



China Shakes the World: A Titan's Rise and Troubled Future -- and the Challenge for America

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“Let China sleep, for when she wakes, she will shake the world.” Napoleon’s words seem eerily prescient today, as the shock waves from China’s awakening reverberate across the globe. In *China Shakes the World*, the former China bureau chief of the *Financial Times*, James Kynge, traces these tremors from Beijing to Europe to the Midwest as China’s ravenous hunger for jobs, raw materials, energy, and food -- and its export of goods, workers, and investments -- drastically reshape world trade and politics.

Delving beyond mere recitation of by-now-familiar statistics, Kynge’s on-the-ground reporting provides alternative explanations for China’s explosive transformation, revealing many of the usual reasons given for its growth to be myths. Most important for the future, he details China’s deep, systemic weaknesses -- rampant fraud, crippling environmental crises, a corrupt banking system, faltering government institutions, a rapidly aging population -- that threaten even greater global disruptions. And he demonstrates the profound consequences of those weaknesses for American manufacturers, oil companies, banks, and ordinary consumers.

Through dramatic stories of entrepreneurs and visionaries, factory workers and store clerks at the heart of this global phenomenon, *China Shakes the World* explains how China’s breakneck rise occurred, the extraordinary problems the country now faces, and the consequences of both for the twenty-first century.

China Shakes the World: A Titan's Rise and Troubled Future -- and the Challenge for America Details

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From Reader Review China Shakes the World: A Titan's Rise and Troubled Future -- and the Challenge for America for online ebook

Marci Miller says

The book, published in 2006, tells the story of China's rise in the previous two decades, eventually becoming a world superpower. I read the book in 2014, and although 8 years after its publication, it's still very relevant to understand the transformation China went through in the last decades of the XX century and first few years of the XXI century. Hindsight only makes this book even more current and fascinating.

The author is a British journalist that has lived in or around China for many years, and his first-hand experience as a Westerner in China enables him to understand the contrast between the Chinese and the Western perceptions of the world and produce a book full of insight.

The text provides telling examples of the transformation of the Chinese business and industry sectors since Deng Xiaoping's reforms and also of its consequences, felt not only across the Chinese society but throughout the world. Kynge uses good macroeconomic and geopolitical arguments to bring a bird-eye, crystal-clear view of China's impact in the global economy. Equally, he often delves deeper into what that surge of Chinese industrialization means to people living in US and European industrial cities, by sharing some of the thoughts and conversations he had when travelling to those, once-flourishing, industrial centers.

It is a highly recommendable and easy to read book touching on a subject that is one of the most crucial socio-economic changes the world has seen in recent times and that will, arguably, set the course of the XXI century. If anything, the book could have done with a little more background of China's history in order to contextualize more its rise. Although perhaps that long-term view would have been too Chinese and this is, nevertheless, a text on China addressed to Westerners...

Knut says

great read on the impact of the Chinese rise on Western, in particular US manufacturing industry. probably in the light of the AI revolution a bit outdated, but still very readable and throbbing with interesting details collected by a brilliant investigative journalist.

Alina Ramona says

as everything comes from China, it is good to understand the impact and how they see the world..what is their focus.

a nice to read book with different aspects that make you think what is the best solution and if we would even be one big happy world

Guy says

Interesting, definitely. Entertaining, very. Eye-opening, in part (but if you don't know much about modern China, then probably extremely so). Profound... ah, well that's the problem. Kynge is a journalist. A good journalist who thinks about his subject and tries to go beyond the surface, but he is not an academic or, at least upon the evidence of this book, a deep thinker. As a result I was left with the feeling that I often have after reading articles in the Economist or the Atlantic Monthly or Vanity Fair (i.e., in the good press): that I've been given a lot of facts but not enough information, details but not enough of the insight necessary to make sense of them all and to really understand the underlying bone structure of the dragon and thus to be able to predict what it is going to do.

It's not all Kynge's fault: he has chosen such a massive subject (the rise of China and what it means for the world), which has so many complexities and cross-links (to economic theory, trade patterns, global warming, the limits of growth, political theory, sociology...) that he would have to be a full-time academic researcher (and a brilliant one at that!) to master it. And he isn't: he's a journalist who has lived in, travelled around, and written articles about China for 25 years. He speaks Chinese, he has interviewed people from all walks of life, he has gathered many fascinating anecdotes and stories, and he has tried to make sense of it all... but it's just too much for him. Read the book for what it is (a treasury of anecdotes and observations about modern China), and not for what it isn't (an authoritative analysis).

