

A complex dream

Niv Horesh says to know the Chinese psyche, the West should read a bestseller by a retired PLA colonel

The English translation of *The China Dream* was published in the United States this summer. The bestselling book, the work of retired PLA colonel Liu Mingfu, sets out how China can usurp the United States as the No 1 nation.

Much of the Western media and many China watchers have been quick to dismiss Liu as a typically loose-lipped People's Liberation Army commissar: triumphalist, anti-American, hawkish and conspiracy-obsessed. But while there are flaws in Liu's overarching arguments, a more complex picture lies behind the bluster.

Although the approach of China's foreign-policy establishment is cagier than Liu's provocative style, China has adopted a much bolder and more assertive posture on the world stage under President Xi Jinping (习近平). Liu's hugely popular book both reflects and shapes public opinion in China – and Chinese public opinion is, in turn, exerting a rising influence on foreign policy, as China scholar James Reilly explains in his book *Strong Society, Smart State*.

So when the West brushes aside a book like *The China Dream*, it is spurning the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the

Chinese view of the Western world – and why China is confident that it can indeed supplant the US.

It is also missing the point that many others share Liu's ideas, from Chinese thinkers on international relations to the general public. His views do not represent just PLA old-timers but a broad cross-section of China's younger, more confident intelligentsia, for example, voices like that of outspoken Shanghai venture capitalist Eric X. Li. One key criticism of Liu is that he prefers to gloss over the horrors of the Mao era in constructing a bold narrative of national revival, but in that sense he is no different to many ordinary Chinese.

The China Dream, then, is a revealing window into the Chinese psyche. Liu's position is often cast in the West as overtly militaristic. But it is more nuanced than that. His militaristic streak is a counterweight to what he sees as China's excessive passivism through its over-reliance on a Confucian "scholarly-civilian" ethos. This is an idea shared by Tiananmen democracy movement veteran Jiang Rong in his novel *Wolf Totem*. Liu is not calling for military power alone – but for the right balance between military and economic power.

Underlying Liu's narrative is a frustration often expressed in private by many Chinese: China is big

and populous, has an illustrious history and stellar reform achievements. Yet, it is still punching well below its weight on the world stage from sports through to science, cultural clout and military might.

Liu's understanding of the US is not free of wishful thinking, but he knows the country's history, strengths and weaknesses quite well. Far from simplistically tarring all facets of American life – in the style of *China Can Say No*, an influential collection of overtly anti-American essays – Liu has considerable praise for elements of the American system. He heaps superlatives on the Clinton presidency; he favourably compares the stability of post-civil-war America with revolutions across Europe; he says the US is a relatively benign imperialistic power compared to European states; he praises Abraham Lincoln for abolishing slavery.

He also observes that, in the US, organised faith tempers heady capitalism and individualism, hinting at his displeasure at the growing inequalities within Chinese society. To him, that most Chinese are mildly secular leaves a vacuum that needs to be filled.

Contrary to how Liu is often depicted in the West, he is extremely wary of overt Chinese triumphalism. He counsels China to have patience in dealing with the US.

While America's ultimate decline may be inevitable, it will be a long process and penning obituaries this decade is premature.

The best way forward for China, in his view, is to fight complacency. Chinese leaders should continue to be haunted by paranoia, Liu hints, and embrace a crisis mentality as drivers of self-improvement.



Its appeal reflects a shrinking knowledge gap between China and the West

Granted, Liu repeatedly calls for China to increase its military budget. But he emphasises throughout the book that this should be used as a deterrent only. His point is that for China to deter the US from all-out war, it would need a stronger army.

Liu argues that a Sino-American showdown is inevitable in the long run, despite economic and other geostrategic complementarities. He predicts China will eventually win the hearts and minds of

people around the world because China does not seek to shape the world in its own image. This makes it more difficult for the US to demonise China than it was for it to demonise the now-defunct USSR.

Judged by the popularity of Liu's book, this is a narrative that many Chinese people are buying into. And its appeal to the wider public is reflective of a rapidly shrinking knowledge gap between China and the West, as millions of Chinese tourists and students travel and study overseas.

In the 1990s, renowned American scholar David Shambaugh could confidently state: "Chinese understanding of the United States remains shallow and seriously distorted." This is no longer the case. It is fair to say that most Beijing or Shanghai taxi drivers know a lot more about the US than most American cab drivers know about China.

