



The Writing on the Wall: Why We Must Embrace China as a Partner or Face It as an Enemy

Will Hutton

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The prevailing view of China is that the country is an economic juggernaut sure to become the dominant power of the twenty-first century. In this provocative and stimulating book critically acclaimed author Will Hutton warns instead that China is running up against a set of daunting challenges from within its own political and economic system that could well derail its rise, leading to a massive shock to the global economy. The United States, he argues, must recognize that it has a vital stake in working to assure this doesn't happen, for if China's political liberalization and economic growth collapse, the United States will suffer crippling consequences.

In today's highly globalized world economy, so much of the economic health of the United States -- our low inflation, high profits, and cheap credit -- rests upon China's economic growth and its massive investment in the United States. A great deal has been said about the economic and military threat China poses. But rather than provoking China with the military hawkishness of recent years and resisting Chinese economic supremacy with the saber rattling of protectionist antitrade policies -- twenty such bills have been introduced in Congress in just the last year -- the United States must build a strong relationship that will foster China's transition from an antiquated Communist state beset with profound problems to a fully modern, enlightened, and open society. Doing so will require understanding and engagement, not enmity and suspicion.

China's current economic model, Hutton explains, is unsustainable, premised as it is on the myriad contradictions and dysfunctions of an authoritarian state attempting to control an economy in its transition to capitalism. If the twenty-first century is to be the China century, the Chinese will have to embrace the features of modern Western nations that have spurred the political stability and economic power of the United States and Europe: the rule of law, an independent judiciary, freedom of the press, and authentic representative government that is accountable to the people. Whether or not China does so rests in large part on how well the United States manages the relationship and persuades the Chinese of the virtues of an open, enlightened democratic system. The danger is that fearmongering will intensify animosities, leading both countries down a path of peril.

Turning conventional wisdom on its head, this brilliantly argued book is vital reading at a crucial juncture in world affairs.

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