And yet... I was really hoping for was an authoritative analysis. China is so large, so important, and is at the heart of so many key trends and questions about the future of humanity on this planet that I want, no, need to read that book. This one raised more questions than it gave answers. And perhaps that is unavoidable: authoritative works tend to be written afterwards not during the events they describe. But not having that luxury, I'm looking for a book that makes the best effort possible at this time.

An example to illustrate the point: towards the end of the book there is an anecdote in which a reasonable, apparently logical and cultured, Chinese woman who Kynge has known for years suddenly turns into a rabid nationalist before his eyes. It is truly scary. Kynge tries to (in the "best" -- cough, cough -- tradition of modern journalism) balance it with a more optimistic interaction with the same woman a month later, but I got the impression that not even he really believed the balance.

No, the stark truth is that, despite millennia of civilization, a rich cultural history, and astounding recent economic progress, from the perspective of the political sophistication of its people China is still in the Dark Ages. China never had an Enlightenment, China has until very recently hardly engaged with the wider world, China was not a primary actor in the two World Wars, and the Chinese have lived under a modern information-controlling dictatorship for the past 50 years. These things matter and mean that we cannot expect the Chinese to act as we would, or (in all too many cases) as we would wish we would.

I've lived in both the US and Europe, and in some ways China reminds me of the US. Immensely powerful, with a high opinion of itself, but fundamentally naive. I'm generalizing of course, but stereotypes exist for a reason and there is such a thing as a national "character" that is a reliable guide for how a nation is going to act and react.

Like Americans the Chinese are very patriotic, haven't travelled much, and don't know the world. Like Americans they haven't suffered much for the sins of their rulers, or at least not in ways as obvious,

universally known, acknowledged, and openly discussed as the devastation of Europe in World Wars I and II. Like Americans they are a nation of farmers, workers, and shopkeepers suddenly become a Great Power. Lastly, and most importantly, like Americans (but even more so due to living in a society without a free press) they have not developed the almost instinctual cynicism about politics and the state that is typical in Europe: in other words they tend to believe what they are told.

The anecdote mentioned above is chilling for precisely that reason: on many issues of importance to the outside world there will be no internal counterbalance to the Chinese state -- the Chinese will do what their leaders tell them to do.

Let's hope that China will have sensible leaders in the decades to come.

Sean says

“Let China sleep, for when she wakes, she will shake the world.” Napoleon’s famous words of a bygone age seem eerily fulfilled or have all but come to fruition in the last few years. James Kynge employs his experiences as a former bureau chief and journalist in Asia for various news outlets over several years to support his theories. The idea is that when China arrives at the point of becoming a global super power or at least a force to be reckoned with that its presence will penetrate to the far reaches of the global community, like that of the United States has done in the past few decades. The problem, argues Kynge is that China has awoken, has arrived at the point of nearly emerging as a global power. Due to its massive population base its presence is truly being felt worldwide as Chinese students fill up foreign schools by the millions, western countries move more and more of their means of manufacturing to the east and the millions of Chinese in their homeland increase in their demand for food, jobs and resources.

Due to the rise of the Chinese tiger many states hold a great unease or fear for Beijing. Kynge argues however that this may be unnecessary, the reason being that though China commands a massive manufacturing and industrial base and an even larger population, in its search to feed, employ and clothe and care for its innumerable citizenry it has wedded itself to the global community and market in such a way that to negatively affect said market would prove disastrous to itself and others. This is a bit of a contrast compared to Stefan Halper’s book *The Beijing Consensus*. Halper has almost nothing but positive aspects to describe China and lauds it with great applause for its “soft power” politics and especially for its growing influence in the developing world by leading by example as well as providing international aid and resources to those in need. Kynge argument diametrically opposes Halper’s by stating that though China has or is in the process of “awakening” it still has a large share of its own problems it will be forced to deal with before it can pose any kind of a real threat to the world. An aging population, rampant corruption in government and the police, pollution and other issues will ultimately prove a formidable obstacle to the Chinese and now consequently the rest of the world due to Chinese entrance into global politics and economics. There is one thing however that both authors may agree on, and that is due to the globalization of the world’s nations and their economies, every state is becoming increasingly tied to every other state. In a world such as this it may be in every state’s best interest to work together in unity and a spirit of openness to weather the financial, economic and political storms that have yet to face any given nation-state in the world market. In other words, the world cannot afford to ignore support China’s growth and it may not be able to afford to support China should it collapse, an international paradox.

