



International Relations and Defence Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Multilateralism

Wednesday 24 June 2026

10.30 am

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Members present: Lord Houghton of Richmond (The Chair); Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon; Lord Alderdice; Baroness Blackstone; Baroness Crawley; Lord Darroch of Kew; Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie; Lord Grocott; Lord Lamont of Lerwick; Baroness Prashar.

In the absence of Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, Lord Houghton of Richmond took the Chair.

Evidence Session No. 3

Heard in Public

Questions 25 - 35

Witnesses

Professor Steve Tsang, Director, SOAS China Institute; Professor Jing Gu, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Development Studies.

Examination of witnesses

Professor Steve Tsang and Professor Jing Gu.

- Q25 **The Chair:** I start the live broadcast by thanking both Professor Tsang and Professor Gu for making yourselves available to speak to the committee and offer your perspective on China's role in the multilateral system. This is the third evidence session in this inquiry. In broad terms, we seek to explore the future of the multilateral system and the UK's role in it. Patently, China is a hugely significant player in how that system develops. This session, which we will try to keep to about 55 minutes, will be streamed live on the parliamentary website. We will take a transcript of it and send that to you. You are at leisure to make minor amendments but not whole-scale changes in your view due to some overnight crisis. I remind committee members that if they have any relevant interests they need to declare them first when speaking.

I start the session by inviting both of you to spend a couple of minutes introducing yourselves and maybe making one or two poignant points you want to put up front. Then we will get on to the panel's questions. Can I ask Professor Tsang to introduce yourself first?

Professor Steve Tsang: Thank you very much for inviting me. I do apologise for not wearing a tie on a day like this. I am professor of China studies and director of the China Institute at SOAS. I have been working on Hong Kong, Taiwan and Chinese politics, international relations and history. My most recent works are *The Political Thought of Xi Jinping* and *China's Global Strategy Under Xi Jinping*, which will come out in September in a book.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Professor Gu?

Professor Jing Gu: Thank you so much, Chair, and the committee for inviting me. I am a senior research fellow at the Institute of Development Studies. I am the director of the IDS China Centre. My work has focused on China's role in global development, China-Global South relations, South-South co-operation, development and business, and also the architecture of global governance.

- Q26 **The Chair:** Excellent. Again, welcome to you both. I take the Chair's privilege by asking the first question, and come to Professor Tsang first. How would you characterise China's vision for the international order, and in what ways does this differ from the United States' traditional approach to shaping that order?

Professor Steve Tsang: China has a vision for a global order. This is relatively new under Xi Jinping. Before that, it had not articulated a global strategy. Under Xi Jinping it has. In that global strategy, the long-term objective to be delivered by 2050, as part of the China dream of national rejuvenation, is to make China globally pre-eminent. It talks about multilateralism, but it is really looking at making China a globally pre-eminent power again, because from its perspective, historically, the best time in human history was when China was the pre-eminent power

and every other country looked up to China, was inspired by China and wanted to learn from China, and, therefore, it delivered Pax Sinica without China exercising domination.

From that perspective, the Chinese vision is very different from the American one. The American view is one of exercising global hegemony as part of the liberal international order and, at the same time, delivering a lot of global common goods and services. Chinese pre-eminence is done on Chinese terms, not on American terms and, therefore, is not about replacing the Americans as the global hegemon of the existing order, but transforming the international order into something that will fundamentally be Sino-centric. It believes, rightly or wrongly, that it will be better for China, better for the world and better for everybody when it is delivered. The realities of course could be different.

Q27 **The Chair:** That is just the right sort of strategic level to give us, and in the right length of time. Professor Gu, can you complement that?

Professor Jing Gu: I come to this question from a developmental and Global South perspective. That matters because China has a multilateral influence. It is not only about security and great power competition; it is about infrastructure development, development finance, technology standards, training and the language of sovereignty and development. The central point I would make is that China is not simply rejecting multilateralism; it is redefining multilateralism in a more sovereignty-centred and development focused direction with a greater voice for the Global South and less automatic authority for Western-led institutions. China works inside the existing system, alongside and around it. The recent Chinese White Paper on global governance makes this very clear.¹ China is no longer just a participant in the global system. It is increasingly presenting itself as a proposer, a reformer, and in some areas a leader of a more Global South-oriented world order.

