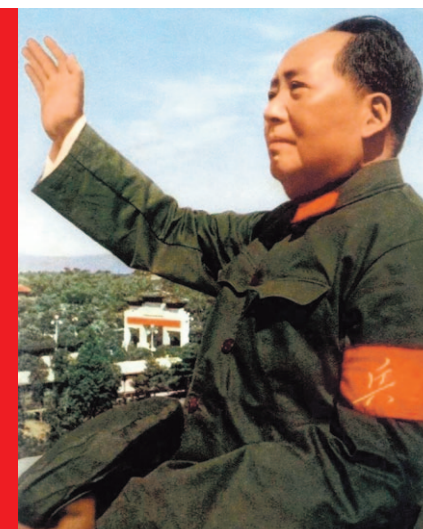


The Chinese Communist Party, then and now

As it approaches its hundredth birthday, the Chinese Communist Party faces a crisis of legitimacy. It has weathered the turbulent events of the twentieth century to emerge as the single dominant force in Chinese politics. Ruling over a fifth of the world's population, the CCP is enmeshed with every organ of Chinese government and dominates the apparatus of state, from the military to the media. As Will Hutton notes in the foreword to *Friends and Enemies*, "Today's China is the Party's creation" (Brown, p. x). It is impossible to understand contemporary Chinese society without addressing the role of the CCP within it.

Mireille Mazard



Brown, Kerry. 2009. *Friends and Enemies: The Past, Present and Future of the Communist Party of China*. London, UK and New York, NY: Anthem Press. 224 pages, paperback. ISBN: 9781843317814

Laliberté, André and Marc Lanteigne (eds.) 2008. *The Chinese Party-State in the 21st Century: Adaptation and the Reinvention of Legitimacy*. Abingdon, UK and New York, NY: Routledge. 208 pages, paperback. ISBN: 9780415692182

HOWEVER, THE PARTY'S domestic (and increasingly international) political might have its challengers. The Chinese government's own official figures count tens of thousands of popular protests every year. The 2011 'disappearance' and subsequent house arrest of Ai Weiwei, who challenged the government by investigating a corruption scandal in the wake of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, emblemizes the Party's response to its challengers. It was also a potent reminder that Tibetans and Uighurs are not the only citizens with cause for complaint.

The two volumes reviewed here each examine the CCP's authority and its role in the political structures of the PRC, asking how the Party maintains its contested power. Kerry Brown explores the "past, present and future" of the CCP from its academic origins in Shanghai to the present and future incarnations of the Politburo. Laliberté and Lanteigne examine adaptation, the reinvention of legitimacy, and the shifting goals and policies of the Chinese government.

Left with more doubts

Friends and Enemies is an intelligent and accessible history of the Party. Brown condenses almost ninety years of CCP history (till 2008) into the first hundred pages. Chapter One examines the CCP's early days, beginning with its Shanghai meetings, supported by the Soviets, and its conflicted alliance with the KMT. Chapter Two charts the period of Mao's rule, from 1949 to his death in 1976. The reform period, discussed in Chapter Three, witnessed some subtle and some conspicuous political changes, not least the democracy movement, which ended in a crackdown. The remaining chapters, just under half the book, are devoted to the current state of the Party, the challenges it faces in the twenty-first century, and how its future affects that of the globe. The events of Tiananmen Square leave the democratization issue unresolved, and Brown takes up this thorny question in the final chapter, which examines the changing context for socialist governance in a globalized, wired age.

Friends and Enemies is a useful complement to more detailed, technical sources such as the Cambridge History of China (vols. 12-15), and the work of historians like Frank Dikötter and Michael Dutton (see Dikötter 2010, Dutton 2005). The book would make excellent reading for students, and I recommend it to anyone with an interest in modern China who is not already a master of the twists and turns of twentieth-century Chinese politics.

Brown, who spent several years in China as a diplomat and businessman, draws on his professional background to augment his academic research, affording him a refreshing perspective on CCP mentality. The Party, he notes, "acts as though it were answerable to no one but itself" (p. 6); but Brown does not demonize or dehumanize its members, whose ranks today include entrepreneurs, intellectuals, ambitious students, as well as farm laborers and the more traditional proletariat. To Brown, the Party is not an impersonal or abstract entity, but a multitude of human faces: the officials, cadres, and other Party members that he personally met in China (ch. 1).

Brown cuts through much of the myth-making by the Party's friends and enemies alike. This entails a productive

problem-ization of historical 'facts'. Yet some historical 'facts' are called into question only to leave the reader with more doubts. Was the Hundred Flowers campaign a cynical ploy or an innocent plan gone wrong? Brown seems to dismiss the former possibility (p. 66). He also implies that Lin Biao never planned an assassination attempt against Mao, and that the plane crash that killed him may have been deliberate (p. 78). Controversies of this nature should not be glossed over, and Brown should have given a detailed explanation of his sources. Some of the most interesting and original material appears in the final chapters of the book, where Brown's political insights are especially valuable. China, he reminds us, may well "redefine the role of the state in the coming century" (pp. 184).

