

## AMERICA AND THE RISE OF CHINA – A POTENTIAL CLASH OF GIANTS

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**Abstract.** A recent book signed by a colonel of the Chinese People's Liberation Army and titled *The China Dream* reads like an elaborate resolution of the Beijing political authorities. The book explains in great details why China will surpass America in the near future and will take over the world. And Liu Mingfu, the author, does not start with a hypothesis, but with a court sentence: China's rise to global prominence is imminent and America must accept it as a fact!

China is already a superpower. From an economic point of view, it is now second only to the United States and it keeps developing. Militarily, it has just launched its second carrier and a third one is in the making. A series of modern destroyers are also in the making. Its Asian neighbours are apprehensive. Does China, like other great nations, have a sense of global mission?

**Keywords:** *US-China Relations; China's Rise; Artificial Intelligence (AI); United States of America; Superpowers*

A recent book signed by a colonel of the Chinese People's Liberation Army and titled *The China Dream* reads like an elaborate resolution of the Beijing political authorities. The book explains in great details why China will surpass America in the near future and will take over the world. And Liu Mingfu, the author, does not start with a hypothesis, but with a court sentence: China's rise to global prominence is imminent and America must accept it as a fact! Here are a few statements:

"...Becoming the strongest nation in the world is China's goal for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century<sup>1</sup>. ...Chinese culture is the most vital culture in the world<sup>2</sup>. ...China has the most excellent cultural genes<sup>3</sup>. ...The United States will have to learn to play by others' rules and adjust to its relative decline<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Liu Mingfu, *The China Dream – Great Power Thinking & Strategic Posture in the Post American Era*, New York: CN Times Books, 2015, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 74.

### *A Complex World*

We live in a complex world and at a challenging time. The world at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is dominated by the United States, by Russia, and by China. America is still the most powerful country, but while Russia is wrestling with internal problems, China is rising economically and geopolitically and is challenging the current world arrangements. Short of some unforeseen events, it appears that nothing can stop China from rising to prominence.

From an economic point of view, China has flooded the world with its industrial goods and for practical purposes it has already conquered many countries and regions. Geopolitically, China is strongly asserting itself in the south-west Pacific and has reached Africa with military personnel. Domestically, Beijing has built a modern infrastructure and has linked the country with Pakistan through an impressive highway that crosses its western desert. Thus, China is approaching the fragile Middle East. Internationally, Beijing is forging new friendships and alliances with Russia, Iran and other countries opposed to the current American-led globalization.

The United States is watching these developments cautiously. Is a future collision of interests and goals between Beijing and Washington inevitable? For now, the two countries are mainly competing in various fields while negotiating new trade relations. However, the author of *The China Dream* has no illusions. Liu writes: "China cannot escape its fate as America's rival<sup>5</sup>...The world is too important to give it to the United States... In the 21<sup>st</sup> century China will rise and confront the threat of the United States...China must have huge armies to guarantee that there will be no war between China and America... Only since the Chinese Communist Party has entered Chinese history has the fighting character of Chinese nation flourished again..."<sup>6</sup>.

### *The March of History*

The current *coronavirus* epidemic has made the world focus on other problems, but the Sino-American rivalry is still intense. Some recent books as well as various reports and articles point out to the preoccupation of the United States with China and with the future of their relations. This essay analyses the chief issues facing these relations.

One of these books, *Fateful Ties – A History of America's Preoccupation with China* by Gordon H. Chang, stands out for its historic approach. The book takes a long view of Sino-American relations from the earliest times to the present. It is a detailed chronicle of events and people that help the reader better understand the current uneasy relationship between these two countries. The book offers a brief, but pertinent history of China, a country that for millennia was the most advanced power in Asia. Actually, 'the Middle Kingdom,' as China was known,

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 142.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 197.

was considered by its emperors the very centre of the universe. As for relations with other countries, Beijing treated its neighbours benevolently, but within a superpower-vassal type relationship. China's dominant position changed during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when the European powers almost dismembered the country. By the end of the century China lost its power and prestige and was badly humiliated by several Western European powers, by Russia and by Japan. The humiliation started with the two Anglo-Chinese opium wars that forced Beijing to open the country to the opium trade, which devastated the fabric of Chinese society.