Robert Pocock says

This book gives a general overview of the economic reforms taking place in China over the last 30-something years and makes for interesting, if sobering, reading. The author describes the intensive development of the Chinese economy and how such fast paced growth, on a massive scale, is impacting the rest of the world. China's economies of scale and sheer productivity do make you wonder how any 'developed' country can possibly compete with it in the manufacturing sector.

The raw statistics behind China however are astonishing and I would have liked more of these, possibly in tables in an appendix for ease of access. Some maps would also have been helpful to picture geographically the different regions talked about, instead of having to consult an external source.

These are niggles however. This book is very readable and conveys a lot of information for relatively few pages. The author combines business journalism and statistics with stories about individuals and their lives and careers. This really helps to provide a human context for the bigger picture he is describing. It is also well sourced with what looks to be a good bibliography. Excellent.

Ayaz Zafar says

A must read. Clears the stereotypes people have attached to china.

Mary says

I'm afraid that I find this book a little hard to measure, as I am unused to reading anything written about China from an external perspective. While an alternative view is, of course, necessary, I cannot help but feel that there are very few people qualified to write about China. To write about China is to understand an incredibly complex country and its people.

James Kynge definitely makes an admirable effort, but the tone of the books is, at times, skewed and has a tendency to veer from rational to a sense that the Chinese will swarm over the earth like locusts and destroy us all. Naturally, I am a little uncomfortable with the latter being put out in to the world as an idea. I would describe it more as economic scaremongering than out and out bad journalism, but never the less...

All in all, however, *China Shakes the World* is definitely a very eye-opening perspective; both on the current global economic climate, and China's dramatic rise since Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms began in 1978. We all take the "Made in China" label for granted, but I don't think any of us appreciate how much China's economy directly affects our daily lives; keeping prices down and producing either the part or the entire product for most things that we own.

China's economy itself seems ridiculous from the outside; the yuan is set at a fixed value, companies are shored up by the national banks and so can continue to function when making ridiculous losses, but Kynge navigates this minefield of apparent reverse business logic, making it understandable even to the laywoman. His inclusion of the environmental impact of industry on China was particularly illuminating, as he has travelled to many of these places himself and reveals what the Party and the media tend to strive to keep from international eyes.

Obviously, this is a book for those interested either in China or economics. Hilariously, it brought me from being a student of the former, to that of both. Perhaps it is Kynge's accessible writing style, or the fact that I had never really delved into the subject before, but economics really is just another form of history and I would not hesitate to recommend this book as another piece of the history of modern China. Albeit to be taken with a small pinch of salt.

Todd Stockslager says

Kynge recounts the rise of China as an economic and resource-sucking giant on the world scene in the last 20 years. The story, as usual with China and its 1.3 billion people, hinges on the massive markets and demand that even fractions of that enormity can generate.

The good news is that the shift of manufacturing to China, with its extremely (and artificially, Kynge points out) low production costs, has resulted in a flood of cheaper goods in the US and Europe, and that China has been buying billions of US treasury notes which kept mortgage rates low. The bad news is these trends may not be sustainable, that any manufacturing still outside of China may be completely sucked into the Eastern giant, and that world resource demand (oil, steel, water, environment as a resource) by the Chinese giant may suck the world dry and create massive price and allocation problems.

Whether the reader is optimistic or pessimistic, in either case it is a troubled future, as the subtitle says, that awaits.

Susan Rumsey says

I am not normally interested in reading business books but decided to buy this as it looked fairly short, easy to read, and I needed to understand more about what all the "China-phobia" was all about at that stage of my life. I was not disappointed: after James Kynge's first four pages I was hooked. I confess that I read only about two thirds of the book, but it was enough to understand the Western paranoia that is so rife about China.