I would describe China's vision as sovereignty-centred and development-oriented and also increasingly plural. China is not seeking global disorder. It has benefited from world trade and global markets, the UN system and economic interdependence, but it wants an international order in which sovereignty and non-interference carry more weight. That differs from the traditional US-led world order which has placed more emphasis on open markets, liberal values, human rights and domestic governance standards. China's approach stresses the UN Charter: sovereignty, equality, non-interference, development, infrastructure, multi-polarity and Global South representation. This is all reflected in the recent Chinese White Paper on global governance. Some commentators have said that it is a kind of Chinese vision for a new global order.

What is interesting about the White Paper is not that the ideas are new. Many are very familiar, such as sovereignty, development, Global South voice, and also multilateralism. What is new is that China is bringing

¹ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, [China releases white paper on global governance](#), 17 June 2026

them together into a more coherent governance agenda. China is no longer simply a rule-taker; it is a rule-shaper. It is not offering a fully alternative world order, but is trying to change the balance of power, the language of legitimacy and the priorities of global governance.

Q28 Baroness Blackstone: Professor Tsang, you just now contrasted the US and China. Do you think that the Chinese Government and China generally want to fill the gap that the US is leaving as it retreats from the multilateral system, or would it not be trying to do that? Perhaps you could tell us a bit about your views on this.

Professor Steve Tsang: China has no intention of filling the gaps being left by the United States of America in terms of the fulfilment of long-standing American global obligations. The Chinese Government are reassured by and pleased with the way President Trump is disrupting the international order, discrediting the United States and dividing Western democracies. What Xi Jinping likes to do is part of his global strategy, which has a double pivot. The first pivot here echoes what Professor Gu said: it is for China to engage with the Global South. The second complementary pivot is for China to take Taiwan, against American wishes. When the two are accomplished, Chinese global pre-eminence will be there for everybody to see.

The first part, the pivot to the Global South, is what Xi Jinping calls the democratisation of international relations, with China focused on engaging with Global South countries which form a majority of member states at the United Nations and a majority of global populations. With their support, China will be able to transform international organisations such as the United Nations from within and make it answer, first and foremost, not to the democratic alliances led by the United States but to the Global South led by and represented by China and, therefore, fundamentally transform the way the whole system works. For this to work, there is also a need for the existing liberal international order to be demonstrated to be lacking or indeed broken. That is why the Chinese Government do not have an interest in filling in the gap that will be left by the United States or, for that matter, other Western democracies. They welcome it.

Baroness Blackstone: That is a very clear answer. Can I come back to you on one thing? You said that China was interested in trying to democratise international debate and discussion. Does that not come perhaps slightly oddly from a country that is not democratic itself in terms of its national organisation and politics?

Professor Steve Tsang: With all due respect, that makes eminent sense to people in Westminster. It may not necessarily make quite so much sense to the Global South. The reality is that the majority of countries in the Global South are not functioning democracies; they are autocracies, even though some of them have democratic institutions. The Chinese promise for them—Xi Jinping said it—is that no individual country, or grouping of countries, has any right to impose any particular way of governance or standard of behaviour on other nations. It is essentially a

charter for autocrats and autocracies to feel safe in the yet-to-be created new or transformed international order. Therefore, it is an appeal that has quite a lot of traction in the Global South. China is simply asking them to support China to push for such an agenda in return for Chinese protection of them.

The second thing it asks for is for them to support China's claim and positions on Taiwan, neither of which costs autocrats or autocracies in the Global South anything domestically. Added to that, you have the Belt and Road Initiative—and other development assistance schemes that China has to help those countries develop—while Western democracies are reducing development aid to countries in the Global South. I would put it that the Chinese case has traction and attraction in the Global South in ways that we, basking in the glory and delight of democracies, sometimes find it very difficult to fathom.

Baroness Blackstone: Professor Gu, do you want to add anything to this?

Professor Jing Gu: I would not describe China simply as filling gaps because that sounds too passive. China has been very actively engaging in international organisations. On this particular question, China has been very successful in engaging developing countries, not based on values or ideology but very much on hard factors, such as infrastructure, finance and technology development, and digital transition in Africa and other developing countries. Many developing countries wanted roads, ports and digital infrastructure, other networks and industrial capacity. China responded to their demands at scale, so that is the main reason behind this. China is not just gap-filling; it is increasing its own agenda-setting role.

My main point is that the space for China was not really created by the US retreat; it was also created by a deeper legitimacy gap in global governance. For years, many developing countries have felt that existing institutions have not given them enough voice, finance or room to shape their policy. I would describe China's ambition as selective leadership. It wants more influence over global governance, especially around sovereignty development, technology standards and representation, but it does not necessarily want to replace the United States across the whole system. The key question is whether this gives developing countries more room for manoeuvre or creates new forms of dependency or constraint.

