

18th annual Bob and Kim Griffin Lecture: Technology Tensions in the U.S. – China Relationship

By Greg Hugh

Neither rain, snow nor sleet could keep a curious group from filling the University of Minnesota campus' Memorial Hall at the McNamara Alumni Center on March 12. They were there to hear a lecture by Kaiser Kuo.

The lecture is an annual event sponsored by the University's China Center and funded by the Bob and Kim Griffin Building U.S.-China Bridges Lecture series. As noted in the accompanying article by Chang Wang, Kuo is host of the Sinica Podcast, former director of International Communications for Baidu, and co-founder of Tang Dynasty, China's first heavy metal band.

As Wang noted, because of his experience and background, Kuo, is eminently qualified to speak on U.S.-China relationships and proceeded to deliver a lecture that presented his viewpoint as to American perceptions of China versus the reality in China.

According to Kuo, when Americans are talking about innovation in China and in the United States, it's important to understand the cultural and social matrix in which in-



L to R: Chang Wang, Kaiser Kuo, Kim Griffin, Joan Brzezinski, Bob Griffin

novations take place. While China has seen technology develop very much in synch with its rapid growth, there is kind of belief in the ability of technology to deliver better lives. However, compared to the U.S. right now, there appears to be a lot of anxiety about technology. While some observers may be concerned that China is ahead of the U.S. in technology, Kuo feels that perhaps such advances may have been under estimated in the past and now possibly over estimated since China suffers from a challenge in its ability to innovate.

China's ability to advance is much dif-

ferent than that of Russia and Japan when they enjoyed their economic growth. China's growth has much to do with their mind set and social factors and Kuo suggested how the series "Black Mirror" on Netflix and films like "The Three Body Problem" and "Wandering Earth" influence and reflect their thinking.

While China's Made in China 2025 initiative might be unfair, the concern of China's technology is causing the U.S. to draw a line in the sand that is resulting in a tighter STEM immigration policy. In addition, the Huawei case is a ticking time bomb that is overshadowing any trade talks between the two countries. Kuo states that replacing China as a source for manufactured goods is a futile effort that will take time and divert funds and manpower. A better approach for the U.S. would be to initiate a small yard and high fence approach to protecting our technology. That is, the U.S. should focus on identifying specific technology it wishes to protect and not include such broad segments as AI or 5G, etc.

The first question of the brief Q & A session posed by Wang, the moderator: What was Kuo's favorite band? Rush. In response to a question from the audience about China applying its soft power, Kuo simply chuckled and said that China, unlike Russia, was really inept and its soft power influence was ineffective.



Chang Wang and Kaiser Kuo

At the conclusion of the Q & A session, the China Center presented a plaque to Kuo. ♦

Introducing Kaiser Kuo

By Chang Wang, contributor

Editor's note: Chang Wang was the moderator at the 2019 "Bob & Kim Griffin Building U.S.-China Bridges Lecture" on March 12. Following are his introductory remarks

The China Center's annual Bob and Kim Griffin Building U.S.-China Bridges Lecture features high-profile speakers who are experts in a wide range of timely and critical China-related topics, from economics and business to culture and politics.



Chang Wang

Kaiser Kuo is host and co-founder of the Sinica Podcast, the most popular English-language podcast on current affairs in China. He also co-founded Tang Dynasty, China's first heavy metal band.

It is both an honor and a daunting task to occupy this platform for a few moments before Kaiser.

My name is Wang Chang, I am a member of the China Center Advisory Board and an attorney with Kingsfield Law Office.

When Mrs. Joan Brzezinski, the executive director of the China Center, asked me to give a few remarks on Kaiser and his lecture, I did not tell her that I am a fan of Kaiser's music and a loyal listener to his podcast.

From Tang Dynasty to Chun Qiu, Kaiser became a cultural icon in China. Rock 'n' rollers were the cultural heroes of the '90s China, just like authors were the cultural heroes of the '80s. I went to college in Bei-

jing in the '90s, when Tang Dynasty ("Tang Chao"), Black Panther ("Hei Bao"), and Cui Jian offered a cathartic experience from the suffocating political environment.