In short, Western strategists should look again at Liu's *The China Dream*. Far from being the musings of a xenophobic crackpot hell-bent on world domination, it contains messages the US and its Western allies should heed, as it attempts to understand the global implications of China's rise – and its ambitions for the future.

Niv Horesh is professor of the modern history of China and director of the China Policy Institute, University of Nottingham

Can-do Hong Kong finds its wings clipped

Mike Rowse says new business ideas across different sectors are now routinely rejected in the 'world's freest economy', and our myopic government is to blame

Touring a city while seated on the upper deck of an open-top bus sounds a bit fuddy-duddy, but is actually quite a good way of getting an overview of a destination's major attractions. While thus engaged this summer in London, Washington and New York on vehicles owned by one particular operator, I naturally cast my mind back to when the same company sought to open shop in Hong Kong a decade or so ago.

The initial reaction of our transport authorities was interesting: you can't have such an operation here, you need a licence and we don't issue licences for such a purpose, our streets are very crowded etc. Sound familiar?

After many months of badgering, and with the support of my old department InvestHK, eventually there was a change of heart and some licences were duly issued to our client, the Big Bus Company. Hong Kong thus escaped the ignominy of being the only major tourist destination not to permit such an operation.

Which brings us to the case of Uber. I will not dwell long here because the subject has already been covered by just about every other columnist and there has been overwhelming public support for the American company, notwithstanding its typically brash ways. Uber built a better product and local consumers voted with their feet, and their wallets.

But while Singapore was examining its licence regime to see what changes were needed so that consumers there could enjoy the service, the authorities here were busy organising raids on the company's office, arresting staff and some participating drivers. To hell with what the customer wants, they seem to be saying, we must protect the interests of taxi licence holders.

It is not only in land transport matters that Hong Kong has been slow to welcome new products and services. Take the case of Jetstar Hong Kong, recently refused a licence to operate by the Air Transport Licensing Authority.



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Now, parent Jetstar is clearly an Australian airline; it is the low-cost-carrier operating arm of Qantas. But the company had the idea of setting up baby Jetstars around the region together with local partners. These babies would run their own operations but would join together with each other and the parent to achieve economies of scale in various aspects of operations and secure savings in such things as aircraft purchase. Thus there is a Jetstar Asia operating in Singapore, Jetstar Japan operating from Tokyo, and Jetstar Pacific operating from Vietnam. As a result, there has been an explosion in the range of choices available to consumers in these places. The percentage of passengers using low-cost carriers in Singapore has soared to over 25 per cent of the market. In Hong Kong, we are still in the low single digits.

Naturally, the incumbent operators here objected to Jetstar Hong Kong's licence application, arguing that our city was not its "principal place of business" (a requirement of the Basic Law). Incredibly, in defiance of all common sense and the facts on the table, the Air Transport Licensing Authority swallowed this argument, notwithstanding the fact that Hong Kong is Jetstar Hong Kong's only place of business. Once again, the forces of inertia have proved triumphant.

I do not want to unfairly single out transport. The same mindset affects other policy areas too, such as parcel delivery (the DHL case in the 1970s) and, more recently, television – just ask Ricky Wong Wai-kay.

For many years, bodies like the Heritage Foundation and Fraser Institute have rated Hong Kong as the world's freest economy, a title our leaders naturally are happy to brag about. One day, the foundation will recover from its myopia and we are going to lose that title. The slight damage to our reputation is one thing; the damage to our economic development if we continue to resist new ideas is far more serious.

Mike Rowse is the CEO of Treloar Enterprises and an adjunct professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He was a paid consultant to Jetstar Hong Kong. mike@rowse.com.hk



In Singapore, budget airlines account for more than 25 per cent of the market. Photo: Reuters

The war may have ended in Asia, but the fight goes on

Alice Wu says without an attempt to heal the wounds of the second world war, with all sides agreeing on closure, history will remain the key battleground in the search for meaning

This Thursday, we get an extra day off to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of the second world war. As world leaders are stressing – more like contorting – themselves over where, how and with whom they're going to do their commemorating, most of us are contemplating what to do with an extra holiday.

What is the meaning of commemorating the 70th anniversary of the end of the war – as our country calls it, the end of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression – if not to remember how power can corrupt, and to what depths, and how easily, humanity can fall into the darkness of hell?

We are also marking the day to remember those who lost their lives, and to be able to say "never again". We commemorate the day because we do not want history to repeat itself.

