

# China going through reforms 'but not the way the West wants'

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**SINGAPORE** – China's rise has to be viewed with the right lens and many in the West fail to understand the Asian power because of a lack of knowledge of the country's unique history and culture, said prominent China expert Dr Martin Jacques.

In an interview with TODAY, the British-born author said it is a mistake for the West to think that Beijing is unwilling to implement political reforms in its institutions simply because the reforms China has taken do not move towards a Western-style system.

Instead, China's vast economic transformation in a mere few decades means that institutions in the country have been constantly

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re-engineered and reinvented to cope with the level of change, said Dr Jacques, whose book *When China Rules The World* has sold over 250,000 copies worldwide. "Generally, this has been greatly underestimated in the West — they don't recognise this political reform (in China) because the only political reform they recognise is that which is moving China closer to the West," he said.

Many observers also forget that China is a developing nation that is home to 20 per cent of the world's population, putting any government to a formidable test of statecraft, added Dr Jacques. Yet the Chinese government has clearly demonstrated its competence in steering China through astronomic growth and economic transformation, he said.

"The government has been a brilliant leader of China's transformation. You've got to remember, this is the most remarkable economic transformation in human history. It far exceeds anything the West has managed to achieve."

While the country's economic success has helped to legitimise the Communist Party's rule among the people, Dr Jacques says that support for the ruling party stems primarily from a longstanding historical and cultural respect for government. This is why

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**Dr Martin Jacques**  
(picture)  
PROMINENT  
CHINA EXPERT

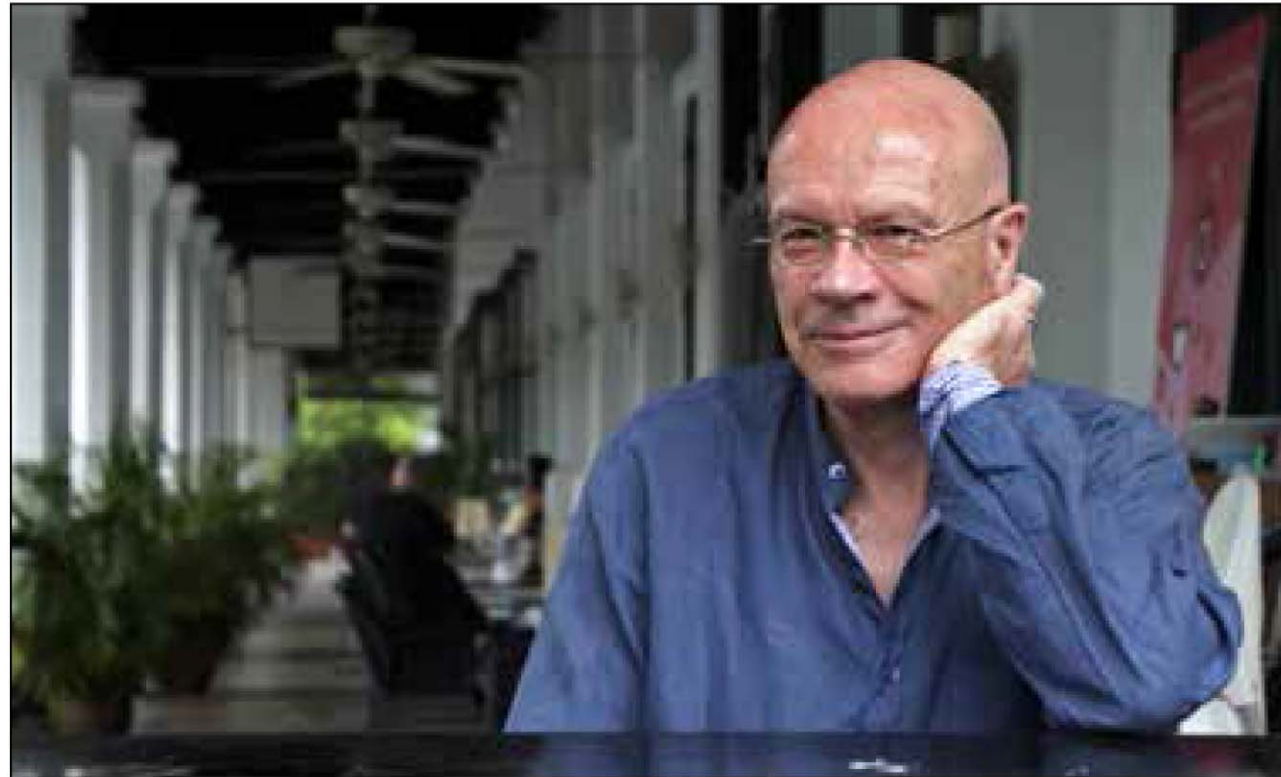


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he does not think that the party's legitimacy will be threatened by China's recent economic slowdown.

"The government in (Chinese) society is a much more deeply-rooted phenomenon; people view it in a familial way, like a parent," he said.

There is also a reservoir of profound goodwill towards the government, he added, citing high levels of satisfaction with the Chinese government in the Pew Research Centre's Global Attitudes Survey.

China's unique history and culture will also chart a very different path for its rise compared with the United States and some European countries, whose past and present global influence have had a great deal to do with military and political power. Instead, Dr Jacques sees China's rising as a

benign global power through gaining global economic and cultural influence.

"Because it has such a huge market, it's going to probably set the standards in lots of different products and technologies," said Dr Jacques.

"I don't think there's any doubt at all that China's going to develop some really formidable companies. And they've got some formidable companies now, like Lenovo, Huawei, Xiaomi, and then you've got to take the Internet world. Baidu is a very effective search engine, and the reason I think Google pulled out of China is because Baidu gave them a competitive beating."

He added that China would have a big cultural influence as it becomes more developed, because it takes great pride in its culture, having dubbed it-

self as the "Middle Kingdom" and the "Land under Heaven".

Dr Jacques said China faces three key challenges in the near term. The first is the need to shift the economy from one based on cheap production for export to one that hires more skilled labour in higher value-adding production. The second challenge is that China has to be more heavily involved in global affairs before it has fully completed its economic take-off.

China's third challenge is governance. "The Chinese governance will have to keep changing, keep performing, because if they don't, they will get out of sync, out of kilter ... (and) there will be serious political consequences," he said.

Dr Jacques believes the Chinese government will live up to this challenge. "Chinese governance is very impressive; it's the oldest statecraft in the world. I think this is the probably the greatest tradition of statecraft in the world," he said.

"But just saying that doesn't solve the problem. The government system is going to have to be more accountable, more representative, more transparent, more institutionally innovative, less top-down — that's a big challenge."

Dr Jacques is in Singapore for two months as a visiting professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. Yesterday, he spoke on the global impact of the imminent rise of China in a student forum organised by Business China.