

## Book Review

Questioning the Narrative: A Review of the book *China Rising: USA and West Responses: A Critical Review Essay* (in Chinese), by Teck-Ghee Lim. Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (SIRD), 2026, 195 pp. ISBN: 9786297575605.

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Dr. Lim Teck Ghee's *China Rising: USA and West Responses* is a timely and substantial contribution to contemporary debates on China's emergence as a global power and the increasingly adversarial reactions it has provoked from the United States and its Western allies. Comprising 58 essays originally published in the Chinese-language daily *Oriental Daily* (《东方日报》) from 2020 onwards, the volume chronicles a period of rapid deterioration in China–West relations—from the COVID-19 pandemic to new tariff wars, technological rivalry, and rising geopolitical tensions over Taiwan and the Asia-Pacific. It is, in the author's own words, an attempt to “strip away the ideological baggage” from Western portrayals of China and to offer readers an alternative lens through which to understand one of the defining geopolitical contests of our time.

This is not a conventional academic monograph. It is a compilation of interventions written in real time by a seasoned public intellectual responding to unfolding world events. In this respect, its value lies partly in its immediacy. Read sequentially, the essays form an intellectual diary of one of the most turbulent periods in recent international relations. They document not only events themselves but also the narratives, distortions, and ideological contestations surrounding them.

To engage seriously with this book is also to confront a deeper and more unsettling question: why does a writer working from Kuala Lumpur, for a Malaysian Chinese readership, arrive at such consistently different conclusions from those of the journalists and editors of the world's leading Western press? The answer tells us as much about the nature of Western media and its assumptions as it does about China.

## A Corrective Intervention

The central concern of the book is clear: the transformation of Western discourse on China. Lim argues that as China has risen economically, technologically, and militarily, it has increasingly been reframed in Western political and media narratives—from “partner” or “competitor” into a “systemic threat” or even a “civilisational enemy”. In essay after essay, he challenges the assumptions underlying this transformation and asks readers to interrogate whether such portrayals are fair, accurate, or politically motivated.

The preface is unusually candid about this corrective purpose. Lim states openly that Western media systematically frames China as an “existential threat”, and that his goal is to provide readers with “unfiltered and critical information” capable of producing a more nuanced perspective. This is not journalism pretending to neutrality; it is explicitly remedial scholarship. Some readers may find this forthrightness refreshing; others may argue that it limits analytical detachment. Yet there is intellectual honesty in naming one’s corrective purpose—something often absent from Western outlets that routinely present geopolitical framings as simply “the news”.

Among the book’s strengths is the breadth of topics covered. Lim moves across politics, economics, diplomacy, media, technology, and culture with ease. Essays on the politicisation of COVID-19 are particularly effective. He traces, with meticulous documentary care, how initial Western praise for China’s stringent pandemic control measures shifted rapidly into blame and accusation once the virus spread globally and domestic political pressures mounted in Western capitals. He cites *Politico*’s compilation of Donald Trump’s 15 separate public commendations of China’s pandemic response—commendations that vanished almost overnight once Trump’s electoral calculations changed. This kind of forensic attention to the gap between official rhetoric and documented behaviour is one of the book’s most valuable features.

His analyses of the diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics, the Peng Shuai controversy, and Western reporting on Xinjiang similarly demonstrate how isolated incidents can become embedded within a larger anti-China narrative—each event stripped of local complexity and subsumed into a pre-existing geopolitical storyline.

The chapters dealing with strategic and economic rivalry are equally notable. Essays on BRICS expansion, the electric vehicle “war”, rare earth trade, and artificial intelligence situate China’s rise within a broader structural challenge to Western economic dominance. Lim’s recurring argument—that economic competition is frequently clothed in ideological language—repays careful consideration, whether or not one shares his conclusions.

## Writing from the Margins of the Western Consensus

To understand why Lim’s conclusions diverge so sharply from those of the mainstream Western press, it is necessary to attend to the conditions from which he writes. Major Western newspapers

and broadcasters largely operate within a geopolitical editorial consensus—one that treats USA primacy as legitimate and China’s rise as a threat to be managed. For journalists embedded in that consensus, it often functions not as an assumption but as an invisible background reality. Lim, writing from Malaysia, treats that consensus itself as an object of analysis.

This positional difference matters enormously. Southeast Asia has a fundamentally different historical relationship with both China and the West. Unlike Western journalists, Lim does not inhabit an intellectual tradition shaped by Cold War alliance politics, NATO frameworks, or Anglo-American liberal triumphalism. The West’s “civilisational threat” framing of China carries a very different resonance in societies shaped by Western colonialism and by long-standing commercial and cultural ties with China.

