

David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, 256 pp. ISBN: 9780520254923 (hardcover).

Frank N. Pieke, *The Good Communist: Elite Training and State Building in Today's China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 240 pp. ISBN: 9780521199902 (hardcover).

Zheng Yongnian, *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor: Culture, Reproduction, and Transformation*, London: Routledge, 2010, 254 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-55965-2 (paperback).

During the 1950s and 1960s the study of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was an important part of Western scholarship on contemporary China. Landmark studies such as John Lewis' *Leadership in Communist China* (1963) and A. Doak Barnett's *Cadres, Bureaucracy and Political Power in Communist China* (1967) were published. Other works, including Franz Schurmann's *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (1966), contained important chapters on the CCP. The general assumption was that in order to understand how the Chinese political system worked, it was important to study the CCP. However, after the Cultural Revolution in 1976, studies of the CCP decreased in number and quality. Mao almost destroyed the CCP as a political organization and therefore it made sense to shift attention to the study of Red Guards and mass movements, factional power struggles and ideological campaigns. From the beginning of the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping embarked on a rebuilding of the Chinese bureaucracy as a meritocratic institution and consequently the China field shifted to studies of the state, bureaucratic decision-making processes and structural and institutional aspects of the Chinese polity. The Tiananmen debacle in 1989 convinced many scholars that the Chinese political system was about to break down and that the CCP would disappear as it had lost its legitimacy. This view was reinforced by the simultaneous implosion of the Soviet Union and the East European communist systems. Scholars became interested in the centrifugal forces in Chinese society rather than the forces that held the system together. It was the assumption that the combined pull of these centrifugal forces would bring the system down.

However, the Chinese political system survived the 1989 internal crisis in China and the echoes of the implosion of Soviet and East European communism. In fact, during the 1990s the CCP embarked on an internal reform process that changed the Party in terms of organizational capacity and ideological orientation. The result was a revitalized Party

consisting of younger and better educated members. In the beginning of the 2000s, a number of new studies appeared calling for bringing the Party back in when studying Chinese politics (see for example, Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard and Zheng Yongnian, eds., *Bringing the Party Back In: How China is Governed*, 2004; Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard and Zheng Yongnian, eds., *The Chinese Communist Party in Reform*, 2006).

The three books reviewed here are a result of the new wave of interest in the Chinese Communist Party. Shambaugh argues that the CCP is subject to the contradictory forces of adaptation and atrophy. He believes that the CCP in the main has been able to adapt to forces of reform. He describes a CCP in a state of shock after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But the CCP coped with the situation by carefully studying what had gone wrong in the Soviet Union. Thus, he provides a detailed overview of the Chinese discourse on the causes and implications of the breakdown of the Soviet bloc and argues that the CCP learned the negative lessons of failed communist party-states and was able to reform and rebuild itself institutionally during the 1990s and 2000s, thereby maintaining its political legitimacy and power. The book also contains an interesting chapter on the Western discourse on the Chinese party-state, which distinguishes between the pessimistic and optimistic views on the sustainability of CCP rule. Shambaugh occupies a middle ground between the two, although tilting towards the optimistic view that the problems and challenges confronting the CCP are essentially manageable. Shambaugh focuses on ideology and political discourses and is less interested in issues of organization and party management. Thus one does not find detailed discussions of cadre management and personnel work. The book benefits from Shambaugh's immense knowledge of Chinese politics and from his huge networks, which made it possible for him to interview high-level Chinese Party cadres. The book is a must for those who are interested in how and why the Party has been able to cope with its biggest crisis after the Cultural Revolution.

Pieke focuses on another secret behind the CCP's ability to revitalize and renew itself: cadre training and education. Traditionally, the most important institution for cadre training has been the Central Party School in Beijing. This institution trains high-level party and state cadres. During a five-year period, leaders must undergo at least three months of training and re-education. For high-level cadres this is done at the Central Party School. In addition to the Central Party School, there are hundreds of provincial and local party schools as well as a plethora of other training centres, cadre academies and ad hoc training programs.

The Party has for example established cadre academies in Jinggangshan, Yenan and Pudong, Shanghai. They are run by the powerful Central Organization Department of the Central Committee. The one in Pudong, the China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong (CELAP), is an extremely modern outfit with top teaching and accommodation facilities and reform-oriented teachers. The curriculum reflects Shanghai's international orientation, whereas the Party schools are more conservative and put considerable stress on ideological matters. Pieke discusses the institutional setup as well as the content of the curriculum taught at the various schools. His conclusion is that the Party has been able to reinvent itself, thereby putting the rule of the CCP 'on an increasingly solid footing both materially and organizationally, and, increasingly, ideologically' (p. 4). The book is well researched and meets a strong and longstanding demand for more knowledge about the Chinese training and education system.

Zheng's book is the most recent monograph on the CCP, covering both ideological and organizational matters. He agrees with Shambaugh that the CCP has been able to proactively react to changes in the socio-economic environment and the international arena, but emphasizes that the CCP is an entirely different kind of party than those in the West: it is an organizational emperor wielding its power in ways similar to Chinese emperors of the past. This is an extremely interesting take on the role of the CCP. Earlier studies have tried to bring comparative perspectives to bear on the CCP and have compared it with the communist party in the Soviet Union or with other major leftwing parties. In contrast, Zheng contends that the CCP is a product of Chinese culture, even though 'it has an imported Leninist frame' (p.xi). Using social and political theory such as new institutionalism, and neo-Marxist scholars such as Antonio Gramsci, Zheng's book examines the CCP's transformation in the reform era. He explores how the CCP has maintained and reproduced its domination over state and society in China. He claims that as long as the Party manages to transform itself in accordance with socio-economic changes, the structure of Party dominion over state and society will not change. Zheng has a positive view of the Party's ability to continuously reform and thereby comes down on the side of those who argue that the CCP will be able to maintain its dominance. In his mind, there is no doubt that the Party will continue to bolster a Chinese political system characterized by 'resilient authoritarianism'. His conclusion is that in the long haul, democratization is the only option for the CCP, but as long as the Party is able to reproduce itself as the organizational emperor, China

will not achieve democracy in a Western sense. This is a predicament for scholars who prefer to use existing Western concepts and discourses to interpret Chinese politics and the role of the CCP. Zheng's approach is controversial, as it questions the universality of Western political theory. Nevertheless, it is a valid reminder that the study of Chinese politics must be contextualized, taking into consideration that China remains a civilizational and cultural state.

These three books are all examples of a new and more detailed examination of various aspects of CCP rule in China. They are also examples of how the theoretical field of inquiry as well as the empirical material have changed. Zheng, for example, is informed by Gramscian domination theories as well as Bourdieu and Foucault. Studies from the 1960s, such as those mentioned above, relied on sources collected from various institutions in Hong Kong or interviews with refugees from the mainland. The Barnett study, for example, was almost exclusively based on interviews, whereas Lewis also included mainland newspapers and magazines. Shambaugh, Pieke and Zheng are all well acquainted with the rich material that is now available in mainland China and they also rely on interviewing. The definitive book on the CCP has not yet been written, but important pieces of the puzzle are already available with the publication of these excellent books.

*Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard
Professor and Director
Asia Research Centre,
Copenhagen Business School*