Matthew says

This review will probably say more about the reviewer (me) than about the book (most reviews probably do, if less blatantly). I felt compelled, disgusted, proud, in turn, yet in ways that are interesting if perhaps not quite unexpected -- rather, I feel like Kynge's writing so neatly synthesizes and brings to life a lot of what I already subconsciously gleaned about China from years of living in Singapore (that red dot some mistake as part of China), that I find myself reacting in vaguely familiar yet never quite so cleanly recognised ways. It makes me wonder a lot about myself -- Chinese by race, yet not by nationality and certainly not at all by cultural identity.

I find the reports of piracy awful, and extremely disturbing. I don't worry so much about the fact that GE or Siemens or Honda had their top end technology, developed after spending billions and decades, stolen in China. I guess I find it hard to sympathise with a corporation that has ways and means to protect itself and anyhow can benefit from China's human resource base and market. I felt most for, rather, the Italian family

owned silk tie maker whose designs -- one mystical elliptical design that took years to refine for example -- were bought for practically nothing by Chinese tie makers who'd bankrupted the Italians with the low cost silk. In this sense I think China really had an advantage that few -- even those who recognise it -- give it full credit for, the fact that they got cheap access to so much technology, so much know-how, so many industrial and aesthetic designs and best practices, that it took centuries and decades for other societies to master. I find that incredibly tragic. Which strikes me as weird, because in that way I identify far more with the proud Europeans/Americans than with the thieving Chinese. Of the former, I respect their aesthetic, their intelligence, their morality, their social graces, their attitude to life, and I am on the whole more comfortable with such and wish that more of my countrymen had the imaginative capacity to live so.

Certainly, I respect how hard the Chinese entrepreneurs suffered and how hungry and resourceful (and lucky) they must be. But while I find their individual stories immensely worthy of respect, I don't see that as a unique characteristic of Chinese in particular -- every race/country/society has its hungry, long-suffering, resourceful, lucky success stories, if not in our time, then at some point in history.

On the other hand I am genuinely glad that China is throwing off the shackles of Western colonialism: I have no love for your occasional obnoxious clumsy self-unaware wealthy fatcat expat -- and that surely is a very Asian view.

And unlike your average Westerner, I'm not particularly disgusted by all the encroachments of human rights, nor of the corruption or melamine or blood transfusion scandals. Maybe it's because I am, after all, from Southeast Asia, and this sort of thing is, well not really standard stuff, but still not that surprising. Or maybe it is an extension of the above -- every race has its master criminals, it's not as if the Chinese are uniquely heartless here (sure, poisoning babies sounds bad, but how about financing wars? or causing widespread financial collapse?). I'm actually quite impressed by the scale, boldness, ruthlessness and creativity of the scams. Possibly it's also because I feel the disregard for human life -- other people's lives, I mean -- is part of Chinese history. One of the four Chinese classics, Water Margin or All Men Are Brothers, has parts where a hero is eating meat dumplings and discovers it is (delicious) human flesh, or, less benignly, is himself captured by a rogue innkeeper and about to be slaughtered for meat, when the butcher recognises and saves him. (This implies that if he had been someone less well-regarded he'd have been butchered with nary a thought. In fact, when the butcher joins the hero's side, he becomes, within the narrative, a minor hero too.) Water Margin was one of my favourite books when I was growing up; I've probably imbibed lot of the values.

But what's behind all this? Here I think Kynge hesitates to pass judgment. He describes the symptoms but as a journalist, prefers to allow readers to draw their own conclusions. So we must. I think Barry Naughton captures it best -- China just has too many people, and has had too many people for too long. I'm not saying other things don't matter -- like forward looking leaders at the top, economic liberalisation, gradual institutionalisation, etc. But I think these merely facilitate a power that wells up from a source, and that source -- of both successes and failures -- can be traced back to demographics; from enormous market size, leading to firms jostling to enter, the immense amount of talent, the cheap human resources with an extremely hungry labor force willing to work for peanuts, the willingness to cheat to get ahead, etc.