Q29 **Lord Lamont of Lerwick:** Can you describe the ways in which China has sought to increase its influence within these multilateral institutions, such as the UN and WTO? With the WTO, there has been a lot of criticism from the West that China has not complied with the rules of the WTO in ways it ought to have done. Maybe that is unfair, but that is a widespread view. Equally, although it is not an institution, a lot of allegations have been made about the Belt and Road Initiative that this has been a culture of trying to create dependency. I have heard Asian politicians say the opposite and how much they have benefited from it. Could you enlarge on the effects within the multilateral institutions?

Professor Jing Gu: China has increased its influence and presence through many senior diplomatic appointments and, more importantly, coalition building, reform proposals and agenda-setting language. The clearest example is the UN system. China presents itself as a defender of the UN-centred international order and sovereign equality. It has increased its financial contributions, expanded its role in peacekeeping and used UN platforms to promote initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Governance Initiative.

Within the WTO, China has defended the world trading system because it has benefited from it, but it also faced criticism over subsidies, state capitalism and overcapacity, as you just mentioned. Its recent decision not to seek new, special and differential treatment in future WTO negotiations helped to present itself as a more constructive reform actor in the WTO. In IMF and the World Bank, China wants these institutions to reflect the reality of today's world economy, but its formal voting power still lags behind its economic weight, while the US and European countries continue to hold significant influence. China has expanded its voice, visibility and agenda-setting power, especially in the UN and among developing countries in recent years, but it has been less successful in changing the architecture of the global governance structure of the Bretton Woods institutions. The key point is that China has gained influence but not universal confidence across all partners or control of the system.

Q30 **Lord Lamont of Lerwick:** Professor Tsang, in reply to Baroness Blackstone you said that China wanted to change multilateralism but from within, but it is in favour of multilateralism at a time when America is retreating from it. What should our attitude be towards this Chinese approach? Should we be in favour of it, cautious about it or what?

Professor Steve Tsang: I think we should engage the Chinese challenge in a much more effective way than simply relying on the United States to do so. We do not know what the United States will be like after the second term of President Trump, but I do not think we can live in the belief and hope that the United States will simply go back to what it was like before the first Trump Administration. We have to bear in mind that the Chinese approach is effective. I described how it engaged with the Global South.

In terms of international institutions, let us not forget how much China has managed to change them from within, such as at the United Nations with the Human Rights Council. You will remember that not long ago, before the Human Rights Council, China was a regular subject of discussion in UNHCR. Not any longer. China became a member of the Human Rights Council and has brought in friends and close partners, to the extent that we have not seen a more difficult situation with human rights in China since the end of Mao Zedong's era, yet it is less the subject of discussion. When the previous High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations wrote a report after her visit to Xinjiang, she had to publish it the hour before her final resignation² because there was

no way she could have published it before. That shows the extent of the influence.

If you look at UNDESA, which controls access to UN facilities and resources, including access to UN properties, China has been holding UNDESA's head position for nearly two decades. In that period, people being deemed as China unfriendly have been denied access to UN properties and, therefore, a voice within UN institutions. So we are already seeing all of that.

How do we actually engage more effectively? We have to bear in mind that the only way we can compete with China effectively is to appear more attractive to the countries being competed against: the Global South countries. If we simply do it the way the Americans have been doing it, which has not been very effective, it is not going to happen. Whether it is led by the Americans or by the UK and other European partners, we have to engage them in such a way that they will see that what we offer is a better alternative than what the Chinese offer. That is of course multilateral. We have the capacity to engage multilateralism in a much more authentic way that is genuinely multilateral. The Chinese approach to multilateralism is that it is very effective rhetoric, but the ultimate goal is Chinese pre-eminence. The UK is not seeking global pre-eminence. Those days are long gone. The European Union is not an institution created for that. It is easy for us to work together and get that message across, but we are not doing it yet.

Q31 Lord Darroch of Kew: China is competing hard for leadership roles in the existing multilateral institutions, notably the UN, but not just the UN's specialised agencies. At the same time, China is leading in the creation of what looks like an alternative set of structures. Examples include the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the BRICS grouping, which seems to get larger every year. Therefore, it can look as if China is both investing in the existing system and trying to weaken it. What is the strategy here? What is the objective? Does it intend these new organisations to be complementary, or is it trying to replace some of the existing structures?