In Chang's opinion, the opium wars triggered a downward spiral, which only the Communist revolution of 1949 ended<sup>7</sup>. Following the wars, China was forced to cede Hong Kong to England while a good part of its Pacific coast and the north-east territory was also lost to foreign countries. Beijing could not accept this subordinate status and regaining its past glory became the long-term goal of its new leaders. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century events are the roots of the hardship endured by China during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

This humiliation led to the rise of nationalism and communism and split Chinese society. From the beginning the two ideologies collided and eventually they became deadly enemies. According to Chang, the nationalists represented an 'aristocratic China' and had little understanding for the masses, while the communists represented 'the masses' and engaged the poor people on their side. In the end, the communists won and, after several decades of incalculable suffering, they rehabilitated the wounded national pride of China. And Mao Zedong, the communist leader, took upon himself and his party the dream of restoring the old Chinese glory.

Chang's writing has a pro-Mao tilt and is very sympathetic to communism. For example, he details the socio-economic ravages of Mao's 'Great Leap Forward' of the late 1950's and of the 'Cultural Revolution' of the 1960's that resulted, as the author mentions, in "chaos, destruction, horrific tragedy, personal ruins, and mass demoralization". He writes verbatim: "Mao destroyed his own revolution in the name of revolution"<sup>8</sup>. Yet, he still sympathizes with Maoist communism!

The road back to greatness lasted almost a century, but eventually China achieved the present status. In the process and over time, communism changed to the point that it defied any previously known stereotypes. It became communism with unique Chinese characteristics. In the end, Beijing reached global prominence by opening economic opportunities to its people while keeping strict overall political control. In fact, some specialists claim that Chinese communism fits almost perfectly its imperial past. China changed radically, but the people remained basically the same: industrious, hardworking, and frugal. China succeeded where most communist countries failed.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful Ties – A History of America's Preoccupation with China*, Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 219.

*Tumultuous US-China Relations*

Relations between America and China, and especially trade relations, are viewed by most authors as mutually beneficial. The two countries signed their first official trade treaty in 1844 and thereafter trade between them flourished. In this regard, at the turn of the previous century, President Theodore Roosevelt had a visionary view: He predicted that America's future would be determined by the position on the Pacific Ocean facing China rather than by the position on the Atlantic Ocean facing Europe<sup>9</sup>. That prediction was accurate and was only interrupted by the communist takeover in Beijing in 1949 and by the Korean War of the 1950's. For the next two decades after those dramatic events, relations between China and American were glacial.

Sino-American relations changed after President Richard Nixon visited Beijing in February 1972. Slowly thereafter, the two countries moved from foes to quasi-allies and then to the complex friendly-inimical relation of today. In the meantime, in the mid-1970s, the new Beijing leader Deng Xiaoping redirected the Chinese politics and completely transformed the country. Deng reversed Mao's policy of collectivism, revived rural life, opened up the country to foreign investors, privatized state-owned enterprises, built industries and slowly made China into the global economic and military power of today. The world had no choice but accept the new reality. Short of a devastating war, no one can stop China from rising further. Consequently, some American circles began to fear China. Yet, does anyone have the right to prevent other countries from rising?

The prelude and aftermath of the 1970ss transformation of China was studied thoroughly by Gregg Brazinsky in his book *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Rivalry during the Cold War*. The author stresses that during this critical period, China transformed itself from a feudal society into an industrial giant. Politically, however, all this time Beijing championed the right to independence of Asian and African countries and attacked America's 'imperialist' policy. The United States watched this transformation with apprehension and grudgingly adjusted its attitude from denying Beijing international legitimacy to eventual full recognition.

The central theme of Brazinsky's book is that Sino-American rivalry was in essence a competition over status. It should be added that no great power accepts a challenge to its status, and no ascending power can rise without struggling to get to the top. As for the meaning of 'status' analysts disagree on what it exactly is. One of the possible definitions claims that status is "a recognized position within a social hierarchy, implying relations of dominance and deference"<sup>10</sup>. Following a century of subordination to foreign powers, China wanted to regain its international standing. And the Chinese communist leaders never lost sight of this goal.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> Gregg A. Brazinsky, *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Rivalry during the Cold War*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2017, p. 4.

