



David Daokui Li

AUTHOR · ECONOMIST · FUTURIST

Western boards are making consequential decisions about China – on supply chains, investment exposure, and strategic partnerships – based on assumptions about how China’s government thinks and acts that are frequently wrong. Official data on the Chinese economy routinely understates the scale of structural risks. The gap between how China sees its own economic model and how the West interprets it is not a communications problem. It is a governance and risk problem, with material consequences.

David Daokui Li is a Tsinghua University economist, former adviser to China’s central bank, and author of “China’s World View,” who decodes the internal logic of China’s economic and governance decisions for the boards, investors, and policymakers who must respond to them.

David Daokui Li's 2026 Biography

Why organisations work with David Daokui Li

- His 2023 research found China’s local government debt to be 50% higher than IMF and World Bank estimates – using a new measurement methodology – making him one of the few analysts whose China numbers organisations have reason to trust over consensus figures
- He has attended high-level meetings with figures including Xi Jinping, giving him direct, first-person insight into how China’s senior leadership frames decisions – not inference from official statements
- His book “China’s World View” (W. W. Norton, 2024) frames Western misunderstanding of China as a systemic risk in itself – shifting the question from “what will China do?” to “why do we keep misreading it?”
- As a Harvard-trained economist who returned to lead China’s most prominent economic research centre, he can translate between two fundamentally different frameworks for economic reasoning – not just describe one to an audience fluent in the other
- His co-presidency of the Society for the Analysis of Government and Economics alongside Nobel Laureate Eric Maskin signals that his analytical framework for understanding state-driven economies is taken seriously at the highest level of the discipline

Biography highlights

- Mansfield Freeman Chair Professor of Economics and Director of ACCEPT, Tsinghua University School of Economics and Management
- PhD in Economics, Harvard University; BS from Tsinghua University, 1985, as a member of the first graduating cohort of the School of Economics and Management

AVAILABLE FOR

- After Dinner Engagement
- Panel Participation
- Speaking

DAVID'S SPEAKING THEMES

- Business Strategy & Growth
- Economic Trends & Global Markets
- Geopolitics
- Political Risk & Policy
- Risk Management
- Scenario Planning & Strategic Foresight

LANGUAGES: Chinese, English

- Member, Monetary Policy Committee, People's Bank of China (2016-2018); former external adviser to the International Monetary Fund; member, CPPCC (2008-2023)
- Founding Dean, Schwarzman College, Tsinghua University
- Co-President, Society for the Analysis of Government and Economics (SAGE), alongside Eric Maskin, 2007 Nobel Laureate in Economics
- Author, "China's World View: Demystifying China to Prevent Global Conflict" (W. W. Norton, 2024), endorsed by Lawrence Summers, Jeffrey Sachs, Niall Ferguson, and Mark Leonard
- Regular contributor to Project Syndicate; cited in the Wall Street Journal, Financial Times, Bloomberg, and New York Times; appears on CNBC and Bloomberg TV
- Named one of China's 10 most influential economists by Wall Street Wire (2006)

Biography

China's economy confounds Western observers not because it is opaque, but because it operates on a different logic – one shaped by two thousand years of Confucian governance philosophy, decades of directed industrial policy, and a political system with incentives that bear little resemblance to liberal democratic models. David Daokui Li is the Mansfield Freeman Chair Professor of Economics at Tsinghua University and Director of the Academic Center for Chinese Economic Practice and Thinking (ACCEPT). He holds a PhD from Harvard and was a member of the first graduating cohort from Tsinghua's School of Economics and Management in 1985.

Li's career has been built at the intersection of academic economics and active policy. He served on the Monetary Policy Committee of the People's Bank of China from 2016 to 2018, was a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference for fifteen years, and was an external adviser to the IMF. He has attended high-level government meetings with figures including Xi Jinping. The founding dean of Schwarzman College at Tsinghua, he also co-presides over the Society for the Analysis of Government and Economics alongside Nobel Laureate Eric Maskin – a pairing that reflects where his intellectual ambition sits: building a rigorous framework for understanding economies in which the state is a primary actor.

His 2023 research, conducted at ACCEPT with co-author Zhang He, concluded that China's local government debt stood 50% higher than IMF and World Bank estimates – a finding that challenged the methodologies on which most international assessments of China's fiscal position rely. His 2024 book, "China's World View: Demystifying China to Prevent Global Conflict," published by W. W. Norton, makes the case that Western strategic miscalculation on China stems not from a lack of information but from a failure to understand how China's leadership thinks. The book was endorsed by Lawrence Summers, Jeffrey Sachs, Niall Ferguson, and Mark Leonard.

For organisations navigating decisions about China – whether on investment exposure, supply chain design, or geopolitical positioning – Li offers something genuinely rare: the analytical rigour of a Harvard-trained economist, direct access to China's senior policy deliberations, and the ability to articulate what China's government actually believes about its own economic model and its place in the world.

Key speaking topics

- China's economic strategy and the logic of state-directed capitalism
- US-China economic competition and the risks of strategic misreading
- China's local government debt and systemic financial risk
- The internationalisation of the RMB and China's role in global finance
- Geopolitical risk and its economic consequences for multinationals
- China's governance model – history, incentives, and decision-making
- Global economic rebalancing and the future of multilateral institutions

Ideal for

- Boards and C-suites of multinationals with significant China exposure or supply chain dependencies
- Chief Risk Officers and Chief Strategy Officers navigating US-China decoupling scenarios
- Investment committees and asset managers with emerging market or Asia-Pacific mandates
- Senior government and policy audiences working on trade, geopolitical risk, or international economic governance

Audience outcomes

- A clearer model for how China's senior leadership actually frames economic decisions – not derived from official statements alone
- A more accurate picture of China's structural fiscal risks, including the scale and composition of local government debt
- A framework for distinguishing between China's stated policy positions and the underlying strategic logic that drives them
- A calibrated view of where US-China economic tension is most likely to produce disruption, and where convergence remains possible
- Practical reference points for pressure-testing internal assumptions about China in investment, supply chain, and strategic planning contexts

David Daokui Li's Videos



