

James Mann *The China Fantasy: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression*, Viking 2007

- A former reporter, Mann believes that the American public has been misled by American elites about the likely evolution of China. He is interested in “how America develops its perception and ideas about China.” P.x
- He’s skeptical about “Washington think tanks, those peculiar institutions where some ideas are formulated and others are ignored when they don’t fit the hidden financial or other interests that help determine the work of the think tanks.” P.xii
- The most popular of these he argues is the Soothing Scenario, under which economic liberalization leads to political liberalization. He argues that this is the basis on which economic engagement with China has been generally sold politically in the US.
- The other, less dominant, view is the upheaval scenario under which political stability isn’t maintained.
- He suggests that a third scenario is more likely under which a repressive political stability is maintained. He isn’t worried that this will lead to China becoming a military threat to the US but is very concerned about its political implications for the Chinese people, the encouragement of authoritarian regimes elsewhere, and that the American public will have been deceived.
- “The Lexicon of Dismissal” – “Over the past three decades, an extensive lexicon has been developed to stigmatize critics of the People’s Republic of China.” P.29
- China Basher – “To brand someone a China basher is often a way of avoiding the substantive question raised by that person.” P.30
- The Chinese government’s version is anti-China. “This is, of course, a blatant attempt to confuse the issue and to wrap the policies of China’s Communist Party leadership in the cloak of nationalism.” P.31
- “Cold War Mentality” – Mann seems to go a bit overboard at times. He criticizes the view that “If we treat china as a threat, it will become a threat” as suggesting that “the reverse is also true.” P.37
- He argues that those advocating human rights and democracy in China are now branded as “ideological.”
- He suggests that the attitudes of the more senior “China hands” in the US were heavily influenced by fears of a return to McCarthyism.

- He acknowledges that there is also “a loose alliance of security hawks warning about China.” Some of whom use labels like “panda hugger.” They are sometimes called the “Blue Team.” P.46
- This group labeled its opponents the Red Team “the continuing tragedy of America’s inability to deal with China lay in the endless maneuverings of these two rival camps... The polarization was so great that any new event or issue concerning China quickly evolved in Washington in poisonous dispute between the two sides.” P.47
- He discusses MacDonald’s triumphalism and the Starbucks Fallacy. He criticizes the statement by New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof that “No middle class is content with more choices of coffees than of candidates on a ballot.” P.50
- “As China’s economy has thrived in recent years, strong economic and social forces have also emerged in Chinese society that will seek to protest the existing order and their own economic interests. The new middle class in Chinese cities is coming to favor the status quo nearly as much as does the Communist Party itself.” P.53
- He refers to “the illusions about the Taiwan-South Korea model for China, the overestimation of the role of Chinese middle class.” P.57
- He argues that there are strong financial incentives for US leaders to be favorable to China “when they [US political leaders] leave office they can move on to lucrative careers as advisors, consultants, or hand-holders for corporate executives eager to do business in China [if they haven’t been critical].” Pp.59-60
- He also discusses large donations to think tanks. “The impact of this deluge of money has been to skew American discussions China toward an upbeat, pro-business viewpoint.” P.64
- Mann criticizes Bill Clinton’s reversal on linking trade policy to human rights as giving in to the business community but never discusses that economic sanctions are very often ineffective.
- “Chinese leaders are skillful at conveying the impression that the country is already moving in whatever direction arriving visitors want them to go.” P.97
- “America has been operating with the wrong paradigm for China.” P.101 Mann dates the US “strategy of integration” back to the Clinton administration. He argues “The fundamental problem with this strategy of integration is that it raises the obvious question, ‘who’s integrating whom?’” P.105
- He worries whether it’s China “integrating the United States into a new international political order where democracy is no longer favored...” P. 105

- He asserts that economic integration is good for elites in China and America but questions its benefits for ordinary workers.
- He suggests “the best tie to try to forestall the emergence of a permanent Chinese autocracy may well be now.” P.109 He doesn’t really have any proposals for how this could be done and grants that we may prefer to do nothing but that we need to explicitly face the issue.