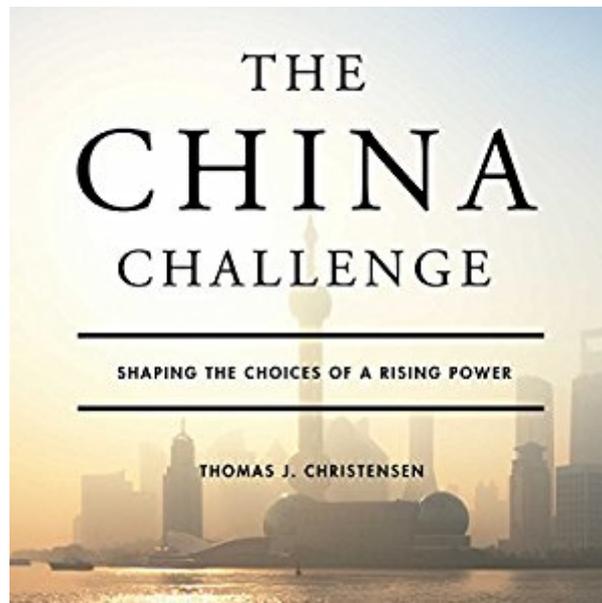


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# The China Challenge: Shaping The Choices Of A Rising Power



## Synopsis

Many see China's rise as a threat to US leadership in Asia and beyond. Thomas J. Christensen argues instead that the real challenge lies in dissuading China from regional aggression while eliciting its global cooperation. Drawing on decades of scholarship and experience as a senior diplomat, Christensen offers a deep perspective on China's military and economic capacity. Assessing China's political outlook and strategic goals, Christensen shows how nationalism and the threat of domestic instability influence the party's decisions about regional and global affairs. If China obstructs international efforts to confront nuclear proliferation, civil conflicts, financial instability, and climate change, those efforts will likely fail; but if China merely declines to support such efforts, the problems will grow vastly more complicated. Articulating a balanced strategic approach along with perceptive historical analysis, Christensen describes how we might shape China's choices in the coming decades so that it contributes more to the international system from which it benefits so much.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

You need to read this book to gain the insider perspective that other authors cannot provide. Christensen has written a thoughtful and enlightening book on China and its future prospects based on his decades of experience and research in and about China. As a scholar of China and international relations, he offers a unique perspective that have aided, and continue to aid policymakers and politicians in guiding the evolution of US-China relations. Chapter 5 on global

governance is particularly helpful in understanding the challenge that China poses to global governance and the international community. A second point that must be made: the knowledge he possesses about China cannot be overemphasized. He has studied its political structure and leadership for decades. He has spent, cumulatively, years in China researching and interviewing politicians and IR experts. He speaks and writes Chinese fluently. Combined with his training in international relations theory, he is one of a few scholars that can qualitatively examine US-China relations and assist in its development. What Christensen can offer is an invaluable insider perspective due to three things: decades of exhaustive research, which includes one-on-one interviews with Chinese government officials and scholars; his language ability, which allows him to conduct personal interviews without the intrusion of an interpreter; and his years as a US government official and now an adviser to the State Department. In examining US-China relations, there is a lot of interpretation of bare facts without context. Yes, China's military is growing. But it's not aimed at the US because they know, better than we do, the costs of competing militarily with the United States.

Thomas Christensen explores how the United States should manage China's rise in the areas of security and international governance since the end of the Cold War. Mr. Christensen suggests that the United States strike the best possible balance between two seemingly contradictory attitudes towards the return of China to greatness. The United States needs a strong military and economic presence in East Asia while adopting a consistent diplomatic posture that invites China to participate in regional and global governance. Without this strong and consistent demeanor in East Asia, China could be more tempted to settle its (territorial) differences with its East Asian neighbors through coercion, or to encourage its allies to act similarly. The use of coercion by China to settle these differences would lead to the outcome that Chinese strategists fear the most: the encirclement of China by an alliance of its East Asian neighbors led by a hostile United States bent on restoring at a minimum the status quo ante. The author correctly labels American rhetorical flourish like the "Asia pivot" as unhelpful and misleading, feeding the paranoia of some Chinese nationalists that the United States has only one paramount objective: keep China down. This zero-sum game mentality will further encourage China to under-invest in regional and global governance and to free ride on the coattails of the United States, the founder and driver of a mostly benevolent and beneficial international world order since 1945. To encourage China to contribute its fair share to regional and global governance is more difficult to solve than the above-mentioned security challenge for three reasons.

When it comes to the vital issue of U.S.-China relations, rigorous, readable scholarship is in regrettably short supply. Even amid the current profusion of books on the subject, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* by Princeton University professor Thomas Christensen represents a uniquely powerful contribution. Given the difficulties inherent in its weighty subject, the volume should long command an important place in your bookshelf or on your desk. Most importantly, it offers Christensen's unique perspective as a leading scholar on the topic who has also served as a high-level diplomat (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs with responsibility for China, Taiwan, and Mongolia). Christensen writes clearly and memorably. He deploys wide-ranging but carefully distilled data and citations to support his points. He shares vivid personal recollections (my own favorite: literally dropping his coffee upon reading news that China voted for UN Security Council Resolution 1970, referring Qaddafi's government to the International Criminal Court). He reflects deeply, and draws connections that are both gripping and relevant. Sharp, precise graphics illustrate key concepts. The result: a remarkably accessible yet sophisticated book--the thinking person's guide to understanding and managing Sino-American relations. In sum, *The China Challenge* offers: A compelling case that today's international system allows the United States and China to coexist peacefully and further common interests and responsibilities, even as they continue to compete in specific areas.

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