**[Demystifying China](https://www.dawn.com/news/1823653/demystifying-china)**

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CHINA’S rise as a global power has evoked different reactions across the world. Much of the Global South has welcomed this and seen it as an opportunity to forge closer relations with and benefit from an economically resurgent China. The [US](https://www.dawn.com/news/1802528) has, of course, cast China as a strategic threat — a classic response from an established superpower to the newest one, seen as a challenge to its dominant position. For the past several years, the bipartisan political consensus that has emerged in the US is to adopt a tougher stance towards Beijing and pursue a policy to contain China’s growing power. Successive administrations have adopted strategies to counter China on several fronts — from trade to technology as well as militarily and diplomatically.

Western paranoia about China is frequently reflected in the Western media. It is exemplified by coverage in the influential news weekly The Economist, which always depicts China as an aggressive, predatory power out to upend the prevailing international order. Most European countries, however, are reticent to take a hawkish approach, not least because China has now replaced the US as Europe’s biggest trading partner. China itself has long sought to project its ascent to global power status as a ‘peaceful rise’, portraying its extraordinary economic success, expanding international influence and increasing military strength as posing no threat to international peace and stability.

There is now a growing and rich body of literature on China’s rise, much of it written by Western authors and analysts. A new book by a Chinese scholar and economist is therefore a welcome addition. China’s World View: Demystifying China to Prevent Global Conflict by David Daokui Li offers a Chinese perspective on how the country works and what the implications are of its rise for the West. His aim is to challenge and allay Western concerns and anxieties about China, arguing that, instead of being a threat, the rise of China is good for the world for multiple reasons and a factor for international peace and prosperity. Li is uniquely positioned to relay this not only because he knows his own country but also for his understanding of the West, having spent several years studying there.

Stable Sino-US relations are the best guarantee for global peace and prosperity.

He is concerned that the gulf between the West and China is widening. On the part of Western power elites, Li sees a readiness to engage in a new Cold War, while on the Chinese side he sees a drive for a more aggressive response to the West, especially the US. These views are regarded by him as dangerous escalation of misunderstandings and miscalculations which could lead to a conflict that is entirely avoidable.

Among the reasons he identifies for widespread Western fears of the country is the timing of China’s rise, coinciding as it has with many Western countries not being “in the best political and economic shape” and facing many troubles. This has eroded Western confidence and produced an “overreaction” to China’s ascent. It has caused US politicians to blame China for America’s socioeconomic problems.

Another reason he cites is that while China has built a market economy, it has advanced without having the institutions of Western democracy, which is seen by some in the West as a threat to their values if China becomes more powerful. This is despite the fact that Beijing has no interest in exporting the so-called Chinese model. China’s technological progress including in AI is also a source of Western worry, he writes, adding that China has the world’s largest pool of engineers and is poised to become a world leader in AI along with the US.

To promote a deeper understanding of China, Li’s book ranges over its society, governance institutions, including the all-pervasive role of the Chinese Communist Party, how its economy works, population policy and its education system. The author also deconstructs the various elements of China’s world view, and discusses what informs them. One of the chapters on the economy provides sharp insights into how private businesses operate. He points out that they are powering the country’s economic growth and account for over 75 per cent of national economic output while state-owned enterprises have undergone reform. Several generations of private entrepreneurs have emerged since the reforms of the 1980s but they all encountered social prejudice, had to deal with challenges of working with the government and navigate the tricky shoals of politics. His discussion of the government’s concern over big internet platforms and their owners’ influence bears close similarity to US concerns about their own social media giants.

The chapter on China’s world view is especially instructive. He defines world view as general principles agreed among the country’s policymakers and educated public. Among its seven strands Li regards three as more important. One, China should work on domestic issues before tackling foreign affairs — “homework first.” Two, earning respect is all-important in international affairs. And three, engage cooperatively with the US but be guided by clear principles and take a firm stand on core interests including Taiwan and technological development. Another element in the world view is that China should not seek to export its ‘model’ abroad.

In the book’s final chapter, Li marshals out his core argument that China’s rise is good for the world especially for ordinary people. This is because it has offered new economic opportunities for many people in the world — bringing more global public goods, speedier progress in science and technology, space exploration and peacekeeping in war zones. Low prices of Chinese-exported goods have benefited low-income families across the world. Competition with China has also goaded countries especially the US to spend more on education, science and technology. Moreover, China has no interest in disrupting the international order or seeking any conflict. Li believes US-China war is avoidable and improbable.

Whether or not one agrees with the optimistic note on which the book ends, there can be little disagreement with the view that a cooperative and stable relationship between China and the US is the best guarantee for global peace, security and prosperity. This crisply written book on one of the defining issues of our era serves as a persuasive reality check on exaggerated or unfounded fears of China’s rise.

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