Naughton quotes a European visitor to China in the 1800s -- the Chinese peasant is like a man standing in deep water, on his tiptoes, with only his nose above water for breath. He quotes statistics noting that China's growth from the Middle Ages onwards was entirely due to population growth, and that the average incomes remained stuck at medieval levels even as Europe grew by leaps and bounds; yet the population continued to increase, which means that the burden on the land was extremely heavy. Thus, the above phrase -- disregard for human life is endemic -- can be turned around, to the equal statement: in China, human life, far from

being priceless, is cheap.

Richard Burger says

When I first came back to China in January 2007, I was talking with my office director about books on China, and he told me, "The best book on modern China has to be *China Shakes the World*. Get a copy as soon as you can." He gave a copy to our company president in New York, who promptly bought 100 copies to give to clients interested in doing business in China. Essential reading has a whole new definition.

My manager was right. This book is unsurpassed in terms of exploring and analyzing just how enormous an effect China is having on the entire world. And anyone who doesn't acknowledge that China is shaking the world is either in a state of willful denial or is living in a cave.

The book gets its title from an unconfirmed and in all likelihood mythological quote attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte: "Let China sleep; for when she wakes, she will shake the world." Well, China has woken and the quote has proven to be accurate, no matter who actually said it. What makes this book special is its approach to the subject, focusing on the effect of China's rise on other countries and other peoples. It's not just another roundup of stories about the "China miracle" and how much Western CEOs are loving doing business in China.

The book begins at what was once the site of Germany's largest steel mill, now only "a scar." Kynge describes how the Chinese bought the ailing business and transported the entire mill - 25 football fields in size, 250,000 tons in weight, with 45 tons of documents telling how to reassemble the plant - to China. 10,000 German jobs were gone, and a 100-year-old business, the lifeblood of the city of Dortmund, vanished. (It was not China that caused the mill to go bust; that process started before China's meteoric rise, due to fierce competition mainly from South Korea.) Kynge's description of how the Chinese took the mill apart, dangling from walkways 60 meter above the ground without safety harnesses and completing the job months earlier than planned, is spellbinding. It's funny, and it's heartbreaking. The mill is a metaphor for many of the traditional businesses that for decades, even centuries, the Europeans thought of as "their own," only to discover that competition from Asia threatened their very existence.

The China "economic miracle" has been in the headlines since the 1990s. The first sign that China was about to shake the world, however, occurred in 2004, when manhole covers began to disappear from streets all over the world. This was a wake-up call: China's thirst for raw materials was about to affect all of the world's markets. It was with the disappearing manhole covers, Kynge says, that China "telegraphed its arrival" to the world. "Whatever else happened, China had to be fed...A new era in international relations dawned, one defined by the geopolitics of scarcity."

Looking over the book now, I see that I've dog-eared just about every page and written notes in many of the margins. There's so much, it's hard to condense it into a single blog post. So allow me simply to give some impressions of various points Kynge makes, in no particular order.

What Kynge manages to do better than any author I've read to date is to capture in words just how strange a trading partner China is, and how it resembles no other great power. Examples are plentiful - companies that make semiconductors and tomato catsup; companies that thrive on the theft of intellectual property; companies that produce an insane over-supply of products; companies that operate on an entirely different moral and cultural plane from their global counterparts. Kynge's vivid anecdotes paint a picture of a country

that in many ways is downright freakish and unbelievably unfair and corrupt. A country that is just so different.

And yet.... Kynge is always clear-headed and balanced to a fault. After enumerating the many bizarries that make China seem so peculiar, he offers some important balance:

"It must be said that from a global perspective, China's emergence is of enormous economic benefit. The value created by the release of 400 million people from poverty, the migration of over 120 million from farms where they perhaps raised chickens to factories where they churn out electronics, the quantum leap in educational standards for tens of millions of children, the construction of a first-class infrastructure, the growth of over 40 cities with populations of over a million, the commercialization of housing and the vaulting progress up the technology ladder have helped unleash one of the greatest ever surges in general prosperity."