The road for a status change was very bumpy. While America showed determination in dealing with Beijing, China displayed typical oriental patience. Then, after several Sino-Soviet military skirmishes in the 60s, Washington and Beijing began to discover common ground and mutual interests. China denounced officially the Soviet Union and called it a 'social-imperialist country.' Suddenly, the United States and China found a common geopolitical imperative – to contain the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, for years previously the two countries had intense back-and-forth confrontations and negotiations. Many thorny issues were discussed confidentially or in different open forums. Among them were the fate of Indo-China and the future of Taiwan. As a rule, in all those contacts Beijing put China's interests first and through shrewd negotiations attained most of its goals.

The realignment that occurred in Asia during the second part of the 20th Century was complex and, in some ways, unavoidable. In this regard, neither the United States nor China won the cold war in Asia. As a result, ever since, Sino-American relations have remained intricate and unpredictable. Despite finding some mutual interests, Brazinsky concludes, China and the United States remained very dissimilar countries with different histories and perceptions of their roles in the world<sup>11</sup>. The two countries have different interests indeed, but is there a reason for the United States to fear the rise of China?

### *What Is Beijing Up to and Who Is Afraid of China?*

Answering these questions indirectly, a Chinese-American author approaches the topic from another angle and raises a few new points. China is currently a leader in artificial intelligence and is challenging America not only economic and geopolitically, but also in the race to dominate outer space. Kai-Fu-Lee's book, *Artificial Intelligence (AI) Super-Powers*, shocks the reader and wakes him up to a new world. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be a world of drastic changes, global realignments and new sociological challenges. We are not facing the 'end of the world', but it is the end of today's era. And what's scarier is that this future is already here, but allegedly, we still need about 20 more years to see it implemented.

Kai-Fu is a leader in artificial intelligence and is preoccupied with the applications and consequences of the new technology. In his opinion, the world has moved from the age of theoretical discovery to the age of practical applications and from the age of expertise to the age of data. Artificial intelligence is the energy of the new age and it marks the beginning of a new revolution. Adopt it or be left behind!

Artificial intelligence is driven by a process of *deep learning*. Human abilities are very limited in discerning complex signs and various correlations. Machines can do a much better job. Deep learning refers to a myriad of nuances in our reaction to different situations that are processed and interpreted by machines. Then, by using complex algorithms, machines spot the most common patterns, make decisions and predictions better than humans, and apply them to real life situations. Thus,

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 344.

the patterns of data are now decisive in determining the accuracy of an algorithm. They are used for various economic activities and for financial profits. It is exactly what is happening now in China on a massive scale, in America more slowly, and to a lesser degree in the rest of the world. This is the future!

### *Artificial Intelligence (AI)*

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the world went through the Industrial Revolution. During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it went through a High-Tech revolution. This century is witnessing a revolution driven by artificial intelligence! Machines endowed with AI and human-like perceptions are already doing a better job than humans in a range of fields with practical applications. Such fields are: *Face and Speech Recognition, Medical Diagnosis and Treatment, Linguistic Translations* and many others. It should be emphasized that according to informed people, if a new discovery is known to the public, it is already obsolete. And while researchers explore the future and people are adjusting to new realities, businesses are reaping the benefits.

There are currently seven giant companies that dominate the world in the research and application of artificial intelligence. There are four American companies: Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft, and three Chinese ones: *Baidu, Alibaba* and *Tencent*. Other big Chinese names are also coming of age. All these companies have developed their own applications and are vying for global domination. The United States is still ahead in the fields of research and innovation, but China is ahead in practical applications. Between the two countries there is a big difference. While the U.S. companies are private, the Chinese companies are controlled by the government. And the Beijing government is in the hands of the Communist Party.

For China investing in AI is not only of economic importance, but also of political significance. By doing so, the government will have more control over its own people and internationally it will claim a larger share of the globe. And China is getting ahead because the population is taking its cues from the government. In addition, Beijing offers subsidies, investment funds, as well as other various facilities, and it sets up special zones for AI development. And when China mobilizes its people and resources, results follow suit. In 2007, for instance, China had no high-speed trains; ten years later China had more miles of high-speed trains than the rest of the world. With the full support of the regime, it has been projected that by 2030 China will become the centre of artificial intelligence of the entire world. And from a techno-military point of view, China could transform economic development into geopolitical advantages to the detriment of America.