Professor Jing Gu: Actually it does both. It depends on the institutions, the issue area and the standards applied. China is not only working inside the existing international organisations, such as the UN, WTO, IMF and World Bank; it is working alongside the new institutions such as AIIB, BRICS+, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the new World Data Organization. I would not describe this simply as anti-Western or as a direct replacement for the existing systems. They are both complementary and competitive. They provide additional finance platforms, networks and representation, especially for countries that feel underrepresented in the older institutions. They also promote different priorities, such as sovereignty, non-interference, development-first governance and greater Global South representation. The AIIB is perhaps one of the clearest examples of complementarity. It has not replaced the

² Post-meeting note: witness clarified that he meant "departure", not "resignation".

World Bank or the Asian Development Bank, but it has given China a stronger institutional role in development finance. The SCO is more political. The BRICS+ is also more significant politically because it gives emerging powers a platform for global governance reform. The role is not a single, coherent bloc. These new bodies do not signal the collapse of the existing system; they point to a more plural system.

Professor Steve Tsang: The two are complementary. They are meant to be complementary. Both are part of China's global strategy under Xi Jinping. To understand the approach it takes, we have to understand how it thinks about it. Here there is a very important concept it uses, called "the united front". This is not only about infiltration of other countries and Chinese overseas. The most important part of "the united front" is not about infiltration but a methodology. This is what qualifies it to be described by Chairman Mao Zedong as one of the three magic weapons that enabled the Communist Party to win and win and win.

To understand the concept of "the united front" as a methodology, we can imagine this room as an oblong table with the Chair sitting at one end and me representing China sitting at the other end. Those sitting close to the Chair are natural friends and allies of the principal contradictions, which is how I would identify the Chair at my opposite end. Those closest to me would be my partners, and those in the middle would be the wavering middles in the intermediate zone. My, the Chinese, priority is to isolate the principal contradiction³, engage my friends and in particular the wavering middles, to win over their support and divide where I can the allies of the principal contradiction so that I can push the principal competition off the pedestal. When that is achieved, not only have I won round one but I will enter round two by elevating the former allies of the principal contradiction into the new principal contradiction, and I will repeat this process until around the oblong table all are friends of China and old friends of China. This is what "the united front" approach is about.

Engaging with existing international organisations and transforming them is a slow process that is going to take time. Building up new institutions and international organisations that can set new standards according to the desire of the Chinese government and party state is much more effective and can go at a much faster pace. It fits into the way of 'the united front' in how China aims to win everybody over eventually as friends, willingly or not.

Lord Darroch of Kew: Thank you. That was fascinating.

The Chair: Beautifully described as well.

Q32 **Lord Grocott:** This question is really about priorities, addressed to Professor Gu. In the various options that the Chinese Government might have in terms of influencing international organisations, what are the

³ Post-meeting note: witness clarified the principal contradiction is represented by the Chairman sitting opposite.

ones that are most important to them and, by definition, which are the least important? Am I right in assuming from what has been said so far that more than anything else there is an overriding interest from China in the Global South? I am answering my own question, I suppose, but is it fair to say that, above all else, that is dominant in Chinese interest in international organisations?

Professor Jing Gu: Yes. Development is central. China's multilateral priorities are clearest in four areas: development, sovereignty, technology and climate. As you just rightly pointed out, development is central. China wants more attention on poverty reduction, development finance, infrastructure, food security, industrialisation, digital connectivity and the Sustainable Development Goals. This is where the message often resonates with developing countries, with the Global South. Sovereignty is also fundamental. China argues that multilateralism should respect sovereign equality, non-interference and the different political and development models.

Technology is increasingly important. China wants to help shape rules and standards on artificial intelligence, data, digital infrastructure, telecoms, electric vehicles, batteries, solar and critical minerals. It also argues that developing countries should not be excluded from the digital and AI economy. Climate and green development are another priority. China is essential to global decarbonisation because of its manufacturing capacity in solar batteries and clean technologies. Other countries will also want to manage supply chain connections carefully.

China is less likely to co-operate on issues that touch what it sees as core sovereignty or highly sensitive political and strategic questions, as Professor Tsang mentioned earlier, such as Taiwan, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Tibet, sanctions, export controls, data flows and sensitive technologies. China's multilateralism is active, ambitious and selective. It co-operates where multilateralism supports development, the Global South's stability, technological inclusion and global public goods. It is more cautious when it believes that multilateralism could place external pressure on its sovereignty, domestic governance and development space.

