best left unused. If, instead of this, US ships sail within visual range, the South China Sea will be turned into an arena of conflict between the US and China. We in ASEAN then become mere pawns on their chessboard. China, instead of being nice to ASEAN, may well turn nasty. To my pleasant surprise, Bob Carr wrote what I said in his memoirs. I can understand of course that the US prefers to use us in ASEAN against China instead of we using the US to improve our negotiation with China. But, from a long term viewpoint, going along with ASEAN is a better game for the US to play in the region.

Whether the US likes it or not, other countries and regions will increasingly assert their own separateness on the global stage. Iran may soon join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, a new chapter has opened in the history of Inner Asia. Saudi Arabia is likely to become the next member of BRICS after Xi's visit. Many other countries like Egypt, Algeria and Argentina are waiting in line. While these two groupings may be weak compared to the EU or ASEAN, they are not weaker than QUAD. Unlike QUAD, they are not explicitly or implicitly directed at anyone else. Everyone wants options if they can have them. India is the classic example. It is in the happy position of being able to sit at many tables. For international organizations like the WTO, the US would do better by intervening judiciously to make key provisions fairer for everyone instead of playing a negative role when the rules are no longer seen to be in US interest.

I venture this proposition: that the US is more likely to renew itself as a beacon for the world by moving towards multipolarity instead of working to prevent it from coming about. The current policy of identifying Russia as enemy and China as strategic competitor shows US determination to preserve its global dominance with the help of a western alliance. However, I doubt it can succeed even in the medium term. The danger is that the US will exhaust itself in trying to do so. The back pressure may in turn widen internal divisions in US society and could even cause the US to turn isolationist which will be very destabilizing for the entire world.

China's Historical Experience with Multipolarity

China is used to conducting statecraft in a multipolar world. Throughout its history, it had to deal with many neighbors a few of whom at any time would have been threatening. To be sure, for most of human history, the world was multipolar. China never had ambition to make itself the single pole because this would have been too difficult. Incorporating other peoples would also affect China's homogeneity and make it more difficult to govern. China's strong preference has always been to manage difficult neighbors using economic leverage rather than to subdue them militarily. Like the US today, it always felt itself to be morally superior to everyone else. There is much China can do to ease the current transition to a multipolar world. Since its relative strength is increasing, China can afford to smile more and be more charming. China needs to see itself in the mirror

more often. Unlike a hundred years ago when China was kicked around by western powers and Japan, China today is viewed with apprehension by many countries, even feared.

China is fond of asking other countries to meet it halfway in negotiations. Compromise is good and always to be encouraged. In the case of the South China Sea, China should meet ASEAN 60/40 on the Code of Conduct instead of halfway since it is so much bigger and stronger. This will help diffuse an issue which is easily exploited by external powers. When Zhu Rongji offered ASEAN an FTA in the year 2000, ASEAN leaders were unsure how to respond because they viewed China as an economic threat at that time. ASEAN then was just recovering from the Asian Financial Crisis. I was among ASEAN Trade Ministers who met to discuss Zhu's offer in Hanoi the following year. We decided to ask China for an early harvest to benefit Southeast Asian countries in the form of tariff-free agricultural and mineral exports to China. As Singapore did not stand to benefit from the early harvest, we were able to become its strongest advocate to both ASEAN and to China. The early harvest was also a test of China's goodwill. According to China's chief trade negotiator, Long Yongtu, Zhu kept the strategic picture in mind and directed Chinese trade officials to accommodate ASEAN's request. That generated much goodwill. ASEAN has since become China's biggest trading partner.

In the case of the border dispute with India, China should also go more than halfway, maybe 55/45, because India feels itself the weaker power. Both sides of course think that the other side was the offending party on the border issue. The standoff after the incident in the Galwan Valley has gone on for too long to neither side's benefit. Next year, India will chair both SCO and G-20, and will value China's support.