You come away from this book enraged at China and in awe of China, hating it and admiring it. Perhaps the most hackneyed phrase about China is that it's a "land of contradictions," but such phrases only become hackneyed because they contain a strong element of truth. Kynge brings us all the contradictions and spins them into a narrative that kept me turning from page to page throughout my flight to Munich. One story about a girl whose life is for all intents and purposes stolen from her by a corrupt official who stole her identity so his daughter could get into a good university will bring tears to your eyes. And stories of the sheer guile of Chinese workers , like those who dismantled the Dortmund steel mill, will make you smile. And his description of just how inequitable the competition from China can be will leave you hopelessly frustrated:

"The Chinese fixed the value of their currency against the US dollar, keeping it undervalued so as to give their exports greater competitiveness. They provided little or no welfare for their workers, so their costs were artificially low. There were no independent unions in China, so the safety standards...in Chinese factories would have been illegal in America. The state banking system provided cheap credit to state companies that could default without consequence. The central government gave generous value added tax rebates to exporters that were not available to US retailers. Restrictions on emissions were lax, so companies had to pay relatively little to keep the environment clean. Chinese companies routinely stole foreign intellectual property, but it was difficult to prosecute them because the courts were either corrupt or under government control. Finally, the state kept the price of various inputs, such as electricity and water, artificially low, thereby subsidizing industry."

Kynge is outspoken on Western Europe's (in particular Germany's and France's) lack of competitiveness underscored by Germany's 35-hour and long vacations. And yet, how can they possibly compete against China, no matter how many hours a week they work, when all of the cards are stacked in China's favor, mostly due to maddeningly unfair government intervention (or lack of intervention)?

But for all of China's ruthlessness and seemingly unstoppable growth, crushing anything that gets in its path, Kynge leaves us more with a sense of doubt than of fear (though there's plenty of fear, too). Doubt, because China's problems (and here comes another hackneyed clichee) are so immense, so overwhelming that its ascension to the status of a global superpower still remains in question. And if it does join the superpower club, surely it will be the strangest member. There has never been a superpower quite like it.

"Although China is poised to overtake the UK to become the world's fourth largest economy, on a per capita basis it ranks just above the world's poorest nations, with an average income of just over \$1,000 a year. Even if the country's gross domestic product one day becomes as large as that of the US, simple mathematics ordains that its people at that time will on average be only one-sixth as wealthy as Americans."

Again, I can't offer anything more than a snapshot; there's so much here, and I can't recommend this book highly enough. In terms of balance, perspective and brilliant analysis of what China is today and where it is going tomorrow, this is the best book you can buy.

Eveline Chao says

Really, really, really great, lively book with lots of engaging anecdotes and real-life examples to make all his points fun to read. It pulled a lot of sort of fragmented knowledge I had about business and economic issues in China into a more comprehensive picture. In particular there's this one section where he talks about the paradox of China trying to be communist & capitalist at the same time, and I found the way he explained it to be a really useful way of looking at the situation. I shall hereby transcribe it here since otherwise I don't really have much to say by way of a review. After I read this passage it all seemed really obvious, but having it spelled out for me like this was totally essential:

Gaige tai kuai, jiu luan. Gaige tai man, jiu si, or, "When reform is too fast there is chaos. When reform is too slow there is stagnation." Put another way, it meant that without the liberalization of controls on the economy, growth would slow and eventually stop. But if the pace of liberalization was too fast, the rapid growth that resulted could spill over into disorder. On the face of it, this was straightforward enough, but there was an added, paradoxical twist: the legitimacy of the Communist Party sprang from both growth *and* control. Yet in order to get more of one, it had to sacrifice part of the other.

Without fast growth, Beijing has no chance of meeting its job creation targets, and too few jobs could mean social instability. But surrendering administrative control to the invisible hand of the market saps the essential power that sustains a sing-party state. So the Party is a reluctant reformer, and in areas where control is critical to maintaining its rule, the Party has tended to resist liberalization that go beyond the superficial. The reluctance also means that when things are going well and the economy is riding high, reform generally decelerates, only to pick up again when the tide of growth ebbs. The waves of activity created by this interplay of government fear and covetousness define the economy's momentum.

Laurent De Serres Berard says

This book was ok. Many anecdotes, and good examples to draw on, but brought nothing really special that was unsaid about China yet. It was a bit too "Expressive" for my taste as an informational book. It doesn't provide a deep understanding of what is currently going on, but give many details of what is going on at the surface of it, and how it can be perceived.

Anil Swarup says

What a realistically amazing analyses of what is right and what is not so right in China and the lessons it holds for the future. A must-read for those that are interested in China and its quest to become a super power.

