



China in the 21st Century: Devin Stewart Interviews Jeffrey Wasserstrom

Global Policy Innovations (GPI)

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Transcript

DEVIN STEWART: Hi. I'm Devin Stewart, here at the Carnegie Council in New York City. I'm sitting here with Jeffrey Wasserstrom. He is the author of *China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Needs to Know*. It is published by Oxford University Press. It just came out two weeks ago.

Jeff, it's so good to have you here in New York on this beautiful Friday morning. Thank you for visiting us. I understand you have a lot of visits around the United States talking about this book.

What does everyone need to know about China in the 21st century? Let's get right down to it.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Get to the point. First of all, that subtitle wasn't—I didn't come up with that. There's an Oxford series that has that. I know it sounds very pretentious to say "everything you need to know." And it's a short book. It's not even like "everything you need to know" in a massive set of five volumes. It's 160 pages or so, in question-and-answer format.

I have been going around giving talks based on the book. I can't go through the 100 or so questions in there, so I have come up with five things that I think everyone needs to know. I'll see if I can remember them.

DEVIN STEWART: Are these sort of mega-forces at work?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: These are mega ones that actually weave through multiple questions in the book, specific ones.

So one thing everyone needs to know, I think—Americans in particular, which is the audience I'm writing for—is that China is very diverse. That may seem pretty obvious, but a lot of the mentions of China refer to it as not being diverse. They talk about how homogeneous it is. It may be more homogeneous than some other places in quite specific ways, but it's incredibly diverse. If anybody asks you, what do the Chinese people think about something—the Chinese people living in which part of the country? Near the coast, where the economy is booming more, or inland? Do you mean people over 60, between 30 and 60, under 30?

One thing I stress is that, for almost half of all Chinese right now, Mao has always been dead, because they were born after 1976. For about a quarter of them, the Berlin Wall has always been rubble.

So when you take into your mind this notion of all Chinese being affected by something like the Cold War, it may affect them, but it's going to affect people very differently.

DEVIN STEWART: It's important to remember that, even within an institution—for example, the Chinese Communist Party or the Chinese government—there are varying and conflicting views.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Yes. And the lack of institutional political change doesn't mean there has been no political debate. Within China, though there are things that you can't argue about, there is debate, for example, about how significant the rise of inequalities within China are. There is a sort of [New Left](#) critique of that, in which people are saying that, in fact, this is a problem, that, without going back to what was going on in Mao's day, we need to recuperate some of that kind of critique of class divisions that was there.

There's also another side, which is saying, well, no, actually, the way to deal with this is to emphasize [Confucian](#) values. So the playing on notions of a [harmonious society](#) is actually another way of trying to deal with this kind of problem.

Another of the things that I think everyone needs to know, particularly Americans, is that China and the United States aren't in every way opposites to one another.

DEVIN STEWART: This is number two?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: This is number two. I think I get to it as number five—

DEVIN STEWART: Before we get to number two—it sounds like you're getting to the idea of a G-2 or a "Chimerica," the relationship between the United States and China. That's number two. But before we get there, real quickly, who do you blame for sort of making these stereotypes? Is it the American press, generally? Is it commentators? Who are you lecturing?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: It's interesting. I used to think of it as kind of a tension between academics and journalists. But, in fact, I see a lot of common cause with a certain kind of journalist working within China, the sort of deeply immersed—certainly the freelance writers. Somebody like [Peter Hessler](#) I see as a complete ally in this effort to humanize and diversify China in the mind.

It's really a sound bite-driven side of Western media, which is largely kind of a gatekeeper role, with what gets through as a kind of CNN story, often.

But I think there's an odd kind of collusion between some Western stereotyping and some of the rhetoric coming out of China which actually encourages us to think of this. For example, the Chinese official statements will talk about 90 percent of the population being [Han](#) and only 10 percent being other ethnic groups. The short-form commentary on China will say the same thing. What they both overlook is the incredible diversity within the Han group.

There are some people who have classified as Han Chinese, a segment called the [Hakka](#), who, throughout the last couple hundred years of history, have often had feuds that have flared up with other groups living nearby, also categorized as Han, that in any other setting—both sides stereotype each other. Both sides often dislike each other. They have different customs. The Hakka women never bound their feet, for example. But they were still classified as Han.