Rebranding China

The Chinese Party-State in the 21st Century explores the reinvention in response to current challenges. The editors note "growing internal unrest, [...]" and other signs that the authority of the [...] CCP is being questioned. Yet, there exists no credible alternative" (p. 1). After the crisis of 1989, the Party (led by Deng Xiaoping) "turned to a strategy of eudaemonic legitimacy" (p. 8), rebranding itself as the guarantor of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. However, "the social tensions generated by the transition towards a market economy, in the absence of any political reform, became intolerable" (p. 3). As China got richer, its system of "market socialism" accrued both capitalist and socialist ills: corruption, inefficiency, radical inequalities, environmental degradation, and land grabs for the purposes of expanding China's gleaming new cities and suburbs, all aggravated by a lack of democracy (p. 7). Today, public dissatisfaction and outright resistance pose a threat to the Party's grip on Chinese politics. The Party-state may face three options in future: "retreat, retrenchment and adaptation" (p. 5, original emphasis). The editors argue that it is banking on the third strategy (p. 7), cautiously dismantling some of its former structures, drafting new laws and policies, and encouraging the growth of a uniquely state-led civil society.

The volume's chapters each explore different aspects of this reinvention, in connection with the three pillars of the CCP's legitimacy: economic performance, political stability, and nationalist ideology. Xu Feng (ch. 2) examines the Party's efforts to construct "harmonious communities" as the building-blocks of a "harmonious society", a replacement for the once all-encompassing *danwei* (work unit) system. Hélène Piquet (ch. 3) outlines the establishment of Chinese Labor Law, designed to aid the transition from "iron rice bowls" to a more flexible (and risky) labor economy. Marc Lanteigne (ch. 9) examines Chinese governance in the context of globalization and development. Susan Henders (ch. 6) looks at Hong Kong's special administrative status and the limits of the "one country, two systems" policy. Charles Burton (ch. 8) appraises the "Beijing consensus" as a model for economic development, and suggests that "a more just society based on a democratic government [...] could strengthen China's social solidarity, national pride and unified sense of purpose" (p. 160).

Jonathan Schwartz (ch. 4) points to a dilemma faced by the Chinese state: its quest for economic growth has severely damaged the environment. This, in turn, leads to public dissatisfaction, and protests against industry and government. The state now recognizes pollution as a social as well as environmental problem, yet it is reluctant to crack down on polluters, as this would entail curbing economic growth. It increasingly turns to NGOs to circumvent this conflict. André Laliberté (ch. 5) examines Taiwanese and other overseas Chinese charity operations in mainland China, where common cultural ground presents both opportunities and challenges. Although the Party-state regulates and coordinates the operations of charities such as Tzu Chi at the highest level, their success in delivering crucial aid depends on a complex set of factors on the ground. Cadres, for example, might be less inclined to cooperate with overseas organizations at the start of their careers, when they have more at stake. The Party's

emphasis on nationalism means that something as simple as placing a commemorative plaque on a newly-built school can be politically sensitive when a Taiwanese charity is involved.

Diana Lary (ch. 7) examines the CCP's use of history to legitimate the current regime. It has fashioned itself into the Qing dynasty's heir, and employs the past to bolster its somewhat "flimsy" basis for ideological (and territorial) legitimacy, throughout the former Qing empire, including Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan (see p. 133). Lary employs the seventeenth-century figure of Zheng Chenggong as a case study for the strategic reinventions of the past. Zheng, the Taiwanese son of a Fujianese pirate and a Japanese mother, serves as a polyvalent symbol: for the CCP, an icon of national reunification with Taiwan; for Minnan people, a regional cultural hero; for Taiwanese, a hero of independence from the mainland.

While the volume contains much interesting material, it is not always clear how the articles complement one another. Some chapters (like Lary's) are aimed at a wide audience of social scientists, while others are written for a narrow audience of political scientists or public policy experts. The editors could have tied the material together more clearly with a concluding chapter. Finally, to live up to the title's ambitions, the book should have included more human detail, and a focus on the state in China's vast rural hinterland.

Editing process

Both Brown's history and Laliberté and Lanteigne's edited volume suffer from the defects of the digital printing paradigm: the page layout, binding, and copy-editing all leave much to be desired. Especially irksome are the errors and inconsistencies in the transcription of Chinese terms. *Friends and Enemies* gives four (!) different spellings for "Yan'an" (pp. 41, 48, 50, 64). *The Chinese Party-State* gives two spellings of "ZhengChenggong" (pp. 141, 143), and has *danwei* inconsistently misspelled as *danewei* (throughout ch. 1). Two Chinese terms appear alongside the pinyin for completely different words (p. 90). Regardless of Chinese ability, any copy-editor should have caught inconsistencies in romanization. Both books should have been equipped with glossaries providing the most important terms in both pinyin and Chinese characters. At a time when authors are being asked to do more and more of the publisher's work, copy-editing their own texts, even providing their own index, these problems are symptomatic of a lack of investment in quality. It is to be hoped that future editions will remedy these problems, which have become endemic to digital imprints.

Both books avoid the common (and false) assumption that greater wealth will naturally lead China to greater democracy, the myth of the "end of history". Instead, they show that the Party has maintained its firm grip on the Chinese government and its extraordinary penetration of everyday life, while carrying out radical reforms in some key areas. The failures of some of these reforms – such as the corruption of village elections, and the loss of social services – is itself worthy of study. Both books leave the reader with the sense that these are crucial and unresolved questions, and that the will of the CCP is somehow more and less than the sum of its parts.

Mireille Mazard is a professor of cultural anthropology at the University of Regina, Canada. Her research explores memory, ritual, and governance at the crossroads of China and Southeast Asia. Her current research looks at the ethics of (non-)violence in transnational Taiwanese Buddhist movements.

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