Hearing his music, reading his column, and listening to his podcast, the more we know Kaiser, the more we realize that underneath Kaiser's adventurous surface, he has an elegant spirit, a razor-sharp sense of instinct and boundless curiosity, and most importantly, a big heart.

From The Beijinger to Sinica, Kaiser shared his encyclopedic knowledge and genuine love of China and the Chinese. He has an awesome ability to illuminate the most complex of concepts to a colleague, to an audience, to the man on the street. His comments on China and the U.S.-China relations are based on his deep understanding of both countries and both cultures. His comments are sometimes deceptively simple, but always exquisitely profound.

Kaiser is a lineal descendant of the Chinese intellectual traditions of the literati/scholar-gentleman ("Shidafu") and the knight-errant ("Youxia"), and it would not be too difficult to identify which part of Kaiser belongs to the literati tradition and which part of him belongs to the knight-errant tradition.

Kaiser has multiple identities: he is a musician, an author, a commentator, a correspondent, a podcast host, and a business executive. He is too talented to be defined or to be categorized.

Asian Americans are sometimes viewed as "forever outsiders" of both universes, but indeed Asian Americans are insiders in both worlds. Kaiser can think like a Chinese in deciphering the often vague and confusing messages from the Chinese authority. At the same time, he is a zealot advocate of equal protection and due process, as a true American patriot who has unwavering confidence in our system of the rule of law and fundamental fairness.

Kaiser is an American who speaks fluent

Chinese, dreams in Chinese, and probably curses in Chinese; he is a Chinese who speaks perfect English and dreams in English. He is no less American than any other American, and he is no less Chinese than any other Chinese. And because of this, we need to listen to him.



Kaiser Kuo

We need to listen to Kaiser to understand the technology tensions in the U.S.-China relationship. As the U.S. and China engage in a high-stakes negotiation over the future of their trade relationship, it's technology that is at the heart of the debate.

Since the beginning of 2017, the U.S. government has charged at least three people with spying for China or attempting or conspiring to do so and prosecuted at least five other cases where the alleged intellectual property theft or attempted theft were for the benefit of the Chinese government.

In November 2018, then Attorney General Jeff Sessions created a "China Initiative" to aggressively identify and prosecute economic espionage cases related to China. Sessions threatened that China "must decide whether it wants to be a trusted partner on the world stage or whether it wants to be known around the world as a dishonest regime running a corrupt economy founded on fraud, theft, and strong-arm tactics."

In January 2019, the Department of Justice unsealed a series of indictments against Huawei, the Chinese telecom company at the center of the escalating clash between Washington and Beijing over technology.

U.S. federal prosecutors accused Huawei's employees and executives of repeatedly lying to U.S. government officials and business partners for the Chinese company's benefit and to pay employees to steal trade secrets from the US.

Huawei denied the accusation and Beijing has detained a series of foreign citizens in recent months on suspicion of endangering China's national security in what some analysts view as retaliatory measures. Chinese officials have denied any links.

Opening your morning paper, you see headlines like "The Huawei indictment marks the end of US and China's cycle of trust." "Is 'Made in China 2025' a Threat to Global Trade?" "China is Leading in Artificial Intelligence — and American Businesses Should Take Note," "China Drives International Patent Applications to Record Heights," "Why 5G, a Battleground for US and China, is Also a Military Conflict" ...

In "AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order," you hear Kai-Fu Lee's startling argument: "If data is the new oil, then China is the new Saudi Arabia."

Then you hear David Brooks praising Marco Rubio's report on "Made in China 2025 and The Future of American Industry": "It's become increasingly clear that China is a grave economic, technological and intellectual threat to the United States and the world order."

What are all these about? What is going on? Where are we going?

Now, without further ado, please, we need to listen to Kaiser to understand what all these are about, to better understand China, and to better understand ourselves. ♦

Chang Wang is a partner with Kingsfield Law Office. He also is an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota Law School, and a member of the University of Minnesota China Center Advisory Board.