If you didn't accept this categorization scheme, you would say the Hakka and non-Hakka living near each other who are fighting—that's interethnic violence.

So, in some ways—and I talk about that in the book—sometimes there can be an odd kind of collusion between Western punditry and Chinese government spins.

The same about this notion of Confucianism being enduring and unchanging. This is homogenization of China's past. It's 5,000 years.

DEVIN STEWART: And what do you make of this idea that Confucian values inform Chinese policymaking?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: There's something to it, but I think you have to realize that it's a selective use of Confucianism at different times. A little over 30 years ago, Confucius was being reviled in China by the Communist Party, which now presides over quoting Confucius.

That, I thought, would have been one of the big stories of the Olympic Games, that they are quoting Confucius. I have said, sort of flippantly—but I believe it—that if any athlete had gone from being out of the running for anything in the 1970s, which is what we would think of Confucius being, to then being celebrated during the event, we would have called him the comeback kid of the Olympics.

But the sportscasters kind of said, "Yeah, here we are in China, where Confucius has always been celebrated. The torch ran through Qufu, his hometown, and now the Games are opening with a quote by Confucius. Isn't that what China has always been about?"

DEVIN STEWART: Was the Olympics really China's coming onto the world stage, as everyone has been talking about? What do you make of the [Expo](#), by the way?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Just a little bit ago, they had the opening ceremony. I think this was a really challenging moment, in part because the Olympics set the bar, in our expectations, so high.

With world's fairs in the past—one of the early American world's fairs, in Chicago in 1893, came right after the World's Fair in Paris that had blown everyone away with the Eiffel Tower. So in Chicago, the real question was, how do you out-Eiffel Eiffel? They were trying to think of a symbol for the fair. Eiffel volunteered to come over to America and build a tower for us, but we thought that was too derivative. They spent a lot of time worrying about this and eventually came up with the Ferris wheel, which was the great symbol of the Chicago World's Fair.

In Shanghai, as they were gearing up for this 2010 Expo, they spent a lot of time revisiting that history and they spent a lot of time worrying about what the symbol of the Expo would be. They came up with this China National Pavilion in the end, which is quite striking. But in a way, the biggest challenge for the Expo isn't to out-Eiffel Eiffel, the equivalent of that—it's not to come up with that symbol—but it's to out-wow [the Bird's Nest](#), to outdo that kind of thing that captured our attention.

I think the Olympics was important. I try to avoid the term "coming-out party," because it has become such a cliché. It was mentioned again today in your local paper, which, I noticed, [quoted me](#), which I was delighted about, in a story about the Expo. It was great to wake up in New York and have my name in *The New York Times*. That doesn't usually happen. I've been quoted a couple of other times before, but it was a pretty special convergence there.

But the Olympics, for me, were a really pivotal moment, the period around the Olympics, because I think it shifted—and this is one of the other five things that you need to know—

DEVIN STEWART: This is number two?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: This is number two. We'll get to U.S.-China later. Number two is that the big question that we used to ask about China, even 30 years ago, was, would China be able to modernize? There were actually a lot of people in a lot of different places saying, "Let's hope China can modernize. They've just had this kind of devastating period—the famines of the late 1950s, early 1960s, the Cultural Revolution. Can they pull it together and get back on this kind of track toward modernity?"

Now—and I think the Olympics were really a pivotal moment for this—the thing is, "Wow, China is modern, or is successfully modernizing. How can the world deal with it, and what impact will it have on the Chinese people?" And some of the protests in China now are actually about worries about excessive modernization.

DEVIN STEWART: What does modernization mean?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Well, in a kind of crude way—and this is where the academic in me would get into all the debates about it—the way I'm using it is, having the trappings that, say, during the 20th century we associated with the more industrialized, more advanced, technologically, parts of the world.

Thinking of China as not being modern is hard to square with their having the fastest trains on earth, starting a space program, having elevated freeways. Now we're worried about whether this degree of modernization, in a kind of old-fashioned style—very tall buildings. Shanghai has more skyscrapers than Manhattan. This skyline is much less "wow" to me, because I spend time in Shanghai. Okay, there are some big buildings here, there are some nice ones, but Shanghai has even more.

DEVIN STEWART: Sorry we disappointed you here in New York.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: But when I really had fun was when I went to Japan. I know you work on Japan. I took the bullet train. I told some local officials that we had a sister-state relationship, Indiana. When I used to teach in Indiana, I went over there. The officials were saying, "Now that China's rising, do we have a chance?"

