

# Decoding the Dragon's Mindset

Inside China's Destiny and its Hint to the World

By

David W. Wang

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## China's Mindset

### PROBING THE CHINA PUZZLE

Stand in the street of any Chinese city and one will inevitably face the 21st century phenomenon - the vibrating, pulsating and thriving China. The momentum of life that originated 5,000 year ago is steadily gaining speed and accelerates with great confidence into the future. The old Eastern civilization is rising again after a humble tumbling in the past 150 years.

Tons of analysis, books and reports are being produced daily, trying to expand the miraculous rise of China. These analysis, however, are far from providing good clues about the phenomenon. They either solely look back into the history or are too narrow-minded in explaining the Chinese economic and cultural revival today.

Some of the earlier efforts have been trying to focus on ideological and leadership changes. But since nothing dramatic has actually happened in that front, this approach seemingly faced a dead lock for now. Newer approaches apply observations on macro economic factors, such as China's big domestic market, high volume of foreign investment, solid infrastructure, well-educated population, and sufficient but lower-cost human resources.

It's agreed that macro-economic factors are keys for a country's growth and development. But these factors alone seem still not unique or "niche" enough to explain the China phenomenon. It is true that foreign investment is a critical factor contributing to the China phenomena, but the question, "Why China?" still remains. Why has China attracted more foreign investment than most other countries?

There must be some inner factors below the surface activities that are much more worth exploring so we can better understand the rising China and the direction it is heading for. Even a lot of Chinese nationals may not be quite aware the inner factors behind their thinking and actions, instead they may just go with the aptitudes.

But the aptitudes and its inner factors, in my opinion, are really crucial for the world as well as China itself to understand. Seemingly it's not ideology, nor government, nor population, nor lower cost labor, etc. that make the difference. So what is it? What's China's niche? Where shall we look for explanation of the real reasons behind the phenomenal rise of China?

I firmly believe that the real strengths are rooted in the Chinese cultural mindset. The riches of thoughts and the ways of life of this five thousand year old Eastern civilization are now being effectively adapted to the demands of the twenty first century modern innovations. The heritage of the past and the vision for the future are creating unique dynamics that are inevitably moving China forward today. It's all about dynamics. China's rise in the 21st century is a process of restoration and adaptation of its ancient inner dynamics under new conditions.

The dynamics includes the classical prototype of what I call "The Dragon's Hexagon", namely a complex and cross-functional cultural system made of philosophy, military strategy, history, folklore and literature, poems, and Dao & Zen tips. The Hexagon represents an integrated model of finest Chinese ideas, values and wisdom that once helped to bring the country to the superpower position of the world, as well as having sustained China's survival in the early modern time and now dramatic rising up.

By cultural mindset, I mean that every society, culture or nation carries its own set of attitudes, values, spirit and role model, thinking and action habits determining how people think, perform, communicate, interpret information, and react to given situations, and so on.

The mindset is of course a product of the culture in which one grows up and is cultivated, and in turn it also plays an impact back to the culture either as reinforcement or reform. This culture and mindset interactive process together makes yesterday, today and tomorrow for a certain people or nation.

Cultural mindset also means it can be divided into different layers of concepts, outlook, values and judgment, and there are the finest – the Chinese Hexagon described in this book for instance, but lower class anti-progressive ideas as well, like those having crippled the Chinese society and culture since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A nation and its people should always try to have the finest cultural model in charge and working, otherwise it would give way to the lower level that in turn would harm the trend. Only the finest model can generate enough dynamics that is the blood of evolution for any mindset and culture.

Then the Hexagon's innovative adaptation to the modern time is the key to the puzzle of China's rise today, following the track of what I called the "tug of war", meaning the Hexagon mindset is moving to recover among incredible impacts of all varieties of forces and issues, including the positive, negative and distractive. After 30 years of development since 1978, the restoration of the Hexagon's dynamics and its effective adaptation to the modern world have driven China into the express track of progress.