There are currently about 800 million people in China who have access to the internet. That means more people than in the United States and Europe together. Accordingly, Chinese companies 'harvest' each click of the internet user and find patterns of meaning in them. Then, *intelligent machines* interpret this huge database for correlations that escape the human brain. Finally, specialized companies



make practical use of this data. For example, the invention of the Smart Phones has given many Chinese people direct access to the internet without having to buy a desktop computer. There are now more than 500 million smart phones in China, and those phones are used for a vast range of operations. And their use has transformed Chinese ‘online actions into offline services’.

There are already many practical applications currently in use in China. The company *Tencent*, for example, developed a special super app called *WeChat* that has taken over the E-commerce<sup>12</sup>. Face Recognition and Speech Translation are two other important fields of applied artificial intelligence. A restaurant in China with an up-to-date face recognition app allows customers to pay by simply recognizing their faces and linking them to their smart phones. Payment and bank balancing are then done automatically on the spot. No additional cost! Another amazing application is simultaneous speech translation. Recently, the Chinese program *iFlyTek* translated almost to perfection president Trump’s speech. And it translated not only words and meanings, but also intonation, pitch, patterns and expressions as if he had been born in a Chinese village near Beijing<sup>13</sup>.

The new wave of artificial intelligence is blurring the line between the digital world of the computer and physical world around us. From being just *automated*, machines are becoming *autonomous*. And endowing them with human-like senses and perceptions could blur the line between humans and machine. Actually, current predictions foresee that by 2030 machines could equal the intelligence of humans, and by 2045 super-intelligent machines may surpass the intelligence of humans. The adoption of AI machines is inevitable and the process will have beneficial results as well as dire consequences. Benefits are mostly material and economic, but internationally, they will cause massive population displacements and drastic geopolitical rearrangements.

Will China with its huge population, resources and authoritarian regime, challenge the current world order? In a recently published book named *Deceiving the Sky*, Bill Gertz, writes that China’s rising is making Southeast Asia nervous and is threatening the United States and the current international order. The problems posed by Beijing and confronting the world are multiple, nuanced and complex. The author underlines the great achievements of China over the last several decades. Yet, in his opinion these achievements are a by-product of Beijing’s efforts to reach global supremacy and to undermine the United States, rather than simple economic goals. And Gertz is asking himself rhetorically: What does Beijing want? What is China’s long-term goal?

### *Who Controls China and What Does Beijing Want?*

With regard to who control China, Gertz gives us a blunt answer. At its core China is driven and controlled by the same old communist ideology! Practically, China is led by an 80 million-strong Party whose chief purpose is to perpetuate

<sup>12</sup> Kai-Fu-Lee, *AI Super-Powers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: Boston, New York, 2018, p. 110.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 105.

its power. The Party is maintained by an army of activists organized in a strict hierarchy and ultimately is led by the Central Committee. At the very top, the Party is led by a Politburo Standing Committee of seven to eleven members who are virtually infallible. They exert God-like powers! And the supreme chief over the entire Party is currently Xi Jinping, a man who controls the entire country.

To keep the people in line, Beijing uses most of the old communist method as well as shrewd system of rewards and retributions. Getting a passport to travel, for example, is not a right but a privilege, and one ought to earn it. Nevertheless, the regime has allowed the people economic freedom and over the years has managed to raise the standard of living of most Chinese citizens. At the same time, Beijing emphasizes its 'grandiose achievements' and instils nationalism and a feeling of pride in the masses. On the other hand, Beijing is promoting a form of internationalism combined with a new version of national communism as a better social goal than the current capitalist globalization. Armed with this ideology, China wages a multi-layered and near invisible war against America. However, Beijing leaders insist that they just want to reclaim China's traditional position in the world. Yet, in order to achieve this, China needs to 'displace and replace' America as the world's greatest power. For the new China, the United States is the enemy!

From a Chinese point of view, the Sino-American confrontation is the last step toward making China again the centre of the universe. However, while the traditional Middle Kingdom was built around old Chinese values, the new China is built around the Marxist ideology.

Internationally, with the Chinese people under control, Beijing is focusing on the main geopolitical agenda of the regime: military expansion into the South China Sea, preparations to take over Taiwan, and ultimately, readiness to defeat America. In this regard, a recent book written by two Chinese intelligence colonels, suggestively named *Unrestricted Warfare*, claims that the first rule of unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules. Thus, for the People's Republic of China, America is the 'imperialist enemy' that must be defeated 'by all means necessary'<sup>14</sup>.