The problem is, I study China, and I largely study the period when Japan was invading China, in my historical work. Part of me empathizes with the side of China during that point, so I took a certain pleasure in saying to the Japanese officials, "Well, I don't know. I took the bullet train to get here, and it was really nice. But tomorrow I'm going to Shanghai and I'm going to take a really fast train when I get there," because the [Maglev](#) is faster.

DEVIN STEWART: Whoa. How was that met?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Oh, with silence.

DEVIN STEWART: Out-Eiffeling the Eiffel Tower didn't stop the Japanese from making a slightly taller Eiffel Tower.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Yes, I visited that. It was fun—the [Tokyo Tower](#).

DEVIN STEWART: Talk about another piece of modernization; there's the massive use of cell phones and the Internet in China. I think that's a topic that you have followed a great deal. Especially, you are the founder of the blog, *The China Beat*.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Cofounder. It's a group effort. None of us wanted to do our own blog, so we went in on it together.

DEVIN STEWART: That's very Confucian of you. Just kidding.

The China Beat, "Blogging How the East Is Read."

Tell me, Jeff, what is the thing that we need to know about the effect of information technology and that facet of modernization on China today? Does it carry values? Is it going to go toward—some U.S. government official said that, and I think Google, [Sergey Brin](#), to a certain degree, believes that information technology can be a tool for openness, for more transparency; freedom of expression can bring freedom of speech, and also help attack corruption and other ills.

But at the same time, on the other hand, as you mentioned earlier, before we started the interview, it's also the case that these technologies can be used to keep people down, keep people under control, survey and keep track of them.

Where do you come down on how this is all shaping up?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: I see it as doing all of those things. But I think the danger is thinking that it inevitably does any one of them. It has become the closest thing to a public sphere, a vibrant public sphere, that there is in China. But at the same time, it can also be a monitoring force. It can mobilize people in nationalistic protests and it can also be used by the government. The government sends mass messaging to try to get people off the streets. During the anti-Japanese protests that the government worried were going too far, they could send out mass messages saying, "Look, if you don't cool down now, we're going to have to take some measures."

So it can be used to warn people. It can be used to spread word about mobilization.

People in China have been very creative in using the Internet. There is an ongoing cat-and-mouse game between censors and activists—and not just activists, but people just playing around. The Chinese have been very clever to come up with puns and other things that get around censoring mechanisms and things like that.

But I think the danger with a lot of things about China is to presume that things are going to move in a single direction, rather than the chance of them moving in two different ways.

[Bill Clinton](#) and [George Will](#) both made statements in 2000—and they rarely agreed—they were both saying about the Internet inevitably freeing up China. And I think when George Will and Bill Clinton agree on anything, we should probably be a little suspicious, at least, of where that's going.

Bill Clinton said, "They're going to try to censor the Internet in China, but that's like trying to nail Jell-o to the wall"—a nice folksy image.

Ten years later, another Clinton, [Hillary](#), was making a statement about needing to think about the ability of the Internet to be used as a tool by authoritarian regimes.

The point is that, in some ways, both of these are true. You can't completely control the Internet. It provides space for play and entertainment and all kinds of things, and awareness of things that the government might not like. China can't cut itself off completely from the Internet. The only way you can really control the Internet is to close off from it. That's really not an option for China, because it really needs to continue to have high growth rates and economic development.

So it's in this kind of bind. It needs to have it. It can't control it completely. It's trying to control it a great deal.

There's a term often used, "the Great Firewall." It's a nice play on words. But it suggests this kind of steady blocking through a permanent structure. It's much more fluid than that. I prefer the term "net nanny," which is what [Jeremy Goldkorn](#), who runs this wonderful website, [Danwei](#), in Beijing, uses to talk about the goal of the government to try to steer you away from worrisome sites and toward ones that are good for you. So this kind of effort to make it the path of least resistance is going to lead you to their story.

Another thing—and this is about the diversity again in China—is that we often talk about digital divide between people who are online and people who aren't. But you have to think in China, and probably a fair number of other places, of digital divides. There are people who aren't online.