Lim’s audience also matters. Malaysian Chinese readers of *Oriental Daily* have different concerns from readers of *The New York Times* or *The Guardian*. Their economies are deeply intertwined with China. Their security environments are increasingly shaped by American strategic pressure. ASEAN’s long-standing practice of hedging between great powers is not timidity but strategic prudence. Lim’s essays on ASEAN’s balancing act and on the dangers of militarisation in the Asia-Pacific are among the most thoughtful in the volume, precisely because they are written from within the region rather than from a metropolitan distance.

There is also the matter of professional formation. Lim is not a conventional journalist by training, nor merely a newspaper columnist reacting to events. He is a scholar-practitioner whose distinguished career spans academia, international development institutions, and civil society. As a former professor, Senior Social Scientist at the World Bank, and adviser to the United Nations and regional governments, he brings to these essays decades of experience in development economics, governance, and international policy. This breadth of experience makes him a more formidable commentator than many professional journalists, whose work is often constrained by editorial convention, institutional assumptions, or the pressures of the news cycle. Lim approaches each article with a researcher’s instinct: to question sources, trace institutional interests, and distinguish evidence from assertion.

This leads him to ask questions that are structurally harder to raise from inside Western media institutions: who funds the think tanks producing anti-China reports? What political interests does the “China threat” narrative serve? What is the relationship between media ownership and editorial line? His comparative perspective is reflected in the range of his references and the confidence—sometimes the impatience—of his judgements.

Particularly valuable in this regard is his structural critique of Western media itself. He interrogates not merely what Western outlets say about China, but why they say it. Whether one accepts all his specific claims or not, the methodological point is sound: narratives do not emerge

from nowhere, and critical readers are entitled to ask about the institutional conditions of their production.

### **Strengths, Limitations, and the Question of Balance**

As a compilation of weekly newspaper columns, repetition is inevitable. Certain themes recur frequently: Western hypocrisy, anti-China propaganda, and the dangers of ideological confrontation. While these reinforce the book's central thesis, some readers may feel that certain arguments could have been consolidated or developed more systematically.

A further limitation lies in the book's occasional tendency toward overgeneralisation. "The West" is sometimes treated as a coherent actor, whereas significant differences exist between the USA, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and others in their approaches to China. Germany's economic entanglement with China, France's intermittent calls for "strategic autonomy", and more cautious voices within American policy circles complicate the picture.

It should also be noted that the book engages less fully with some legitimate concerns regarding China's own internal contradictions and policy shortcomings. Acknowledging Western double standards does not by itself resolve these underlying issues. The strongest version of Lim's argument would be one that holds these concerns in view while still challenging the instrumentalisation of human rights discourse for geopolitical ends.

Yet these limitations should not obscure the importance of the work. The book's contribution is not to replace one simplification with another, but to insist that the dominant Western narrative is itself constructed, interested, and partial.

### **A Necessary Counter-Voice**

At its best, *China Rising* performs a valuable function. It reminds readers that narratives are shaped by power, interests, and ideology. It asks us to question who frames global events, whose voices dominate international discourse, and whose perspectives are marginalised. In this sense, the book implicitly invites a Socratic mode of inquiry: to interrogate assumptions before accepting conclusions.

The book arrives at a moment when the stakes of such critical thinking are unusually high. As trade wars intensify, as military confrontation over Taiwan is openly discussed, and as technological decoupling accelerates, the quality of public understanding matters more than ever. A book that asks "who benefits from this narrative?" and "what are the alternatives?" performs not merely an academic function but a civic one.

For scholars and students of China studies, international relations, media studies, and Southeast Asian politics, this volume offers a valuable archive of commentary from the Global South during a critical historical juncture. For general readers, it provides an accessible and provocative entry point

into understanding how China's rise is perceived—and contested—in our time.

### **Conclusion**

Dr. Lim Teck Ghee has produced a book that is timely, courageous, and important. His markedly different approach from mainstream Western commentary on USA–China relations is not a puzzle requiring apology. It is the product of a distinct intellectual tradition, a different positional vantage point, an explicitly corrective scholarly purpose, and decades of experience in development policy and international affairs.

Whether readers agree with all his conclusions is beside the point. A worthwhile book sharpens inquiry and provokes reflection. *China Rising* does both. It makes a compelling case that the dominant Western framing of China is not a neutral description of reality but a politically constructed narrative—and that recognising this may be the first step toward a more stable and equitable world order.

In an era when the costs of geopolitical miscalculation may be incalculable, that is no minor contribution. It is an essential one.

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