History is a curious thing, especially in this part of the world. It's not just the right-wing Japanese politicians who have serious hang-ups over it. For a long time after the war, Chinese "comfort women", a euphemism for women forced into sexual slavery during the war by the

Japanese invaders, were considered shameful. Researchers have found rape victims who suffered further abuse as stigmatised "collaborators" of the enemy.

So when we say "never again", what is it we don't want to see repeating?

There are those who seem to have gone stark raving mad, like the former president of Taiwan, the "father of Taiwanese democracy" Iwasato Masao – otherwise known as Lee Teng-hui. Lee, who grew up under colonial rule in Taiwan, called Japan Taiwan's "motherland" in an interview this month that outraged many people. Even though Taiwan was Japan's colony then, "motherland" is truly a bit of a stretch.

Lee, or Iwasato, grew up at a time when many parents chose to take Japanese names for their families to improve their social and economic conditions.

His recent comments were a reminder that cultural indoctrination can produce total freak shows. Imagine the childhood trauma this man and many like him suffered. Iwasato not only once worshipped Hirohito as his "personal god", as many Taiwanese students at that time had to do, he also

volunteered to fight for the Imperial Japanese Army.

After the end of the war, he briefly joined the Chinese Communist Party twice – out of hatred for the Kuomintang, he later claimed – and became a born-again Christian. Then his hatred for the KMT apparently subsided, for he joined the party in 1971 and steadily rose through its ranks until he became its chairman in the late 1980s. Then he turned against the KMT.

Iwasato/Lee is clearly a deeply conflicted man who is torn about his own identity.

He is also a byproduct of the very circumstances we want to avert when we say "never again". He symbolises the very reason for not only why the world must not go down the path of war again, but also why, as we commemorate the end of the most devastating conflict the world has suffered, we must strive to come to a consensus on what actually happened. Without it, there will be more Iwasato/Lees who stand ready to reopen old wounds, to feast again and again on conflict.

Commemoration is a process of healing, and, ultimately, a way for the world to move forward. If we consider how much arguing occurs every year at this time, over the same things, we know that we have made little progress in the past 70 years, at least when it comes to the war on the Asian front.

Alice Wu is a political consultant and a former associate director of the Asia Pacific Media Network at UCLA

The power of free play

Shimi Kang says the 21st-century skills children need to innovate and collaborate are developed in play – not through a regime of classes and drills

Did I hear that right? Kids need to be happy. Creative. Have soft skills. All this from the original, iron-fisted "all work, no play" Tiger Mum, Amy Chua, during her recent media tour for a newly opened tuition centre in Singapore.

What would make tiger parents pivot so strongly towards dolphin qualities of happiness, critical thinking, innovation and social skills? Maybe it's reality – 21st-century reality.

To do well in today's fast-paced, highly social, ultracompetitive and globally connected world, Tiger parents have finally realised our children need 21st-century skills. Four essential skills – creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration – were determined by the Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills, an international team of 250 researchers.

This set of core skills can be referred to as the consciousness quotient, or CQ. IQ (intelligence quotient) represents raw intellectual ability, and EQ (emotional quotient), emotional intelligence. For success today, our children will need an integration of both – CQ.

Luckily, this skill set does not require expensive tutoring and enrolment in exclusive schools. In addition, it cannot be drilled into a child in their teens; it flourishes from a foundation in childhood, one that includes the very things tiger mums hate – collaborative problem-solving, individual

autonomy, freedom to explore and make mistakes, and play. Yes, playing – not studying, practising, tutoring or drilling.

For people of every age, play is directly linked to the development of the brain's prefrontal cortex – the region responsible for discriminating relevant from irrelevant information, goal direction, abstract concepts, decision-making, organising our feelings, delaying gratification, critical thinking, and planning for the future. The prefrontal cortex directs our highest levels of thinking and functioning.

Because play allows us to imagine, communicate, solve problems, experiment, collaborate, try and fail, and create, it helps children survive and thrive in our rapidly changing world. Play provides children with the cognitive framework and flexible thinking needed to adapt to any situation.

Powerful examples include having a play date, going on a sleepover and being in a school play – exactly the things Chua explicitly forbade her children to do. If you want your children to be intelligent, develop emotional regulation, be innovative, work in a team and have great people skills, then let them play. Just don't "tell" them to play, book a play activity, or pay someone to instruct them to play. There's a big difference.

Dr Shimi Kang is a Harvard-trained psychiatrist, award-winning researcher, speaker, and author