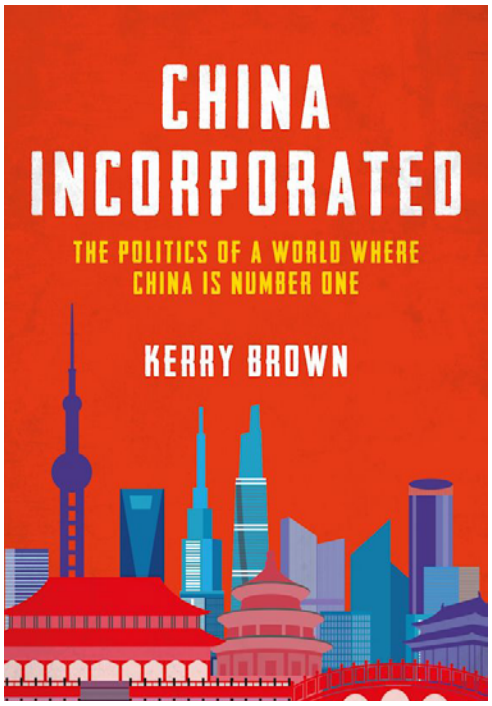
BOOK REVIEW



China Incorporated: The Politics of a World Where China is Number One

By Kerry Brown

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Kerry Brown's *China Incorporated: The Politics of a World Where China is Number One* offers a thought-provoking perspective on the implications of China's rise in a global context dominated by the long-standing leadership of the United States. Comprising eight chapters, Brown's analysis encourages readers to adopt a fresh mindset through a comprehensive examination of China's dynamics from start to finish.

The book's contribution is twofold. Firstly, it delves deeply into the often-overlooked theme of values within the realm of great power competition between China and the US, notably highlighted through Brown's frequent use of the term "Enlightenment West" to describe the US-led Western perspective in contrast to China. Secondly, it prompts us to question the established modernisation paradigm (a theory that posits that economic development in societies is a catalyst for democratisation) inherited from Cold War, stressing the inseparability of economic development and democratisation, thereby giving way to a re-evaluation of traditional viewpoints.

The first chapter provides a comprehensive overview of key themes, which are detailed in the rest of the book. It delineates three critical aspects: China is no longer weak, its ascendancy in both land and naval capabilities, and the distinctiveness of its value system vis-à-vis the West. This exposition transcends the commonplace discourse surrounding China's rise, which has become the talk of the town in the last decade, directing attention to how to make sense of this reality. The recognition of China's transition from a perceived state of weakness is contextualised as a simultaneously relative decline of Western powers, stimulating parallel discussions concerning China, the US, and European powers. Moreover, the emphasis on the burgeoning maritime power of China underscores the necessity of broadening the discourse on China-West relations beyond the confines of the Taiwan issue to encompass a broader naval domain, the South China Sea.

As mentioned earlier, the emphasis on values and philosophy compared with the Enlightenment is most intriguing. This undoubtedly reminds us that we need to question the less inclusive and intriguing aspects of the ideational pillars of a global actor that is often touted as a future superpower, such as "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence," and "Harmonious Society," which are frequently used by Beijing.

The second chapter illustrates China's behaviour in the virtual domain and cyberspace amid its global growth, showcasing its ability to create Made in PRC versions of domains with high levels of censorship and surveillance, a significant capability. It also discusses the overestimation of Confucius Institutes (hosted by universities, Confucius Institutes are educational and cultural organisations affiliated with the Chinese government, established around the world with the aim of promoting Chinese language and culture, supporting Chinese language teaching, and facilitating cultural exchanges) as examples of China's soft power, cautioning against exaggerating their impact. These examples highlight China's subtle, exclusionary actor behaviour and its challenges in attracting interest in its values. It is, therefore, highly unlikely for a passionate researcher or enthusiast to solely emerge from Confucius Institutes in a university with a rich liberal arts tradition.

The third chapter outlines a significant shift in the Enlightenment West's attitude towards China, evolving from patronising to openness for collaboration and eventually seeing China as a threat. This last attitude reflects what we saw in the long communique issued after last year's NATO Summit in Vilnius. Brown underscores two turning points in China's perception of the West: the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the Arab Spring, highlighting the failures of Western capitalism and interventionist foreign policies in the post-Cold War era. They solidified China's reluctance to heed Western advice, resonating with critiques of interventionist liberalism in John Mearsheimer's *The Great Delusion.* The notion of a crusader state promoting liberal values, with each Western failure now serving as rhetorical leverage for China, stands as a noteworthy observation.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, we observe a dual analysis, which is highly necessary. These chapters, elaborated upon with the questions "What Does the World Want from China?" and "What Does China Want

from the World?" clearly illustrate the stark contrast between China's ambition to wield power without taking too much responsibility with binding commitments in global issues like climate change and the Western perception of a China constrained within the boundaries of the liberal international order. This inherent disparity is central to understanding how China and the West perceive each other. The sixth chapter presents a rich and necessary example, both from Brown's own experiences and in the context of the discussions on China and the alternative global order. Accordingly, the Xinjiang issue, where the Chinese government is accused of a series of ongoing human rights abuses against Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang, serves as a microcosm for understanding China's stance on human rights within the international system. The vast disparity between how the Enlightenment West and China perceive the surveillance state mechanism in this autonomous region underscores the differing perceptions detailed in the fourth and fifth chapters.

The seventh and eighth chapters are crucial, especially concerning the future of modernisation theory and whether China will adopt a paradigm-shifting approach. The assertion that, "We have been using Stone Age tools to address a space age problem. Getting rid of the 'evil/good' dichotomy is a great place to start addressing this," (170) is particularly noteworthy. Brown conveys the message that differentiating our observations and analyses from the past is no longer optional, but a necessity to understand and contextualise China.

Though his enquiry is robust, Brown's analysis lacks examples of China's actor behaviour through global regimes and international institutions. For instance, China's behaviour under the UNFCCC regarding global climate change, its stance in WTO negotiations, or its voting behaviour in the UNSC could have been included in the discussion. Comparing China's nuanced approach of exploiting or utilising existing potentials within UN frameworks to the goal-oriented strategies of the West, as mentioned in the second chapter, could have made the differences clearer and more understandable. For example, contrasting the EU's stance with the Green Deal against China's revisionist approach in COPs as the leader of the G-77 would give readers a better understanding of the contrasting engagements with international institutions at play.

Overall, the author's emphasis on values and the call to evaluate China's rise concurrently with the relative weakening of the West are thought-provoking and significant. This book provides an excellent resource for those interested in researching beyond the traditional narratives about China. Additionally, through this work, Brown highlights the need for new methods in examining China's rise in international politics literature.