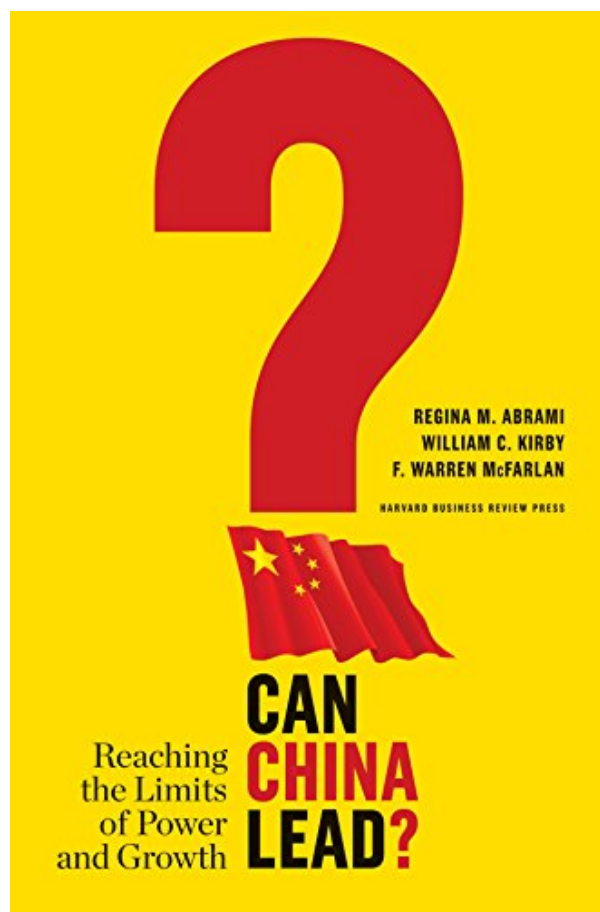
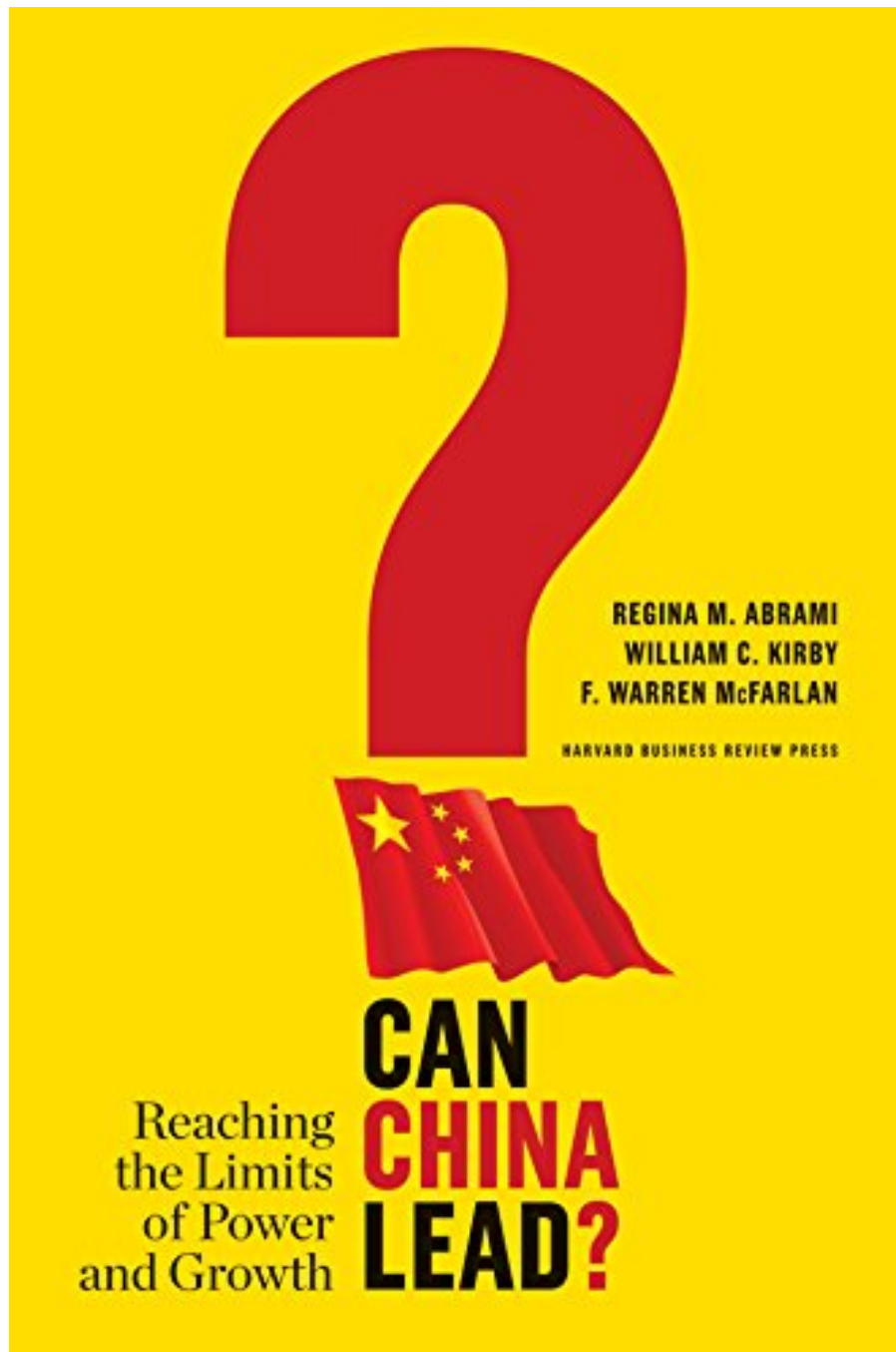


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It's time to rethink the way we think about China.