There are 300 million or so people who do go online—the largest Internet-using population in the world at this point. It passed the U.S. a year or so ago. There are people who only go onto Chinese-controlled sites. Then there are people—yet another group—who go on via [VPN](#) [virtual private network] service, who get around the firewall or controls and are using the broader Internet. Within that, there are people who are going around the firewalls, but only using Chinese-language sites, and there are other ones who are also going to English-language sites.

DEVIN STEWART: The people who go over the firewalls—how would you characterize them? Are they more educated, less educated, more well traveled?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: They do tend to be, often, better educated, or at least more tech-savvy, obviously, because you need to do these techniques. They are often the same kinds of people who would be more likely to travel abroad. But it's also a form of virtual travel, in a sense.

But they may be nationalistic. They may just be curious. I think we sometimes think that people who have really checked out the Western news versions of things will be less nationalistic, but often what they can come across in precisely the news sites that are censored will reinforce certain ideas they have about the Western press being biased.

DEVIN STEWART: What about innovators—scientists, inventors? With the size of the state-owned enterprises in China, the size of the economy that's government-owned, which is something that [Liz Economy](#) has identified as being one of the most important factors in understanding China today, the role of the state in the economy—it's what [Ian Bremmer](#) calls "state capitalism" in his new book, [The End of the Free Market](#).

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: I'll have to check that out.

DEVIN STEWART: It's a great book. I recommend it. We'll be having an event here, a book launch.

How do you see the impact of the Great Firewall or the net nanny on innovation, given the size of the economy that's state-owned? Is it something that might hinder China's economic and innovative future or not?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: I think this is one of the things that the government has recognized. What they're most concerned about, again, is the access to information of people who are the broadest mass of people. They have always been willing to allow more access to multiple kinds of information to people higher up in various hierarchies. This has been going on for a while.

When I lived in China in the mid-1980s, for example, when you couldn't buy *Time* or *Newsweek* on the street, they got copies of it in the university library where I was. But you could only get access to that room if you were a graduate student or a professor. Undergraduates couldn't even get in there.

Some of that, I think, translates in other cases. Academics are the group I know best. In the period of the Cold War, Eastern European or Russian academics in the social sciences and humanities, if they got a Ph.D. in the West, didn't go back to teach in their home country, because they couldn't imagine having a fulfilling academic life. They wouldn't have access to enough of the debate.

Now there are some Chinese academics who get a Ph.D. in a field like anthropology, could have a tenure-track job in the U.S., and decide to go back to China, in part because the government, in wanting to get those people back, is allowing more access to broad discussions within the academy.

That's an example of trying to create the setting where that innovation will take place.

I guess another way to think about where censorship has moved in China is that—in one vision we have at least about the totalitarian state, the government just is focusing on what you can read. In China, it's much more focusing on a few things that they want you to not be able to read, selectively preventing discussion of certain taboo subjects, a surprising number of which begin with the letter "T," [Tiananmen](#) to Taiwan—at least not discuss them in ways that run out of other things.

DEVIN STEWART: Speaking of the letter "T," let's get to your third point of the book, before we run out of time here. Do you want to move on to that?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: You kind of got to the third point. The third point is that one mistake is to think of China in recent decades as that the economy has changed, the political realm hasn't. That's a tendency. The media coverage often is, the stories about the economy cue the pictures of KFCs and McDonald's and talk about how radically different everything is. If the story is politics, cue shots of the top leaders getting together—

DEVIN STEWART: Which is on your cover.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: On the cover, juxtaposed with a picture of punk rockers.

DEVIN STEWART: Punk rockers, which is also on your cover, which I want to ask you about. What are you trying to say with this cover? Are you making fun of the news, like you are talking about right now?

For our listeners, I want to describe this. The top half of the cover has a picture of three punk rockers. One is lighting a cigarette, it appears. He has a Mohawk, with several-colored hair. He has two buddies here. One has a [Che Guevara](#) T-shirt and the other one has a Mao Zedong T-shirt. They look quite similar. On the bottom half we have Chinese leaders meeting and clapping about something—I'm sure, some great success. Maybe five successes? A certain number of successes that have been achieved.

What is this all about here, Jeff? What are you trying to say with this?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: It flags, at the most basic level, that we need to think of China as a place of amazing change and certain kinds of continuities.

DEVIN STEWART: What's the continuity here?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: The continuity is below. There still are, almost always, unanimous votes of the official leaders. But there's a lot of kind of personal freedom at the other level.

