

Book Review

Kishore Mahbubani: Has China won?

by Pascal Boniface, geopolitologist, Director of The French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs IRIS



Pascal Boniface. (Picture pascalboniface.com)

Kishore Mahbubani is Singaporean. But unlike the vast majority of his compatriots, he is not of Chinese origin. He is Sindhi Hindu, a Hindu population originally from Pakistan. In 1947, his parents fled the persecutions that accompanied the partition between India and Pakistan to take refuge

in Singapore, where he was born in 1948. He was a diplomat, notably at the United Nations. He is now a professor at the University. He is one of the most influential commentators on international life.

In his book *"Has China Won?"* Kishore Mahbubani tells us that in the competition between China and the United States- although the United States is always in the lead - China scores more points because it makes fewer mistakes than its rival across the Pacific. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union managed to achieve, at best, 40% of the GDP of the United States. Today China is already at 60% and the gap is closing steadily.

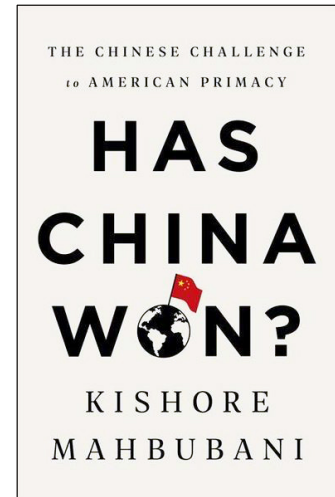
For Kishore Mahbubani, China's main mistake is to close its market and not really apply the rules of international trade. Since joining the WTO in 2001, China has increased its GDP tenfold. It can therefore no longer claim the protection similar to that of a developing country that it enjoyed when it joined. According to Kishore Mahbubani, the exercise of non-tariff barriers and failure to respect intellectual property also deprives China of support abroad. Finally, he notes that China should not underestimate the United States, which is always capable of rebounding.

However, the United States itself makes many mistakes, according to Mahbubani. For the Singaporean author, they should arbitrate between the desire to make life easier for the 330 million Americans and the desire to maintain world supremacy. These two objectives are, in his view, incompatible because it leads Wash-

ington to increase its military spending exponentially while China does not fall into this trap. China has indeed understood that the Soviet Union imploded by wanting to follow the United States and does not want to make that mistake. The constant increase in US military

spending is a mistake because, according to Kishore Mahbubani, it is not by military means that the rivalry between Beijing and Washington will be resolved. A war would lead to the mutual destruction of both countries. It is therefore through diplomatic means that the conflict will find a solution. Therefore, what is the point of the United States having several thousand nuclear weapons? The few hundred that China possesses are enough to deter the United States. An American aircraft carrier costs \$13 billion. The former Singaporean diplomat points out that for a few hundred thousand dollars, the Chinese DF-26 middle-range missile can destroy it.

Kishore Mahbubani is also very critical of the American diplomatic system. Since it is at the diplomatic level that the competition is decided, the fact of hiring in the most important American embassies "friends of the power", who have contributed financially to the election campaign, deprives the talents of American diplomacy of key positions. The future prospects are bleak for American diplomats who can only dream of secondary positions while "friends of the power" are appointed to the most prestigious posts. In the end, American diplomacy suffers from this system. Kishore Mahbubani believes that by focusing everything on the military criterion, the United States is now behaving like the Soviet Union during the Cold War and, by wearing itself out. Thus China is given a competitive advantage, which, for its part, is behaving like the United States during the Cold War.



The same is true at the diplomatic level. Chinese policy relies on international institutions whereas Trump wants to destroy them. According to Kishore Mahbubani, China has a majority in the United Nations General Assembly while the United States is now much more isolated.

Certainly there is the democratic argument. The United States is a democracy and China is not. Again, Kishore Mahbubani meets this argument with the typical arguments of a non-western. He first points out that while the Chinese population is four times larger than the American population, there are 2,200,000 prisoners in the United States while there are only 1,600,000 in China. He also notes that if there were a democracy in China, the people would elect an aggressive leader like *Trump* instead of a democratic leader like Obama.

His most fundamental criticism of American democracy concerns the methods of financing. The author explains that the United States has an anti-corruption law for foreigners, the *Foreign Corrupt Practices Act*. This law stipulates that if money is paid to foreign decision-makers to influence their decisions, heavy penalties are imposed. He explains that in reality, since the end of the campaign spending limits decided by the Supreme Court in 2010, the United States is allowing themselves what is prohibited abroad. Finally all donations, made by donors, come to influence political decisions and the great influence of money limits American democracy.

Always somewhat provocative, Kishore Mahbubani asserts that China is not expansionist. When England conquered Australia, it was at sea for 90 days. China was only 30 days away and yet China did not try to conquer Australian land. Furthermore, he points out that China will obvi-

ously never give back Tibet and Xinjiang, but neither will the United States give back Texas and California. In fact, the CCP is rooted in Chinese civilization more than in Marxism-Leninism. And in the last 2,000 years, the Chinese have never been happier than during the last 30 years.

The Singaporean scholar quotes *Kissinger* who points out that the Chinese prefer to play Go where you have to surround an opponent patiently, whereas Westerners prefer to play chess where you have to conquer the king as quickly as possible.

Finally, the major problem is that the only element of consensus in the United States is the opposition to the yellow peril. *Joe Biden* and *Donald Trump* agree on this, and even *George Soros*, who has heavily financed campaigns to try to prevent the election of Donald Trump, approves of his anti-Chinese policy. This consensus in the United States about fighting China's rise to power seems extremely dangerous to Kishore Mahbubani, who believes that Americans would do better to seek to maintain the standard of living and well-being of their people rather than fight for that supremacy. He believes that never in China's two-thousand-year history have the Chinese been happier and, he says, never freer. After all, they enjoy a certain amount of freedom, for example, they can travel abroad. Of course, they give priority to the fight against chaos. In China, order and security take precedence over freedom as it is understood in the Western world.

A very stimulating book, which feeds the debate by the originality and strength of its arguments.

Source: <http://www.pascalboniface.com/2020/05/20/kishore-mahbubani-la-chine-a-gagne/>

(Translation Swiss Standpoint)