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**Book Review**

## Book Review: China modernizes: Threat to the West or Model for the Rest?

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**Randall Peerenboom (2008):**

**China modernizes: Threat to the West or Model for the Rest?**

Oxford University Press, Oxford, 406 pages

ISBN10: 0199226121, ISBN13: 9780199226122; EUR 13.00 (paperback)

Today there are two sharply contrasting views of China: On the one side China is seen as a rising superpower predicted to be the largest economy in the world by the mid of this century. On the other side China is viewed as an anachronistic authoritarian regime, which poses a threat to geo-stability and to the economies of the industrial world. RANDALL PEERENBOOM analyzes these two opposing views by exploring China's economy, political and legal system, and its record on political and personal rights in the context of the developing world. While China performs well compared to the peer group of middle-income countries it cannot meet the standards set by industrialised countries.

The author, RANDALL PEERENBOOM, is the Director of the Oxford Foundation of Law, Justice and Society's China Rule of Law Programme, Associate Fellow of the Oxford University Centre for Socio-Legal studies, and Professor of Law at La Trobe University in Melbourne. He has been a consultant to the Asian Development Bank on legal reforms and the rule of law in China and currently works for one of China's leading foreign investment firms.

PEERENBOOM clearly states the objectives of the book: to analyse the road China is following and situate China's quest or modernization within the general debate about these topics. Both opposing views are analysed: China as threat for the West and as paradigm for developing countries. Therefore, the question is twofold: what on the one side China can learn from other developing countries and on the other side what other developing countries can learn from China.

The author compares China to the East Asian Model. Although there are several dissimilarities, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan share the paradigm of economic growth as a motor for reforms, see an important role for the state and disconfirm the freedom and democracy first approach. PEERENBOOM concludes that China has largely followed the East Asian model and is likely to continue to do so in the future.

The book examines China's performance on a number of rights measures and other indicators of human well being relative to that of other countries. It focuses on China's record on human rights, social and economic rights, law and order and social stability, women's rights, cultural and minority rights and lastly quality of governance. PEERENBOOM also analyses China's relation to democracy. China's leaders and most citizens have concluded that the main issue at their current stage of development is not democracy but stability and economic growth.

Finally, the book gives room for thoughts on the challenges China is facing in replicating the success of other East Asian countries and the utility of the East Asian model for other countries. PEERENBOOM argues in favour of China's model but admits that this model of development does not necessarily work in other countries. The pragmatic and the data-driven way this book is written helps understand China's model of development and its implication. PEERENBOOM does not make any hypothetical assumption that we are all hiding behind a veil of ignorance nor does he ask what would be the best political system if people

were always rational or reasonable, but he relies heavily on empirical studies to aid taking right decisions. These features make this book so special and worth reading.

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