As the result, although China's status quo, depending on which angle taken for the observation, sometimes may still send out mixed signals, the general trend of the country's development remains encouraging and promising,

Talking about China's cultural power and its impact seems not to be a fresh subject though. For a 5000-year old, rich, and sophisticated civilization, many renowned authors and scholars have spent even their lifetime in studying it with lots of decent results and discoveries.

This book of mine, however, intends to take a new angle targeting at the Chinese cultural mindset with intense focus on those key working principles and instances, and it is written for the general public as audience. It will probe the China puzzle from two halves: the mindset prototype, and the mindset's evolution amid the "tug of war". The key subject is about how China handles its dynamics for development and lessons drawn for China as well as the rest of the world. Together hopefully this can put up a

complete picture with regards to where the Chinese mindset comes from, what it affects, and where it is heading for.

I believe firstly, out of the intense interactions between the classical China and modern world, there is an emerging new China on the horizon that is very worth to explore and understand. Secondly, the Chinese experiences can really induce some strong reverberations all over the world, either from the angle of the classical China's rise and fall or the rising contemporary China.

In this book, I make efforts to explain the ideas vividly, provide sufficient background and visual aids, and also link to Western similar practice or analogies so that non-Chinese readers feel easier to follow the clues.

Of course there are much more to read and digest in the sea of Chinese culture if a reader wants to pursue further along the track. So I've also provided references and further readings related to each topic for the convenience of those readers with more interest.

In conclusion, what's the significance for us to explore the Chinese cultural mindset? Personally I can see at least three reasons: first a nation and its people need to build a fine cultural mindset for its survival and progress. It is the cultural intrinsic and adaptable power that pushed China once at the top, is lifting the nation up again today and positively adapting to the outside world, and also helps to fight against and eliminate those things already obsolete in the society and tradition;

Second it carries an enormous lesson: whatever fine development model at its mature stage of its age like the China model in the ancient time may carry a tendency to go to the opposite and negative side of history. It thus requires quite a mechanism to be installed so as to secure a "soft landing" to reduce and offset the declining effects from the development cycle. This mechanism, in my opinion, would mostly depend on the effectiveness of the culture and system involved.

Finally through its cross-cultural "big bang", some innovative and creative model of dynamics for development for China and the world order may be on the way to emerge. So this book is not just about the rising China, but for the present and future world as well.



*Map of China and its 35 Administrative Zones (Province, City, etc)*

## Part One - Dragon's Hexagon – The Prototype



*The Temple of Heaven in Beijing – Capital of China*

Why this Cultural Hexagon Matters? The Hexagon is a milieu of China's cultural, historical, economical and military achievements and traditions accumulated in a period of five thousand years. It is a fine set of teachings, lifestyle philosophies and attitudes of heart that plays significant role in the establishment of China's glory in ancient times and now. Good understanding of the hexagon provides an explanation of China's steadfast adaptation to the demands of modern times.

China – the Central Kingdom owns a cultural mindset of Hexagon. It is a Chinese adaptable cultural model with six “polar themes” to cultivate its people’s mindset. These six themes are philosophy, war strategies, history, folklore & literature, poetry, and Dao & Zen. They represent six areas of Chinese life: attitudes and values, spirit and role model, thinking and actions. The Hexagon is the effective link between an ancient civilization and the modern world that has birthed a brand new synergy of values and philosophies.

These six polar themes have been providing the Chinese with powerful and dynamic nutrition in thinking and actions, imagination and realities, emotions and self-preservation. If dynamically and fairly applied, they can prepare quite civil and

intelligent, on the other hand strategy-driven and competitive people. On top of this foundation an individual may still receive regular education, learn specialized skills, and pursue a career of work.

To describe a Chinese model, however must resort to the Chinese methods. That is, instead of trying to forge any theories and academic like analysis, we will approach the model via variety of legends, anecdotes and real samples and tackle the meanings behind them case by case.

We want to look into the motives, reasons, sentiments, revelations, and perceptions behind each of the story, because this is exactly how the Hexagon has always cultivated the Chinese mindset: rarely via theories or abstracts, instead, always through vivid and unforgettable stories or specifics, like spring rains steadily and gently saturating a lawn.

