

A book review on martin jacques' when china rules the world

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A Book Review On Martin Jacques' When China Rules the World By Abhinav Pathak “ The underlying argument of the book is that China's impact on the world will be as great as that of the United States over the last century, probably far greater.... China, with continuing economic growth (albeit at a reduced rate) is destined to become one of the two major global powers and ultimately the major global power”- Martin Jacques

Martin Jacques' above statement is a bold one, but shouldn't come much of a surprise as Goldman Sachs gave such conclusions credibility in 2007 when it concluded that China would surpass U. S. GDP in 2027, and double it by 2050. I believe that Jacques, in a serious and comprehensive analysis, puts modern-day China into a long historic context and explores contemporary (and possible future) relations between a resurgent China and other East Asian states, the United States, and other parts of the world. The book is split into two parts, The End of the Western World and the Age of China.

The Age of China section is much better than the End of the Western World. It gives the reader a background of China in relatively decent depth. It describes biases and history. It describes issues like racism; the repercussions of Confucianism are described in depth. A lot of the statistics seem to be from earlier in the decade suggesting this book was written over a long period of time but only recently completed. That being said, the main forms of argument of this section and the book, are images, not real facts.

Chinese proverbs are used as evidence of the perspective, which I think is very ineffective, as for each one which supports a point, one can find another proverb which offers a different perspective. The Rise of China is an

incredibly important and seemingly irreversible process, this could have been a great opportunity to back up claims with case evidence, but that was really not done in any convincing fashion. The author often makes hyperbolized points, which within a paragraph become qualified with a much more balanced perspective.

An example is the description of China and democracy. China it is claimed has no need for democracy and there is no reason to expect it, based on their historical citizens arrangement with government, and the fact that the people are not demanding it today (there are several times when it is stated that the Chinese need 8-9% growth as not to cause civil unrest implicitly stating that it is the growth that excuses the lack of demand for political rights and that citizens are willing to forgive political rights for economic growth)...

Most people who make convincing arguments about China and democracy make the claim that democracy in China will follow from socio-economic development. When people move to the point from having to worry about subsistence to worrying about their leisure time, their priorities of governance change. The allusions to history are just not convincing arguments, they can be dismissed as contextual and the authors own description of growth needed to prevent civil unrest makes the same point as stated above.

The author sure knows this, so after making a claim which is not backed up, qualifies it by saying, it probably will democratize, but not the way you expect. Well, I don't know what that means. Points like this should be argued

with case studies, look at the political associations and power that the well off have vs. the poor, look at how those have changed. If there has been no change in political ideals of a person/group as their socio-economic condition has changed, make a point.

Unfortunately the book does not take this approach, it looks to the past when the world was little changing in a relative context to today, and makes inferences. To quote Park Chung Hee from Korea which also took a state centered followed by democracy approach - " In human life, economics precedes politics and culture. " If one is going to dispute this, one should be doing it with cases not words with any evidence. However, there are many illustrations that Jacques, the author, gives us to back his claim of the Chinese domination.

Since the economic reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 (just two years after the death of Mao), the Chinese economy has been growing at an average rate of 9.5% a year which represents a doubling in size every seven years. Jacques comments: " Given its scale and speed, China's economic transformation is surely the most extraordinary in human history... The country has borne witness to the greatest poverty reduction programme ever seen".

He further observes that the most important single characteristic of China is its unity. It has been relatively unified for over two millennia, attaches compelling priority to the maintenance of this unity, and is not prepared to compromise on the sovereignty - as opposed to the forms of governance - of Tibet or Xinjiang or the 'lost territories' of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.

Jacques argues that “ the Chinese have a pathological fear of division and instability”.

China will become modern not by simply replicating the established modernity of Europe and North America, but by creating its own distinctive modernity in what will become a world of what he calls “ contested modernity”. In many respects, the coming global supremacy of China is seen by the Chinese themselves as simply re-establishing the natural order of things, since they have always seen Chinese civilization as the greatest in the world and the 'century of humiliation' (1850-1950), involving the 'unequal treaties', colonialism and occupation, is regarded as an aberration which is now being corrected.

This sense of superiority is underlined by a specifically racial view of the Chinese in which the Han Chinese, who comprise 92% of the total population, are seen as a single race and even the 100M non-Han are described as different nationalities rather than races. Indeed there is a view in some quarters that the origins of the Chinese are discrete and unconnected with that of other branches of humankind. All of these form the main themes of the book, “ When China Rules the World” and it does sound that the 21st century will witness a paradigm shift in the centre of world power and influence.

I do have couple of criticisms though. I feel the author is inconsistent at times and does not draw conclusions based on the evidence he presents rather than the feelings that he has about the subject. It often seems like the author is describing a zero-sum world, China moving up is the west moving

down. The West has started growing again, given there are major issues still being worked through (though the author says the West is in a depression...) and there is a title called the end of the Western world. In my opinion if the US manages to grow, then that doesn't mark the end of the western world. As long as the quality of life per person is greater than in China or wherever, it is a model for something right? Otherwise one should just join the country with the greatest number of citizens. The end of strict western hegemony seems inevitable, but the west is a model for something as again, it has the highest living standards in the world. If china doesn't dominate the US GDP that would be a tragedy, it has 5 times the people...

This balance of power perspective is what drives a lot of the commentary. It is an important perspective and it would be naive to dismiss it, but as long as the model for economic growth is yielding good results, it is a valuable model for how a society should run. One cannot compare China and the US/Western Europe. They are not anywhere close on a GDP per capita. The rise of Chinese nationalism is very much a result of the great things China is achieving and the desire to be a part of it and to show the world what the Chinese are capable of.

It is not a we are better, any average Chinese citizen would with a high degree of confidence switch place with a US citizen of Chinese origin- as long as that is the case, we haven't seen the end of the west. That phenomenon will be around for a long time and the end of that situation isn't even contemplated in this book, the more defining data point to the author is, when china's GDP will exceed the US. So as not to bore people, the book

gives good history, discusses central aspects of Chinese culture that aren't prevalent in the west, and discusses how they might manifest themselves on a global scale.

That perspective is an important one, as the strategic power of China grows, so will its use of influence and it is important to understand the context of its perspectives. Another criticism that I have is that he not infrequently darts backwards and forwards in time. Perhaps this is unavoidable and I might not have been better pleased with a strict chronological account which would necessarily have hopped about between geography, military and economical viewpoints. In conclusion, I believe that China will change the world.

However, the future is seen here mainly through the prism of a somewhat overstated China-centric historical determinism. The clamor of conflicting voices within China, with their potential to shape coming events, is barely considered. A more symbiotic development - that of China reaching an accommodation with the world in mutual self interest - is played down. China is locked into global systems that it will be difficult to fully extricate itself from - or replace - and which will mitigate its actions.

Jacques himself convinced me that China's rise is not a new paradigm but one of many burgeoning hybrids of existing modernity which will be eventually assimilated, albeit at great cost to Western global dominance. This book is a valuable addition to an important debate. But at times the author stares so long and hard at China's history that he seems to develop tunnel vision. Surely China's past, although important, will not shape the

global future in the overwhelming way that Jacques clearly believes that it will!