But I think we can't think about the economy, everything changing, and politics, nothing changing, even though that cover might play into that kind of idea. In fact, as you just mentioned, the economy hasn't completely changed. In some parts of the country, state-owned enterprises, state-directed development is still there. So it's not as though China has become this complete free-for-all free market, even though there are elements of more capitalism than we imagined. And the political story is not one of complete stasis, even though there hasn't been the kind of institutional change that many of us would have liked to see or were hoping to see.

One thing I talk about is that Chinese leaders don't have to stand for election. But, increasingly, they are sometimes acting as if they did. They're trying to figure out what popular opinion is. They're checking out—

DEVIN STEWART: What's driving that?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: It's partly that the Chinese Communist Party has taken the fall of communism in other places as a sort of diagnostic opportunity. They are trying to learn from the mistakes in other places.

DEVIN STEWART: They're adapting.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Yes, it's adapting and trying to stay a step ahead of those kinds of things.

But there's one funny thing—

DEVIN STEWART: What do they worry about, by the way?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: One thing they worry about is what is sometimes called "the Polish disease," which is [Solidarity](#), which is any kind of organized labor activity that spans multiple locales and multiple industries. They've been willing to selectively compromise at certain points or deal gently with single-issue protests in single locales, with one social group. What they fear, because of

Solidarity—and, to a certain extent, Tiananmen—is anything that pulls together people from different walks of life and from different parts of the country. So they treat differently—

DEVIN STEWART: Do they actually call it "the Polish disease"?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: They do. That term was actually first used in East Germany and then it was borrowed. In the early 1980s, East German officials said, "We don't want the Polish disease spreading here," after Solidarity had linked there.

DEVIN STEWART: I interrupted you. You were going to tell us a funny story, which is probably the highlight of the interview.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Well, it has been the highlight of my book tour, I would say. I riff on the cover of the book being this study in contrasts, the young men on top and the older men on the bottom. One of my colleagues at Irvine, a sociologist who was originally from China, said, "But all these men have one important thing in common."

I said, "What?"

He said, "They all dye their hair."

DEVIN STEWART: Interesting. I was actually going to ask you about that.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: The officials are trying to look younger. The Chinese Communist Party keeps saying, "We're passing on the leadership to a younger generation," and what they're really doing is passing it on from 70-year-olds to 65-year-olds or 65-year-olds to 60-year-olds.

Everybody in that picture, except one guy, who is the true nonconformist there, who let his hair go white and stay white—all of them have this jet-black hair.

DEVIN STEWART: So there's a convergence; there's the hair convergence.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: There you go, the hair convergence.

DEVIN STEWART: That will be the next book.

I see there is this one guy with the white hair. Maybe he just doesn't care anymore.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: He could be the crazy eccentric there.

DEVIN STEWART: Let's get to your fourth point.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Oh, the fourth point. Maybe the fourth point—I mix up the numbers sometimes—is that the U.S. and China aren't complete opposites. This is partly about how intertwined the two countries are. But more than that, I just think that, from the perspective of some other parts of the world, the U.S. and China actually stand out as these continent-size countries that were founded on revolutions that were all about rejecting colonialism and imperialism, and then built things that really look like empires to the rest of the world.

We think of, in human rights, China and the U.S. being a study in complete contrasts. China we put in one category; the U.S. we put in another. But when I went to Sweden to give a talk about human rights in China and the U.S.—I was on a student radio station—they said, before the interview, "Are you going to talk about what China and the U.S. have in common? Swedes, some of us, think of you two as being in one category."

I said, "Well, I don't know."

She said, "You both have the death penalty. We focus on that as a human-rights abuse, and you're two of the only countries to do that."

DEVIN STEWART: [Harry Harding](#), our good friend who came with us on our [Carnegie delegation to Beijing](#), put out the idea that the reason he expects China and the United States to disagree in the future, and maybe even to have some conflict, is because they are so similar. One of the points that he makes is that China and the United States both like to justify morally their international and domestic policies and positions.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Yes. I think the other thing is, China now is a lot like the U.S. when we were hosting our first World's Fair, which was the first World's Fair held outside of Europe, 1876, in Philadelphia. We were rising toward becoming the world's second economy and then beyond there. We were doing things differently and were viewed by the established powers with a certain amount of suspicion and concern. We were seen as a country that was making enormous strides economically, but we were producing shoddy goods that you couldn't trust, quack medicines that were kind of dangerous. [Dickens](#) came here and complained about our refusal to pay attention to copyright laws.