In his book *The China Dream*, Liu Mingfu writes however that China does not want to challenge or confront the United States. On the contrary, Beijing is inviting America to cooperate and the two should manage together the affairs of the world. Nevertheless, the outcome of this relation is clear: 'China's march to the top of the world is unstoppable.' Other than that, Liu is rather soft on the United States, although he is sarcastic and sharp-tongued. He writes: "American imperialism is a benign variety of imperialism ... The United States is the most civilized hegemon in modern history, and China is the most civilized rising power in recent history<sup>15</sup>. The United States is a nation ridden with original sin<sup>16</sup>. China has no original sin... China has never expanded abroad, invaded other countries to steal their resources<sup>17</sup>. Yet, China is ready to help America, which... finds

<sup>14</sup> Apud Bill Gertz, *Deceiving the Sky: Inside Communist China's Drive for Global Supremacy*, Encounter Books, New York, 2019, p. 196.

<sup>15</sup> Liu Mingfu, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 66.



itself more and more isolated in the world<sup>18</sup>... America is truly in need of rescue... If China wants to cure America, we need to help overcome its hegemonic syndrome, a disease that threaten the world and wreak havoc on America's national fortunes"<sup>19</sup>.

### *An American Dilemma*

China's rise to prominence has triggered two different kinds of reactions in the United States: appeasement among liberal circles and apprehension among conservatives. Gertz stresses that the failure to confront China is a failure of Washington's leadership and of the analysts who for various reasons downplay Beijing's aggressive behaviour. He also accuses those who put their personal interests before the interests of the country. And he singles out a number of high-profile individuals who lobby for China like the former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Such persons have a lot to gain financially from dealings with Beijing. Gertz also criticizes the businessmen who put their personal profits ahead of national interests. In this regard, many Americans view China as an emerging market with the potential for unlimited profits. It should be remembered that Lenin once said that the capitalists will sell for profit the very ropes on which they will be hung...

A very illustrative case in this regard is America's dependency on China for its medicines. In a recent book titled *CHINA Rx. Exposing the Risks of America's Dependence on China for Medicine*, the authors show that a huge amount of all drugs sold in America, from simple aspirins to the newest antibiotics, are made in China or are made from ingredients imported from China. Most people are not aware, the book writes, but the last American aspirin manufacturer... "closed in 2002 when Chinese companies sold bulk aspirin in the United States at artificially low prices"<sup>20</sup>. As a result, many essential medicines or ingredients for life-saving drugs are now made in China. In fact, China aims at reaching monopoly-like control of many industries in the new era of global economy. To achieve this, China is continuously spying and stealing chemical and medical secrets from the United States getting ahead with every step and eroding further America's market share. It is obvious that Beijing has a global strategy while Washington has none. In this regard, the authors stress that profit can be an immediate goal, but not a strategy! And they add: "This is the China trap. China thinks long term. America thinks short term"<sup>21</sup>.

Ever since China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, America opened its market to Chinese products, but through a variety of measures, China shielded its market against U.S. imports. Globalization worked for China in the

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 185.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>20</sup> Rosemary Gibson, Janardan Prasad Singh, *CHINA Rx. Exposing the Risks of America's Dependence on China for Medicine*. US: Prometheus Books, 2018, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 99.

chemical field, but not for America, which has lost millions of jobs. Gibson and Singh claim that... “America helped create the middle class in China and at the same time destroy the middle class at home”<sup>22</sup>.

The book concludes that... “U.S. pharmaceutical industry needs long-term thinking, but the capitalist model isn’t designed to do that. It’s a recipe for disaster. It’s devastating to individual lives, and it’s devastating to this country”<sup>23</sup>. Gibson and Singh also consider that American dependency on Chinese drugs and medical devices is a threat to our national security. And they stress that medicine making is part of our health security and it should be treated as a strategic goal at the highest level. (Indeed, suppose that China discovers a lethal virus that spreads all over the world. And suppose that Beijing has the antidote, but does not share it with other countries!).

Why is America losing and China winning most of their confrontations? Guo Wengui, a Chinese billionaire who fled into exile in 2016 and who knows very well the communist system, believes that America is losing the battle because Western culture is based on moral values, while communism is based on a false utopia; Western culture is built on the morality of right and wrong while the communists culture turns truth and lies into exactly the same thing.

