

Geoffrey Murray, *China – the Next Superpower: Dilemmas in Change and Continuity*, England: China Library, 1998. 260pp. ISBN 1-873410-78-6

Murray's book provides a timely update of the breathtaking changes that have taken place in China in recent years. Since the Tiananmen Incident, Western media have been obsessed with negative images and an unsympathetic portrayal of China for her lack of progress in political democratization. Consequently the general public's knowledge of the extent and nature of these changes in China is very limited. Because the author has spent most of his time over the last ten years in China, he has witnessed what he has termed the 'most profound transitional period' in Chinese history (p. 19). This fact alone merits a serious reading of the observations and empirical data presented in this fascinating book.

Unlike some other works on the rise of China as a global superpower, the book does not intimidate readers by exaggerating China as a 'threat' to the world. Instead, the book focuses primarily on the internal dilemmas and contradictions that China faces, and the potential impact China will have on the world. Chapter 1 presents an interesting analysis on various grounds for considering China as a superpower-in-waiting. It concludes, after a careful evaluation of China's burgeoning military and economic power, that although China's progress in these areas is very impressive, the country remains a modest power. China is still dealing with the difficult task many other developing countries face, namely, to make the transition from a highly centralized planned economy to a market economy, and the transition from an agrarian society to an industrial one. What has made China unique so far is that she has tried to accomplish both transitions at the same time at a fairly rapid pace. The key to the future success of these transitions, and ultimately to China's credential to be regarded as a superpower, is her ability to maintain political stability and an intricate balance between change and continuity.

Chapters 2 to 5 look in depth at some of the issues that may threaten China's success, including the unrest among unem-

ployed workers, the migration of a vast army of indigent peasants in search of work, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and population pressure combined with food security. In the author's opinion, these issues are the results of the two social transitions, and there is no easy solution to any of them. China's path towards superpower status is anything but a smooth ride; there are many bumps in the road ahead.

The following three chapters further examine the implications of the economic and political reforms during the last two decades. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss Chinese national characters, and the value conflicts brought about by the current market-oriented reforms. The author believes that 'the values underpinning China's economic success are related less to traditional Confucian concepts than to a scramble for anything that works to fuel the economy' (p. 112). Indeed, as a result of the moral vacuum, Chinese leaders struggle to find ways to combat many social evils such as official corruption, illegal drugs, Triad gangs, etc. Chapter 7 further illustrates how the Chinese are ill prepared for the unprecedented changes they face. According to the author, Chinese society is locked into an ideological debate 'involving a battle of values that reflect the fundamental changes that have taken place in the balance between China and the rest of the world' (p. 123).

The world is certainly hostile to the idea of having China as a dominant superpower. Chapter 9 examines closely the 'China threat theory' in the context of Sino-US and Sino-Japanese relationships. Through his examination of arguments presented by both sides, the author shows a strong dissatisfaction with the American-led media attack on China. Chapter 10 makes an interesting observation. The author believes that the Western countries' attempt to make China a contributor to peace through integrating China's economy into WTO may prove to be one-sided, since China may well be the one who will 'undermine and change the global capitalist system, rather than being entirely disciplined by it' (p. 210). The author presents two likely scenarios based on his analysis of all the internal dilemmas and contradictions. The 'strong China' scenario presents China as an alternative model to American-style

capitalism; while the 'weak China' scenario portrays a disintegrated China split into squabbling fiefdoms. Either scenario will surprise the world and have a far-reaching impact on global politics. 'The Chinese', the author concludes, 'will draw on their own long history to survive, while the outside world can do little but stand aside and watch' (p. 217).

Murray's book provides a journalistic account of the China story. It does contain some journalist simplifications. For instance, when he talks about Chinese history, Murray mentions that China is a 'nation that has experienced 5,000 years of hardship' (p. 189). Apparently not all periods of Chinese history can be characterized as hardship. Overall, Murray's book is a valuable addition to the literature on China studies. Twenty years from now much of Murray's analyses will still proved to be very well grounded.

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