

A Global China Dialogue on the Challenges of Global Education

Address for the Opening Session of the Tenth Global China Dialogue: “Governance for Global Education”, British Academy, London, December 5th, 2025.

Dear colleagues,

Since 2014, the Global China Academy has developed its activities across its fellowship system, the Global China Dialogue, and the transcultural publishing program, thanks to the extraordinary energy and commitment of Professor Xiangqun Chang. Her dedication deserves our gratitude and our praise for this successful endeavour. She is driven by the conviction that a transcultural dialogue between China and the rest of the world is a key component of a more peaceful, sustainable and better world.

This 10th edition of the Global China Dialogue focuses on “Governance for Global Education”, a sector in which China plays an increasing role and in which the world has much to learn from China.

In China and worldwide, the education system faces considerable challenges and must adapt to a fast-transforming world to fulfil old and new missions. Let me briefly highlight three of these challenges.

The first and most widely discussed in contemporary literature is the requirement to adapt education to a digital world. The rise of the digital world provides new tools for more efficient and interactive education. It also requires training our students to use these tools both proficiently and critically. In this field, China has moved faster and more decisively than many European countries, which have much to learn from China’s experiences and innovations.

The second one is far from new but remains the main mission of public education: ensuring access to high-quality education across class divides, diverse social backgrounds, and the rural–urban gap. Each child deserves the opportunity to develop their full potential in different realms of life.

A third challenge is less present in scholarly literature but no less important: schools, universities and the whole education system should also instil a sense of the common good and encourage the new generation to work with and for their communities, at the local, national and global levels. Fostering these civic and ethical values is especially crucial in a time when some world leaders encourage egocentric individualism, the pursuit of narrow self-interest, and domination over others. Training a new generation of world citizens with cosmopolitan values is crucial at a time of increasing interdependency and ecological crisis.

'How to live together on a limited planet?' is arguably the central question of the 21st century. There is only one planet, and we have to share it. Schools and universities train students such as engineers, organic farmers, and experts in sustainable development with competencies to pursue green and low-carbon development. However, this mission must go beyond these specialised university careers. A more harmonious relationship with nature should be a core element at every educational level and in all disciplines at universities. The Earth is our common home; we need to learn to protect it.

A complementary and crucial value is transculturality. It requires a cosmopolitan orientation and an opening to others that is at once sociological, cultural, and personalⁱ. Fei Xiaotong called it "A cultural self-consciousness in pursuit of harmony and diversity and a united world". Twenty years after his death, his words remain a major inspiration.

Thanks to Professor Xiangqun Chang, the Global China Academy has become a space where a community of knowledge and mutual understanding is being built, a space to foster dialogue and to bring us together for a better understanding of the challenges of our times.

I am particularly pleased to greet two of the Western sociologists who have done most to open global sociology and the Western world to Chinese sociology.

Professor Laurence Roulleau-Berger has been working closely with Chinese sociologists for over two decades. She has contributed to developing and implementing the Chinese "post-Western sociology" approach, to which she has dedicated several articles and a seminal book, bringing together dozens of Chinese and East Asian sociologistsⁱⁱ.

Professor Martin Albrow, a leading global scholar, my mentor in global studies, and an active promoter of the Global China Dialogue, is probably the one who has captured the spirit of the dialogue between China and the West in the most appropriate and convincing way:

“Whatever differences there are between our cultures, there are supervening issues that affect the human future on this earth... We cannot dwell forever on the problems of understanding one another before we work together in a common cause. In that sense, achieving an understanding adequate for the challenges facing humankind collectively is a proper ambition for sociology in our timesⁱⁱⁱ.”

I wish you all a day full of fruitful exchanges and dialogue towards this ambition of achieving “an understanding adequate for the challenges facing humankind collectively”.

Geoffrey Pleyers

President of the International Sociological Association

Global China Academy website: <https://globalchinaacademy.org/global-china-dialogue-series-forum/>

ⁱ Pleyers, G. (2023). Global Sociology as a Renewed Global Dialogue, *Global Dialogue*, 13.3.

<https://globaldialogue.isa-sociology.org/articles/global-sociology-as-a-renewed-global-dialogue>
(Chinese translation: <https://globaldialogue.isa-sociology.org/uploads/imgen/3355-v13i1-chinese-simplified.pdf>)

ⁱⁱ Roulleau-Berger, L. (2021). The fabric of post-Western sociology: Ecologies of knowledge beyond the “East” and the “West”. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology*, Vol. 8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-021-00144-z>; Roulleau-Berger, L., & Li, P. (Eds.). (2023). *Handbook of Post-Western Sociology*. Leiden: Brill.

ⁱⁱⁱ Albrow, M. (2018). *China’s Role in a Shared Human Future: Towards Theory for Global Leadership*. London: Global Century Press.