In this thought-provoking book, noted China experts from Harvard Business School and the Wharton School assert that while China has experienced remarkable economic growth in recent decades (nearly 10 percent for more than thirty years), it now faces major challenges—tests that could shift the country's political and economic trajectory.

A lack of accountability, transparency, and ease of operating in China—combined with growing evidence of high-level corruption—has made domestic and foreign businesspeople increasingly wary of the “China model.” These issues have deep roots in Chinese history and the country's political system.

Regina M. Abrami of the Wharton School and William C. Kirby and F. Warren McFarlan of Harvard Business School contend that the country's dynamic private sector could be a source of sustainable growth, but it is constrained by political favoritism toward state-owned corporations. Disruptive innovation, research, and development are limited by concerns about intellectual property protection. Most significant of all is the question of China's political future: does a system that has overseen dramatic transformations in recent years now have the capacity to transform itself?

Based on a new and popular course taught by the authors at Harvard Business School, this book draws on more than thirty Harvard Business School case studies on Chinese and foreign companies doing business in the region, including Sealed Air, China Merchants Bank, China Mobile, Wanxiang Group, Microsoft, UFIDA, and others.

Can China Lead? asserts that China is at an inflection point that cannot be ignored. An understanding of the forces that continue to shape its business landscape is crucial to establishing—and maintaining—a successful enterprise in China.

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A compelling and accessible introduction to China's business climate

By Kelly McCarthy Barner

*Can China Lead?*, by Regina M. Abrami, William Kirby, and F. Warren McFarlan, asks a question that can not be definitively answered but is well worth asking. The authors seamlessly combine their knowledge of China’s history, people, and politics to advise companies looking to engage in commercial interactions with one the world’s second largest economy (As ranked by GDP by the United Nations, 2012). As the authors state in their Introduction, “Chinese businesses compete globally, now going head-to-head with North American and European corporations in telecommunications, heavy machinery, and renewable forms of energy.” (p. x)

Procurement is spending an increasing amount of time analyzing the tradeoffs between building global supply chains and reshoring (or at least nearshoring) materials and services that might previously have come from China. This book is an accessible introduction to the highly contextual nature of business in China. The primary tensions, which sometimes lead to misunderstandings by businesses in other countries, are between the official government and the dominant Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The CCP has leaders representing their interests in every major corporate organization, leading to misgivings about intellectual property rights and agreements.

Companies looking to do business in China would be wise to understand what holds value to Chinese firms, including manufacturing or design processes that allow them to build their own knowledge and skills. “For example, an agreement with Boeing to buy a large number of Dreamliners for Chinese airlines was directly linked to the decision by Boeing to have the rudders built in China. Had the Chinese not gained access to that technology, the planes would not have been ordered.” (p. 92). Clearly articulating and calculating the impact of such tradeoffs becomes a critical success factor for companies looking to meet the demand of Chinese customers.

The authors open the book by making the strong case that business in China can not be understood separate from its history, one that is less cohesive than many of us think. “China is instead a series of interlocking regional economies, with populations the size of European nations, or larger.” (p. 10) The complexities of dealing with multiple layers of officials representing varying levels of local government or the Party should not be taken lightly.

For all of the seeming severity and cautionary information, many of the modern news stories incorporated throughout clearly illustrate the author’s points while almost entertaining in a way reminiscent of pop-culture tabloid falls from grace. Particularly notable are Mao Zedong’s widow, Jiang Qing, who upon finding herself on trial for causing disharmony (etc.) during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976 was referred to as ‘the criminal’ by her court appointed lawyer, and Bo Xilai, a once influential Party chief who was accused of corruption, covering up murder, and “improper” relations with a number of women. (p. 1)

The authors are clearly skeptical of China’s ability to lead without significant changes to their political system. “If anything, the political system created by the CCP stands in the way of the substantive changes needed to transform this country of 1.3 billion people into a place with sustainable foundations for economic growth and social well being.” (p. i) Although the future of China’s economy – or more accurately represented, economies – is an open question, *Can China Lead?* is a compelling and worthwhile read for anyone transacting with or sourcing from companies in China.

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Disappointed

By Joe Zhang

The authors have strong credentials. But this book is weak, and has failed to teach me new things. Inefficiency and corruption in China is well-known and well-documented, but how the weak governance of the country (and its corporates) will continue to hold China back deserves a much more thorough analysis. The book’s reference to China Netcom is seriously flawed, as the authors obviously do not know the details of that episode.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

I bought this to go along with a course I'm ...

By maceves

I bought this to go along with a course I'm taking, ChinaX from HarvardX. One of the contributors is one of our professors.

The book seems to be written for businessmen planning to invest in China. It presents pitfalls and warnings. The premise is obvious; the writing is clear. It's all business and not meant to be entertaining.

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