On the WTO, China should play a helpful role in allowing some provisions to be re-negotiated. China acceded to the WTO in 2001 on tough terms. I remember the way the US, EU and Japan put China through a wringer. An exhausted China asked Singapore for a pass when I was Trade Minister. We agreed because all our demands were met by the concessions major powers were able to extract from China which were MFN'd to us. Nevertheless, China grew more than WTO members could have reasonably expected, probably more than China itself expected. The rules which were appropriate then are not all appropriate today especially with respect to the disciplines governing State Owned Enterprises and Intellectual Property. China continues to enjoy developing country status because its per capita income is still relatively low. But, in certain sectors, China is an advanced country. In a few sectors, it is actually in the lead. Rules which others feel are fairer for today's China will help to discourage countries from lightly invoking national security reasons to impose tariffs and other trade restrictions. Current WTO DG Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is a formidable woman. She can help to bring China, the US, the EU and other countries together in negotiation to update the WTO so that all countries will continue to value it as a fair and predictable way for the promotion of trade and the resolution of trade disputes. To be sure, it is not easy to bring about such an outcome and we must be realistic. However constructed, the WTO can help mediate trade disputes only to the extent that geopolitics allow it. Nevertheless, the WTO, like the UN, can put moral pressure on countries to behave in a civilized manner. China's support of WTO reform is crucial to the international trading system which has enabled hundreds of millions of people to rise out of poverty.

As a multipolar world benefits China, it behooves China to help bring it about peacefully by easing the transition to it. It behooves China to act in a way which over time persuades the US that the kind of multipolarity China envisions is also good for the US. Chinese officials should avoid excessive self-righteousness and be less thin-lipped in responding to criticisms. A bit of humor may also help.

Human Fraternity as a Transcending Value

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of multipolarity for the US to swallow is the acceptance of different value systems co-existing in the world. There is bound to be some conflict in values on issues like gender, sexuality, individualism vs communitarianism, drugs, gun control, the death sentence, abortion and stem cell research. But, even within a family, including an American family,

there could be such disputations. This is nothing abnormal. The key question is whether we are bound together by a spirit of fraternity. It is a moral question and a moral challenge. Are we in the end still brothers and sisters? In a curious way, Pope Francis, even though he is the head of a religious congregation, best personifies the larger spirit of celebrating diversity within one human family. In 2021 in Abu Dhabi, he co-signed a document on Human Fraternity with the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, Sheikh Ahmad bin Tayyeb. After the signing, the Grand Imam issued a fatwa that Muslims should treat Christians living in their midst not as members of a minority but as brothers. The Pope issued an Encyclical titled *Fratelli Tutti*, all brothers, using the words of St Francis of Assisi. Among Muslim countries, the UAE has taken a lead in putting words into action the spirit of the Abrahamic Accord. In Abu Dhabi, an Abrahamic Centre will be opened next year encompassing in one triangular complex a church facing east, a mosque facing Mecca and a synagogue facing Jerusalem. It is only by recognizing our fraternity that we are able to overcome religious differences in the world. Historically, China's Mandarins, who today are represented by the cadres of the Communist Party of China, have practised a kind of agnostic morality. Also acknowledging that all men are brothers, the Confucianist approach towards religion is to keep it in the private space and out of the political realm. From very early on, Mahayana Buddhist monks in China were confined to temples. Without fraternity, religious diversity is divisive. Without fraternity, a multipolar world will not be peaceful.

The original liberal idea of accepting diversity created the US and made it the greatest country on earth. In recent years, the liberal idea has become intolerant dividing the American family from within. Lee Kuan Yew admired the US for its ability to attract and incorporate talent from all over the world. He argued that while China had a talent pool of 1.3 billion people to draw from, the US had seven from the entire world. The America which Lee Kuan Yew described was one even Chinese leaders wanted their children to go to for higher education. Much has since changed. Whether the US can be *primus inter pares* in a multipolar world depends on the outcome of the ongoing drama we see in US domestic politics today. China should try not to be embroiled in that drama by making it clear that, in a multipolar world, it is happy to live with the US as first among equals.