



Has China Won?

The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy, New York: Public Affairs 2020,

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The rise of China in last the three decades has started the debate as to whether the primacy of America can be sustained or will it be replaced by another superpower (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2016; Jervis ,1991). If the United States were to be replaced, the key question arises: who would assume its role? The author of the book under consideration is extensively engaged in the exploration of a pivotal narrative in the 21st century, centred on the enduring competition between the United States and China. This discourse has evolved into a prominent arena of intellectual inquiry for scholars globally, and Kishore Mahbubani is no different in this regard. His book titled *Has China Won? The Chinese Challenge to American Primacy* discusses a wide range of issues which has engulfed both America and China. The book consists of nine chapters, with an additional condensed article by Stephen M. Walt in the appendix. This article delves into the prevalent myths surrounding American supremacy.

Mahbubani begins the writing of the chapters by asserting that the geopolitical contest between the United States and China in the 21st century is inevitable. He underlines the importance of developing a long-term plan for dealing with China and cites George Kennan's "spiritual vigour" to spark a strategic discussion. Chapter 2 delves into China's biggest mistake, which he identifies as alienating major constituencies in America. He discusses factors such as provincial autonomy, Chinese growth, and leadership issues. Chapter 3 explores the challenges faced by the United States, particularly the lack of a comprehensive long-term strategy, the potential harm of Trump's trade policies, and the shifting landscape of global economic leadership from the United States to China.

Chapter 4 addresses negative perceptions of China in the United States, arguing that China has not been militaristic or aggressive in recent decades. He suggests that the United States should

consider leaving Taiwan alone while emphasizing the importance of adhering to international law in the South China Sea. The book further explores whether the United States can change its course of action in Chapter 5. He criticizes American inflexibility in foreign policy and advocates for a strategic reboot.

In chapter 6 the author argues that strong central rule is essential in China due to factionalism and corruption within the Chinese Communist Party. He discusses the positive outcomes of authoritarian rule, such as stability and improved living standards, and questions the export of democracy to China by the United States. Chapter 7 debunks American myths, here the writing challenges flawed assumptions about the United States and further argues that the growing inequality, corporate influence, and elite control over American democracy undermine these assumptions.

Chapter 8 discusses the global impact of the U.S.-China competition, particularly on countries like Australia, the European Union, Japan, India, ASEAN, and Russia. He emphasizes the need for both the United States and China to win countries to their sides. In the final chapter, the author concludes that the U.S.-China contestation is both 'inevitable' and 'avoidable'. He identifies areas of non-contradiction between the two powers, including promoting the well-being of their people, addressing climate change, and avoiding ideological conflicts. The author ultimately raises the question of whether humanity, rather than a single nation, will emerge as the winner in this global competition.

The book may seem to scholars as a thought-provoking analysis of China's ascent on the global stage and was criticized by others for its overly optimistic portrayal of China's rise. The book's most significant strength is its assessment of America's internal and exterior policies suggesting that rigidity and inflexibility have engulfed its foreign policy. Furthermore, He debunks two flawed assumptions that is; America is 'benign actor' and offers 'a quality of life'. Making further claim that it is receding to a 'plutocracy'. While Mahbubani is unquestionably a reputable scholar and diplomat, however his book falls short in terms of a thorough and impartial analysis of the complex challenges related to China's growth. Nevertheless, the book possesses a number of strengths that add to the discussion surrounding China's ascent to global prominence. He provides readers with insightful information about how different areas and nations view China's rise by drawing on his broad diplomatic expertise. This global perspective broadens readers' awareness of international relations and helps them recognise the complexity of China's global influence. Another advantage of the book is its ease of use through employing

simple and basic style. A wide range of readers may readily comprehend the intricate subject matter as the author avoids using unnecessary jargon and presents his thoughts in an understandable way.