If domestically, China could legitimately claim obvious achievements, internationally and inter-ethnically Beijing sticks cautiously to its so-called ‘civilized and non-imperialistic’ policies. The concentrations camps of Sinkiang are never mentioned; the persecution of Christians and of other religions is taboo; and the military build-up in the South China Sea is officially ignored. Hong Kong and its current problems, on the other hand, are also rarely mentioned. As for Taiwan, considered an indivisible part of China, any American interference in the area will be a *casus belli*. And with regard to Tibet, Liu Mingfu, the author of *The China Dream*, lets a 21 years old Chinese answer the issue: “Tibet was, is, and always will be a part of China... If Westerners pack up and leave from the Americas, the Pacific, Africa and Asia, and return to Europe, China will leave Tibet”<sup>24</sup>.

From a military point of view, Gertz claims that we are in the middle of a cyber war and are unaware of what is going on. Behind the façade of economic development, the Chinese build incessantly their military forces. With a smile of benevolence on their faces, the Chinese leaders are conquering the world and the West is sleeping, the author writes. A good part of Gertz’s book, *Deceiving the Sky*, is dedicated to the Chinese efforts to control the outer space, to satellite capabilities, cyberspace espionage, and star war style applications. The details are overwhelming and the reader realizes how dangerous the current global competition is. According to experts, a future military confrontation between the United States and China will be determined by who is first to develop the most sophisticated artificial intelligence military capabilities<sup>25</sup>. In his opinion, space will be the main battleground of the future and China is developing fast. The

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 132.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 80-83.

<sup>24</sup> Liu Mingfu, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>25</sup> Bill Gertz, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

Chinese have pretty much closed the gap with America and the future is murky. Will reason and common sense prevail, or we are destined to collide?

Bill Gertz ends his book with several recommendations, but are they feasible? He rightfully emphasizes the shortcomings of the Chinese model, but fails to see the shortcomings of capitalism in the era of globalization. For example, he only finds in America a 'seeming loss of moral clarity' and socio-political polarization, but he does not elaborate. He convinces the reader that China's aggressive policy threatens America and the present world order. Specifically, Gertz stresses that China has no intention to join the current world arrangements, which in his opinion, are based on nations that value "individual liberty, democracy-based rule of law and free-market capitalism"<sup>26</sup>. He assumes automatically that the Western system is superior. It may be so, but he does not manage to make the point.

### *Conclusions*

China is already a superpower. From an economic point of view, it is now second only to the United States and it keeps developing. Militarily, it has just launched its second carrier and a third one is in the making. A series of modern destroyers are also in the making. Its Asian neighbours are apprehensive. Does China, like other great nations, have a sense of global mission?

According to Xi Jinping the Chinese goal is to rejuvenate the nation. And he further implied that China is destined to become again a great power and to bring communism as a new world order to oppose current globalization. By contrast, America's sense of mission, as allegedly ordained by God, is to bring justice and democracy to mankind. Is there enough room at the top of the world for the two visions? Can America share the world-stage with China still making room for other evolving countries to challenge the *status quo*? There is no easy answer, but there are lessons to learn from the evolution of Sino-American relations. First and most important: never say never to change. The world is in a perpetual state of change and mankind should expect unpredictable developments and events.

As for the future, nobody can predict it. History is not linear or a simple extrapolation of the present. Henry Kissinger, historian and former statesman, once confessed that when he was young, he wanted to find the meaning of history. Later, at an old age, he admitted that the meaning of history was yet to be found. History and the future can take any paths and can surprise everyone. No wonder, current U.S. attitudes toward China are ambiguous. For America China is an important trade partner, but some critics claim that it is self-deception to consider Beijing a trustworthy partner. And some hawkish critics even urge Washington to confront China now from a position of strength rather than in the future when Beijing will be capable of challenging American supremacy.

From America to Russia and from Europe to China, the world is confronted with an alarming array of problems and challenges. We are in the middle of a

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 212.

radical transition and are knocking at the door of the unknown. Yet, while moving into the space age, we are still faced with the same age-old human nature: political bickering, economic interests and geopolitical claims in many sensitive areas of the globe. What we need the most these days is honest and competent leaders capable of wrestling with politics as well as with moral issues. Otherwise, we will not make it into the next stage of human civilization. And the time of reckoning is fast approaching!

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