The readers will find that most of the stories that have shaped the Chinese mindset are based on early occurrences, events, individuals and works around the beginning of the first millennium or during the first millennium (Year 0-999). This era functioned as the pivotal time in forming the Chinese civilization including its mindset.

So, we will try to understand the Hexagon in the Hexagon's way. That's the objective of the first half of this book and we are going to take some in-depth look at about 60 specific samples and hopefully obtain a good feel about the prototype of the Chinese mindset.

Some reader may come up with this question: if we say the so called cultural Hexagon has been working effectively to China and its people, then how do we explain the past 150-year "down time" China has gone through? Why has China suffered such setbacks that even this seemingly magical "Hexagon" wouldn't save it?

On one hand, I want to point out those 150 years of down time, compared to the 5,000 years glorious history, can easily shrink into insignificance. On the other hand, however, since these 150 years were at the milestone doorway of human civilization in entering the modern age, it would be unwise to downplay this China fallback without tracking the root causes.

Please note, as mentioned above "dynamically and fairly applied" is the law of the Hexagon for it to function effectively. Lessons learned by the Chinese over generations include that too many forced restrictions or narrowing down to one single or couple of polars will most likely hurt the performance of the Hexagon, because that harms its dynamics. When the fine cultural mindset started to malfunction, lower class, narrow-minded and timid ideas and values would prevail. All this led to China's down time and tragedy in the early modern era.

So the Hexagon has gone through two major stages. The first stage is about its establishment and development. The Hexagon since in place worked so well with other factors that it helped once to bring the classical China society and nation to its pinnacle of development; then Stage Two is ironically marked with restrictions and malfunction. When things at their top stages, opposite and negative powers grew to turn around the cycle and started to cripple the dynamics of the Hexagon as well. So the wounded Hexagon was displaced by some poor and base model that apparently failed to save the ancient China from a miserable "hard-landing down time" onto the modern soil during

this process. The Hexagon since then has needed to adapt greatly to the new age in order to heal itself.

Has China ever had advanced ideas and practice in science and technology, market economy, logic reasoning, and civil society? Absolutely yes. The Chinese invented paper, powder, compass, and printing way before other cultures and nations did. They invented and tested the earliest model of rockets and had sent a big fleet to the ocean 700 years earlier than Christopher Columbus set his sails across the Atlantic.

The Chinese, especially those people living in the coastal regions have always had the tradition and great instincts in conducting commerce and trade, and for a period of time in different historical stages, such activities even became part of mainstream ways of Chinese economy.

Long before the Han Dynasty made Confucianism the official national ideology, China already had a famous school of thought called Mouism that advocated Mozi's teaching on logic, thinking and reasoning.

The Chinese philosopher master Confucius always upheld the idea of "harmony but not sameness". He believed and thought that only people with different viewpoints working together can create a great society. This sounds very much like the core idea of democracy, doesn't it? Ironically, though, by making Confucius' philosophy the official teaching of their time the Chinese dynasties betrayed the very core of Confucius' values: they forced the sameness.

The era of forced sameness was in a sharp contrast with the dynamics of the Hexagon. The tension resulted in the biggest history lesson China ever learned: departing from the dynamic of the Hexagon meant departing from the adaptable ways of life. The 21st century triumphant appearance of China on the world stage is a direct result from the ancient history lesson: they need to continue watching its cycle and enhancing its cultural model as an assurance for sustained success under the contemporary demands of globalization.

Throughout human history many great civilizations rose and declined never to reappear again. Not so with the Chinese civilization. Today we witness China's rise again. How does China accomplish this? Where do such national resilience and revivification come from?

It is the "Dragon's Hexagon" that has come back to life with new dynamics and strategies. The Hexagon screens, qualifies, and aims at the right targets, starts to digest the input, and then generates brand new thoughts and energy. Although we still see some way to go for the full dynamics of the Chinese Hexagon, the giant dragon is moving on big time again, along the innovative track of modernization.