Mahbubani's exploration of the topic adds to the current discussion on China's position in global politics and economics as its rise continues to change the world landscape. It gives readers current information on one of the most important geopolitical changes in recent history. Although he may come out to some as being unduly optimistic about China's rise, his willingness to question popular Western myths about China promotes critical thinking. This alternate viewpoint encourages readers to participate in conversations concerning the direction of international relations, resulting in a deeper comprehension of the subject. The book also provides historical context, illuminating the elements that have shaped China's current standing in the world while suggesting that it should change the Marxist-Leninist mindset which disdains the business community, and giving up the philosophical assumption of the self-sufficient 'Middle Kingdom', he says when 'China built walls it falls behind and when it opens up it thrives'. This historical viewpoint is extremely helpful for readers trying to understand the long-term effects of China's rise since it highlights both changes and continuity in China's approach to international affairs.

Finally, "Has China Won?" offers policy options and ideas for how Western countries may interact with China. America, according to him, "is making a strategic mistake by fighting tomorrow war with yesterday strategy" (p.6). Strategy dealing with the Soviets cannot be applied against China. He recognizes the fact that the world is not bipolar rather a 'complex place'. Although there may be disagreement and dispute over these suggestions, they offer a useful framework for ongoing talks about developing sensible responses to China's growth. As for him, the aim is "to stimulate a strategic debate" (p.8) and 'think about the unthinkable', that is, 'Can America lose?'. In contrast to Samuel P. Huntington's thesis on the 'Clash of Civilizations', he proposes the concept of a 'Fusion of Civilizations,' wherein societies come together to share common values without erasing or diminishing their unique differences.

As far as the limitations of this book is concerned, the book fails to critically examine China's home and foreign policy. Mahbubani minimises or ignores the well-known violations of human rights, censorship, and the repression of opposition in China. He presents China as a benign actor in the international arena, but he ignores the country's territorial claims in the South China Sea or its predatory lending practices in emerging nations, which have sparked worries about

debt reliance. The claim made by Mahbubani that China is winning the global contest of ideas and values are oversimplified. He fails to recognise the fundamental incompatibility between China's system of government and the values of democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression upheld by many liberal democracies. For him, democracy perpetuate chaos (*luan*) whereas China love stability. He believes that strong central control is necessary in China due to the current Chinese Communist Party (CCP) factionalism and severe corruption, since strong central authority serves at least three public goods in China: It restrains Chinese nationalism inside the political system; responds to global climate issues; and has evolved as a "status quo power." He makes the case that China's economic success can serve as a model for other countries, but he easily ignores the negative effects of rapid development on the environment and society, such as income inequality and pollution. The main idea in the book is likewise weak because it lacks thorough analysis and supporting data. As for him, Chinese have learned to live peacefully with their neighbor with whom it has fought a war, further claiming that it has not fought a major war in forty years and has not fired a single bullet across its border in thirty years. He uses anecdotes and stories from his own life to spice up his tale, but he also makes a lot of broad generalisations and assumptions. Readers may find it challenging to fully believe his results because his study lacks the breadth and empirical backing required to validate his claims. He portrays China's rise to worldwide prominence in a biased manner, ignoring the myriad intricacies and conflicts that surround the topic. The book does provide some insightful information about how China views its own rise, but it lacks the critical thinking and objectivity that such a significant topic need.

In summary, it can be asserted that the book's primary strength lies in its incisive and thought-provoking assessment of America's current policies. However, it falls short when it comes to conducting a similar evaluation of China, and this constitutes its principal limitation. Nonetheless, the book debunks certain myths about America, serving as a mirror for the American populace, elites, and policymakers. However, it would be wise for researchers and readers who are constantly looking for a more thorough and objective analysis of China's rise to look for more sources that offer a broader perspective on the subject.

End Notes

Brooks, S. G., & Wohlforth, W. C. (2016). *America abroad: The United States' global role in the 21st century*. Oxford University Press.

Jervis, R. (1991). The future of world politics: will it resemble the past? *International Security*, 16(3), 39-73.