

Book Review: China's Vision of Victory

Jonathan D.T. Ward

The Atlas Publishing and Media Company LLC

ISBN: 978-0-57-843810-8

Reviewed by Peter Cook

Director PCA Maritime, Australia

peter.cook@pcamaritime.com

Jonathan Ward is an incisive, global observer. Between 2006-2011 he lived and travelled extensively in Russia, China, Latin America and the Middle East; he speaks Russian, Chinese, Spanish and Arabic. He is also a talented academic, having studied in New York, Beijing and St Petersburg before completing a master's degree and DPhil at Oxford University in England. He is a Director of Atlas Organization and is recognised by several respected international institutions as an authority on evolving global dynamics, especially in Asia.

During the research for this fascinating book, Ward had unparalleled access to Chinese Communist Party archives (which have now been shut), allowing him to conduct a forensic analysis of important speech transcripts, papers and comments made by members of the Chinese Politburo and principle individuals. His immersion in the country, culture and fluency in the language, gave him an extraordinary opportunity to experience and better understand the characteristics and idiosyncrasies of this extraordinary nation across the social spectrum first-hand, giving the book a unique viewpoint.

Despite the slightly disconcerting dedication at the beginning of the book, addressed to "My Fellow Americans", this is not a nationalist-motivated demonization of China. It is a perceptive examination of China's commitment and drive to fulfil "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" to its former status, glory, power and influence. It is with this context that one should approach his book 'China's Vision of Victory'.

Whilst China is comparable in land surface area to the United States (9.6 million square kilometres v 9.8 million square kilometres), its population dwarfs the US (China 1.4bn v US 324m, only 23percent of China's) and China's culture is one of the oldest in the world (stretching back 5,000 years).

This succinctly written book is broken down into five parts, building from "A Vision of National Destiny" to the Chinese "Vision of a New World Order". Ward cleverly pulls together the core elements of China's rise, providing his perspective as he unravels the aspirations and purpose of what Kissinger called a "mysterious" country.

Over most of its 5,000-year history, China regarded itself as the "Middle Kingdom" of the Earth and, despite millennia of war and fragmentation followed by reunification, the unique Chinese culture has endured. For thousands of years, China dominated Asia and the East. China was at the forefront of sophistication, origination and creation in the 17th century. The arrival of Europeans in the 18th century, with their overwhelming demand for the exotic new products and resources discovered in this unfamiliar land, changed the dynamic. China was subjected to the status of subservience, sewing a seed of retribution.

After the Opium Wars in 1840, China was a broken "semi-colonial and semi-feudal country". Ward describes how, through key individuals and "one of the most potent and active senses of national destiny that exists on Earth today," China has become one the most formidable economic, militarily powerful,

technologically capable countries in the world. It is perceived by many, as competing with the USA, the acknowledged global superpower, for supremacy.

Ward does not suggest acquiescence or submission to China as an evolving superpower but provokes the reader to understand and confront the reality of what is happening. He explains how the “West” has failed to understand, and seriously underestimated, the “invisible force of more than 1.3 billion people.” The US approach was to “engage but hedge”, which is deemed to have failed. This could be blamed on entrenched Anglo-Saxon systemic racism, resulting in arrogance and complacency, making them blind to the Chinese renaissance.

Ward explores the beginnings of the great rejuvenation of China at the start of the twentieth century, acknowledging Mao Zedong’s significant influence but also identifying the Chinese mantra, “hide your brightness, bide your time”, as the way in which this economic rebirth seems to have been overlooked until well into the first decade of the 21st century.

Historically, China has been a “continental” nation, always having to defend its borders from neighbouring invaders and being forced to build the only defensive structure (the Great Wall), visible from space. With its borders now secure, China is looking to the sea as its “Blue National Soil”, building outposts across the South China Sea. Ward explains this uncharacteristic maritime growth (China’s single significant foray into the maritime domain in 1405 by Admiral Zheng He, was halted before gaining any real momentum, due to prohibitive costs and limited foreseeable gain), by examining the urgency of its growing demand for resources from outside the nation, and the criticality of seaborne trade to feed this requirement. He also looks at the rapid growth of the Peoples Liberation Army (Navy) in numbers, technological advances and ongoing initiatives, posing questions about its rivalry to the largest navy in the world (the US Navy).

The economic growth of China has been breath-taking, and Ward reveals startling facts about how it was designed, developed and conducted, along with some unsettling predictions about where this growth is likely to take China and the potential knock-on effects to other global economies, especially the US. He reiterates the patience and tenacity of Chinese companies acquiring market share whilst democracies obsessively debate the future of the “rules-based order”.

He also describes how China sees the “Belt and Road” initiative as a symbiotic process, rather than just purely importing raw materials and exporting products globally. He highlights the urgency placed on this advancement to ensure that the appetite of a fast-expanding consumer class (estimated to be growing at 100 million people per year) within China and other developing countries, especially in Asia, are met.

The final section of the book looks at how China envisages the world will develop beyond the Western constraints of the rules-based order, examines the phenomena of “Sinocentrism”, and how popular quotes from ancient China¹ are used to exemplify Chinese purpose, methodology and conduct. Ward, then provides evidence to demonstrate how successful the Chinese have been in this strategy, including highlighting that Hollywood no longer makes China the bad guys. In his book “on China” Henry Kissinger elucidates the Chinese art of “strategic encirclement”, which he experienced in the 1970s. The relentless creeping global presence of China with its growing economic influence may prompt the reader to reflect on another of Sun Tzu’s teachings, “The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”

In his conclusion, Ward urges the reader to take stock and understand the reality of China’s unprecedented growth. The targets set by the Chinese Communist Party of “rejuvenation” by 2050 (two

¹ Philosopher Sun Tzu, “the clever combatant imposes his will on the enemy but does not allow the enemy’s will to be imposed on him.”

centuries after the end of the Opium Wars and one hundred years after the founding of the People's Republic of China) are on the horizon and approaching fast. As Ward says, "the world is changing, and at the centre of these changes is the rise of China." We therefore must understand how we can adapt to the forthcoming new world order.

This is an important book and a significant contribution to the debate from someone who has lived in the country and experienced, first-hand, its culture. The book is meticulously researched, and engagingly written, in a logical, methodical format with excellent maps and photographs reinforcing pertinent points. The author makes a compelling case for China's formidable transformation, which may be uncomfortable to read, especially as it dawns on the reader quite how much has already happened, and it should prompt serious reflection.

The final comment of the book is the conundrum "What kind of force is China?", which is now a question for us all to ponder.

Peter Cook

Peter Cook is a well-respected maritime security professional with extensive knowledge and a founding director of PCA Maritime Ltd. Peter was a student at the London Nautical School where the foundations of his understanding of the Merchant Navy and shipping industry were laid. He then served for 24-years as an officer in the Royal Marines, for more than 8 years he was involved in maritime security related roles. He was a founder and CEO of the Security Association for the Maritime Industry (SAMI), the international representative and regulatory body for private armed guards on ships. He is now based in Australia, establishing a new consultancy and lecturing post graduate students on maritime security at Universities around the globe. Peter is also the Indo-Pacific Editor of the IJMCS.
