

**FOREIGN
AFFAIRS**

Published by the Council on Foreign Relations

Published on *Foreign Affairs* (<http://www.foreignaffairs.com>)[Home](#) >

Understanding China

September/October 2005

Kishore Mahbubani

*KISHORE MAHBUBANI is Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore. This essay is adapted from his book *Beyond the Age of Innocence: Rebuilding Trust Between America and the World*.*

THE WAKING DRAGON

China today is like a dragon that, waking up after centuries of slumber, suddenly realizes many nations have been trampling on its tail. With all that has happened to it over the past 200 years, China could be forgiven for awakening as an angry nation, and yet Beijing has declared that it will rise peacefully. This good disposition stems partly from China's awareness that it is relatively weak. But it is also a sign that Beijing has endorsed the vision of progress that the United States has extolled since World War II. States no longer need to pursue military conquest to prosper, the theory goes; trade and economic integration pave a surer path to growth. And Beijing has noted how much adhering to this philosophy helped Japan and Germany emerge from the ruins of World War II.

As the main architect of the world order today, the United States should be among the first to celebrate China's progress. For if Beijing continues to abide by Washington's rules, peace and stability could reign, and the United States, as both a society and an economy, could benefit a great deal from the renaissance of Chinese civilization. Curiously, however, the United States is doing more to destabilize China than any other power. And no one in Washington seems to be proposing, much less pursuing, a comprehensive new strategy for U.S.-Chinese relations. The working assumption appears to be that with a little tinkering here and there, the relationship will stay firmly on track. In fact, however, nagging suspicions and mutual misunderstandings are already threatening to derail it.

Copyright © 2002-2009 by the Council on Foreign Relations, Inc.
All rights reserved.

Source URL: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/61020/kishore-mahbubani/understanding-china>