

Activity 5. The Chinese Century

Source: Fishman, T. “The Chinese Century,” *The New York Times Magazine*, July 4, 2004, p. 24

Instructions: In the last decades of the 20th century China emerged as a powerful economic, political, and military force in world affairs. In the article excerpted here, the author wonders whether China’s continued economic growth will make it the dominant country of the 21st century in the way Great Britain dominated the 19th century and the United States the second half of the 20th century. Read the excerpt from “The Chinese Century” and answer questions 1 – 3.

China is everywhere these days, influencing our lives as consumers, providers, citizens. It has by far the world’s most rapidly changing large economy, and our reactions to it shift just as quickly. China is at one moment our greatest threat, the next our friend . . . Since 1978, its gross domestic product has risen fourfold; in straight dollar terms, China’s economy is the world’s sixth-largest, with a G.D.P. of around \$1.4 trillion. It has gone from being virtually absent in international trade to the world’s third-most-active trading nation, behind the U.S. and Germany and ahead of Japan . . . China is poised for similar growth in this century. Even if China’s people do not, on average, have the wealth Americans do, and even if the United States continues to play a strong economic game and to lead in technology, China will still be an ever more formidable competitor. If any country is going to supplant the U.S. in the world marketplace, China is it . . . China is the world’s workshop because it sits in a relatively stable region and offers manufacturers a reliable, pliant and capable industrial work force, groomed by generations of government-enforced discipline . . . The productive might of China’s vast low-cost manufacturing machine, along with the swelling appetites of its billion-plus consumers, have turned China’s people into probably the greatest natural resource on the planet . . . China has 17 million university and advanced vocational students (up more than threefold in five years), the majority of whom are in science and engineering. China will produce 325,000 engineers this year. That’s five times as many as in the U.S., where the number of engineering graduates has been declining since the early 1980’s.

Questions

1. Why is China projected as a dominant, if not the dominant economic power of the 21st century?
2. What are some of the advantages China possess in economic competition?
3. In your opinion, what would be the impact of China’s continued economic growth on the United States and the world?