So a lot of the things that are now being said about China were being said about us, which doesn't mean that we shouldn't criticize these things. But we should be aware of those sets of parallels.

DEVIN STEWART: Do you see that the future will be more conflict or more peace or more a convergence? Or do you refrain from making any predictions?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: I refrain from making predictions. But I do think we need to realize how intertwined our economic fates are and how much the Chinese Communist Party needs high growth rates to continue. They, in a sense, are more dependent on the economy staying on track than we are. We saw in the United States that the economy could go off the rails and there weren't people in the streets. In China they can't do that. The government has yoked its legitimacy to the notion that only the Communist Party could make China able to stand up in the world and free itself from foreign intervention.

Also they are now saying—people don't believe much of communist ideology there. It's not creating a more equal society. It's not doing any of the things at that kind of level. But the argument is that it is raising people's living standards dramatically. Some people are not having their living standards raised dramatically, but they're thinking, "Our turn might come next."

If the economy doesn't keep growing for the Chinese government, they realize there will be a lot of really angry people who will say, "We were waiting our turn. Our turn is never going to come." Then the simmering anger at corruption and all sorts of things that are simmering there are going to just explode.

DEVIN STEWART: That's very interesting. [David Denoon](#), at NYU, made a very similar point a couple of years ago [here at Carnegie](#). He called it the tunnel theorem, where, if cars are stuck in a tunnel, it's okay as long as people think that they will be able to move eventually, but if the cars have no future, if there is no movement in the future, people get out of the cars, start honking.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: That's great. I think that captures it well.

DEVIN STEWART: Do you want to get to your fifth point before we wrap up here?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Now I'm kind of confused. But I'll tell you the best line I have from the talks, even though, if anybody listens to it and comes to my talk, they'll say I'm saying the same joke again.

I end the talks with this image of a slide of a giant video screen showing the Expo coming. It has been a really hyped event in China, even though Americans haven't paid much attention to it. It's this picture of this [giant baby](#), basically, touting the Expo. When I first started using this slide, I would say, "Well, this is just about the excitement, the looking forward to the Expo." But now, as American concerns about China are growing, and fears about China, I look at that and it's kind of a freaky picture. There's this giant baby coming right at you—

DEVIN STEWART: Is this like a big blow-up in a parade or—

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: It's a giant video screen, a Times Square-like effect. In downtown Shanghai there are tons of video screens advertising products, but often advertising the government or events like the Expo.

I give a very flip talk when I do this book talk. I'm using a lot of popular culture. I end by saying, "I am an academic. So now when I look at that picture, it reminds me of a quote by Homer"—that's a good way to end it—"Homer Simpson, who said, 'Children are our future, unless we stop them now.'"

I think some of the American phobia about China—there are reasons to be concerned, but some of this concern is about the possibility that China represents some of that future, much like the United States caused anxiety to more established powers in Europe when we were rising. We kept hoping that they would come along to join this kind of modern world. Now we're saying, what are we going to do? How is it going to happen when this arrives?

DEVIN STEWART: But can it be stopped, really?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: I think—and this is about the U.S.-China relationship, too—the two countries have to work together. I use the line in *Time*, that the U.S.-China relationship is really the one thing out there that is too big to fail, in the sense that to handle issues like the environment—these are just enormous—there has to be some way for the two countries to work together, as well as to set a parameter for other rising, developing powers to work together. We're just so giant. They are the largest producer of greenhouse gases. We're the largest per-capita producer of greenhouse gases. It's not worth saying, who is the really big polluter? It's that somehow together we have to work this out.

DEVIN STEWART: And if we don't, we're all doomed.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: Exactly.

DEVIN STEWART: So far doom has not happened in the world, so it's more likely that cooperation will happen, right?

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: That's a good optimistic note to end on. I do like that one.

DEVIN STEWART: Jeff, we really appreciate the time you have taken to spend with us to tell us about your book, *China in the 21st Century: What Everyone Needs to Know*.

Thanks so much for coming by.

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM: It's been a great pleasure. It's been fun.

Audio

In this lively discussion, topics include China's diversity, its "net nanny" approach to the internet, and why China and the U.S. are more alike than we may think.

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