Professor Steve Tsang: President Trump talks about "America first". China practises "China first". When it engages with international organisations and global affairs, it will prioritise whatever advances China's advantages first. Things that just happen to be necessary for the rest of the world can wait. We have seen how the Russia-Ukraine war started and developed, and how Chinese positions put China first and not global security and stability, in spite of its articulation of concerns about how the war affected countries in the Global South disproportionately compared to the disruption to our energy supplies and security in Western democracies. If we go back to when the war started, a month and a half to two months after the invasion started in February 2022, only one global leader could have done shuttle diplomacy, flown to Moscow, talked to President Putin and then flown on from Moscow directly to Kyiv, talked to President Zelensky and banged heads together to try to find a way out, just when the Russian invasion was getting into

difficulties. That was Supreme Leader Xi Jinping. He did not do that. He could have done it, but he did not.

China is well placed, more than any others, when the 7 October atrocities happened and the Israelis started their operations against Gaza to interfere, but it did not interfere. China is best placed among all the global powers to interfere with the American attack on Iran to find a way out and sort out some of the problems. It stayed in the back seat. None of these would have delivered much immediate interest to China in its calculations of what matters to it, yet the disruption that those conflicts have brought about to the international order, and the discrediting of the United States and the Western democracies, work to China's global agenda. This is the reality that we have to acknowledge and recognise as we devise the best way to engage in an effective way, putting our interests and the interests of human rights and democracy in the world ahead of others.

Q33 Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Thank you very much for the clarity you have provided. At the outset, I declare my interests. I am chair of the advisory board of the International Communities Organisation and co-chair of the World Humanitarian Forum.

With that, I turn first to you, Professor Tsang. I agree with your premise. I was there with Michelle Bachelet, and indeed it was our advocacy that led to Michelle's visit to China. I know the parameters and limitations that she worked with, so it was interesting to hear you. Quite often, a criticism levied was: how can China be sitting on the Human Rights Council with what was happening in Xinjiang and with the Uighurs?

To bring you back to the UK and your previous answer, it was really interesting that China chose not to interject and intervene on key conflicts. Could you expand on that? My question is also specific to the UK-China relationship within multilateral organisations. We have seen historical co-operation on areas such as Covid. When we lived through that, that was very clear. We saw, when we hosted the COP, some degree of co-operation on this. Indeed, when the first AI summit was held under the previous Government, the Vice-President of China was also invited to attend because there was recognition that we needed to work with some degree of co-operation. The current Government have a "co-operate, compete, align" approach. Where do you think the current relationship is of the UK with China in multilateral fora? More importantly, do you think that the current approach that the UK is adopting is the right approach?

Professor Steve Tsang: Thank you. The current UK approach sounds absolutely wonderful. In practice, it might not work quite so well. It is one thing to say the three Cs, but when do we do the first, the second or the third C? China has a strategy to engage with the UK. The UK does not have a strategy to engage with China. We do not have something to say such as, "We want our relationship in five, 10 or 20 years with China to be like X". We do not have that. We are drifting in terms of where the situation is and trying to be as pragmatic as we can, which is the tradition

of British diplomacy. I understand and respect that. The Chinese have a clear objective of what they want of us. They want us to stay pragmatic and engage with China in a constructive way, which is what the long-standing UK policy has been, and by doing so we divide the Western democracies and occasionally deliver what are bonuses to China.

Let us think back to the AIIB. When the AIIB was originally put forward, it was primarily a Chinese initiative to support the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, BRI, until the United Kingdom agreed to join the AIIB, which opened the floodgates for a whole lot of other developed, rich countries that had been very hesitant about AIIB to join AIIB. With that, the AIIB changed fundamentally from what was a Chinese instrument to become a genuinely credible international development bank. We can deliver things like that for them. We have done that, and they would like us to continue to do so. They would therefore continue to engage with us, using our principles, our values and our rule of law to advance what they want to advance. But when we engage in China and ask for the same to be respected when China is dealing with UK or British citizens, then Chinese rules, precepts and laws apply, which protect their interests but not ours. I think it is fair to say that the Chinese Government put China first. The important thing is that the UK Government need to understand that and have a strategy to deal with it in a much more effective way, balancing the protection of our fundamental values and rights, and yet have ways to avoid us falling into the kinds of traps the Chinese love us to walk into.

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon: Thank you. Very briefly, Professor Gu, on the development side, because we co-operate at times, we always found that China was always quite bilateral with its development focus, particularly, as we have heard from both of you, when it came to the Global South. Do you think there is a level of co-operation that the United Kingdom and China can have within the multilateral context?

