When asked whether China will start colonizing other countries after they dominate the world, Tsinghua University visiting professor Martin Jacques gives a categorical "no.

Part of this year's International Week — an annual event full of performances, lectures and films — Jacques' keynote presentation did not disappoint as the first in a highly-anticipated lineup of speakers.


The ultimate conclusion of his keynote address was, after comparing China's current economy to the global economy, that China's economic strength will be twice as large as that of the US by 2050 — a conclusion he drew from two categories, the first being Chinese culture, and the second being China's long history.

"China has never had an overseas empire. It has never been, expressing on its earlier emphatic "no."

"Since the Qin Dynasty, they think of themselves as the Middle Kingdom — so why would they colonize?"

China, according to Jacques, is not a nation-state like most Western countries. Instead, Jacques referred to China as a "civilization-state" — a country shaped by its sense of civilization and unity, one of the most important political values it has.

Despite having a population of roughly 1.3 billion people, an overwhelming majority of Chinese people think of themselves as Han race — something Jacques said is different from nation-states.

Another argument Jacques made was China's culture and language are extremely individual, making it unlikely it will ever adopt North American or European politics.

This, he argued, tied in to the economic boom he was predicting.

"It will be like the 1920s, when China is the strongest one in the world," he joked.

"Welcome to the flames: we are going back to the guns."

His speech segued into a meet-and-greet, where attendees could ask questions about his presentation or book.

Jacques said his interest in China began during his holiday he spent in 1992.

"I went to China, and Malaysia and various other countries in East Asia, and I was left of fullness it even exists with tremendous interest," he said.

"Why China? Although these other countries are also rising, China remains hugely the most important. China's impact on the world over the next 50 years is going to be much greater than India's or Brazil's.

In the spirit of China's theme, Conscious Culture: Finding Paths to a Better World, Jacques added that China is eventually going to become important for everyone. Jacques said this was also why he agreed to give a keynote speech during I-Week. Amid praise and thanks from those who sat in on his talk, he said that, having looked at the I-Week program he thinks its a terrible idea.

"I think that the University of Alberta's commitment to international students, and also specifically to Chinese students and trying to find a way of getting the student body more interested in China, I think is splendid," he said.

"At the moment, we are far too ignorant about China, and we have got to learn about China, and this is absolutely crucial for the future of people here, and everywhere... It's absolutely fundamental," he said.