Professor Jing Gu: Certainly. First, I have to say that China sees the UK neither simply as an adversary nor as a straightforward partner. It sees the UK as a useful but sometimes difficult middle power. From a Chinese perspective, the UK still matters in many areas such as climate, finance, technology, AI safety and global governance reform. It is particularly interested in working with the UK where the UK appears pragmatic, technically capable and willing to engage beyond a purely US-China rivalry frame.

Basically, my second point is that we have to put UK-China relations in perspective. It is part of a wider picture of changing global development politics, the US-China rivalry and the fragmentation of the world order. The Global South needs more policy space. China also sees the limits of collaborating with the UK, especially where the UK aligns closely with the US on technology, security and other issues. China's view of the UK is issue specific. On climate finance, green development and other clean technologies, the UK is a strong partner. On other issues such as human rights-sanctions, or security and technology controls, it is more likely to be seen as a critic or constraint. The UK is not decisive on its own, but it

remains, as we all know, a significant P5 member, a convening power, a standard setter and a bridge to the wider Western and international debates. The UK possesses that kind of normative power. The UK's task is to help to shape the quality and the direction of the multilateral system and international organisations. That means engaging China where it contributes to the global public good while defending the standards and making multilateralism open, fair and genuinely multilateral.

Q34 Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie: Thank you very much for being with us today. We have just talked about the UK-China relationship, but if I can bring it back to the multilateral organisations, how much of a problem is increased Chinese leadership of those organisations to the national interests of the UK? Professor Tsang, I come to you on this. You described very vividly the importance to China of non-intervention in sovereign states, despite whatever those sovereign states might be doing with human rights issues. You described China's aim of dividing Western democracies. We have touched on issues of AI safety, technology and data. Within the multilateral system, what should the UK's policy be? Should it resist Chinese leadership and rule-making, or should it learn to accept and work with it?

Professor Steve Tsang: It really depends on how the United Kingdom sees what is in our national interest. If we believe, as I personally do, that supporting human rights and individual dignity wherever that happens to be is important, then we need to engage the Chinese competition in a much more effective way. China is making headway in the international organisations not only because it is devoting a lot of resources and capacity to doing that but because we are withdrawing from those arenas. We are not taking, for example, the United Nations as seriously as we used to. It is not just the UK; it is the UK, US and European democracies as a whole. We are all not doing enough about that. We are reducing our overseas development aid budgets at a time when the competition is very much winning the hearts and minds of the Global South in sustaining the international order that is beneficial to supporting human rights and human dignities and liberties.

We cannot return to the earlier stage of the liberal international order. That has gone. We have to accept that, and that is not necessarily a bad thing. We have to engage competitively in those international organisations to transform them into something that is better suited and stronger in supporting, encouraging and protecting the rights of individuals and human dignities everywhere. If we do that, we can compete with China, because the Chinese approach is fundamentally transactional. It is getting a lot of traction because we do not have anything more beautiful to offer to countries in the Global South. Forgive me for using very crude language, but in a beauty contest you do not have to be very beautiful to win; you only need to be less ugly than the others.

The Chair: I have had a final bid from Lord Alderdice, but it has to be a one-minute question followed by two one-minute answers. Baroness Crawley, I promise you time in the next session to ask your question.

Q35 **Lord Alderdice:** How far and in what ways do China's history and culture affect its approach to the current world order?

The Chair: Great question. One minute.

Professor Jing Gu: Chinese culture and Chinese philosophy have a fundamental impact on China's political culture and approach to multilateralism. As we know, the tributary system and the mutual benefit win-win philosophy are reflected in China's practice in many developing countries. In terms of Chinese legal culture and philosophy, [*Speaker continued in another language*]⁴, which to put it simply, means "Mind your own business". This kind of philosophy is to some extent reflected in its approach to international affairs through the non-interference principle.

Professor Steve Tsang: Xi Jinping introduced a concept called historical nihilism that effectively bans any other version of history than his and the Communist Party's version. History and culture in China today matter because it is the version of history and culture that the Communist Party presents. If you try to convince anybody and provide evidence that Confucianism is not what Xi Jinping says Confucianism is, you will have committed the heinous crime of historical nihilism and will be subjected to punishment. With all due respect, I do not think China really is affected by its genuine historical culture or history, but it is being affected significantly by the party's version of it.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed, both of you, Professor Tsang and Professor Gu. Your insights have been brilliant. I remind you that you will receive a transcript for small corrections if necessary. I am happy that I can now consider part one of our morning session closed.

⁴ The witness referenced a Chinese saying.