

ROBERT LAWRENCE KUHN

Understanding why the CPC endures

The Communist Party of China, the CPC, still mystifies foreigners. As the 95th anniversary of its founding on July 1, 1921 approaches, it's worth wondering why the lingering mystery. Two unambiguous facts confound the critics — the CPC has led China in its historic, sustained development, and the CPC continues to be, after 67 years, China's uncontested ruling party. The two facts are not unrelated.

In general, foreigners do not understand the CPC; worse, they feel no need to do so. This is a mistake, because in order to understand China today, one must understand the CPC.

Here are the kinds of questions that foreigners should ask. What are the CPC's philosophies and how do its policies reflect its philosophies? How is the CPC organized and how does its governance mechanism depend on its organizational structure? Why has China opted for what it calls multi-party cooperation under CPC leadership? Would China be more stable with a multi-party competitive system? What's the relationship between "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" and both the market playing a decisive role in the economy and the non-public ownership of enterprises? Can a system with a single ruling party increase transparency, standardize decision-making, and establish credible checks and balances? What's the relationship between the ruling party and the rule of law? What challenges does the CPC face? What can be learned from the CPC's history — we know about its triumphs, what about its tragedies? Why has the CPC now increased its crackdown on corruption, extravagance, and abuses of power? Why must the CPC now be rejuvenated? Finally, how does the CPC as the ruling party claim legitimacy?

The CPC is reaching out to provide answers. I'm pleased to participate. My show *Closer To China* on CCTV News featured five episodes on "Understanding the CPC" that were broadcast in mid-2015 and five that are being broadcast in June/July (all online or to be online). Produced in cooperation with the CPC Central Committee's Organization Department, the series portrays the CPC's adaptation (keeping up with the times), philosophy (ideals and visions), governance (process of political leadership), personnel management (selection and training), and future challenges (facing problems).

From my experiences — including a recent, 12-day, in-depth study of environmental protection in East China's Zhejiang province and healthcare reform in Northwest China's Qinghai province, especially in mountainous areas — I explain why the CPC asserts that its leadership is optimum for China's development. Key reasons include: the CPC's adaptability to changing conditions, using experimentation and testing new policies in limited areas before rolling them out nationwide; the CPC's five-level structure — central, provincial, municipal, township and village — and how the CPC guides the government through the legislative National People's Congress and administrative State Council.

In making China's system work, the quality of CPC officials is especially important. The CPC allocates substantial resources to selecting, training, monitoring, assessing and promoting officials, and, when necessary, punishing, demoting or firing them. For well over a millennium, Chinese dynasties recruited the country's best and brightest into public service, a sophisticated and systematic process that the CPC has adopted and tailored for contemporary times. The process is rigorous and quantitative, with increasing focus on transparency, equity, breadth, and reducing all manners of favoritism. Training is intense and throughout one's career.

Rules of work style and personal behavior are now firmer. An eight-point regulation attacks extravagance and "empty talk" and reduces bureaucratic trips and meetings. A training campaign stresses strictness in morals, power and self-discipline, and honesty in decisions, business and behavior.

Looking ahead, no one doubts that the CPC is facing multifarious challenges. Economic reform and transformation are both vital and thorny. Social development, such as pollution control and healthcare, must meet escalating expectations. Moreover, public pressures are mounting for increasing transparency, strengthening checks-and-balances, and constructing institutions that are self-correcting.

To deal with these intricate, entangled and sometimes contradictory objectives, the CPC is seeking to involve citizens in the process of governance and the oversight of government, such as through social media and public polling. Party leader Xi Jinping states that the CPC must be governed by standardized rules and equitable procedures.

But to be the single ruling party, the CPC has a higher obligation to enhance standards of living and personal well-being, which includes comprehensive reform, real rule of law, transparency in government, public participation in governance, increasing democracy, increasing freedoms and human rights.

The CPC, as the single ruling party, must assess and adjust ceaselessly. That is its strength. Conditions change and so must policies. Only by such real-world grounding — monitored and modified continuously — can the CPC construct, in the mid-term, a moderately prosperous society, and, in the longer term, a fully modernized country.

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LI FANGCHAO

Exam puts too much pressure on students

Photos and videos of students venting their pressure before the *gaokao*, national college entrance exam, which falls on June 7 and 8, have caused heated debate recently.

The photos showed some grade three students at a senior high school in Xiamen, a coastal city in Southeast China's Fujian province, tearing up their textbooks and throwing them out of the windows of the school buildings.

While a video that went viral online showed a similar scene at a senior high school in Liupanshui, Guizhou province in Southwest China.

Amid deafening shouts and cries of "hurray", hundreds of used textbooks and old exam papers fell from the sky like snowfall.

The photos and video finally caught the attention of the authorities. On May 25, the Xiamen education authorities issued a directive, ordering schools to ban such activities and resort to other ways to effectively alleviate the pressure on students.

The directive, said to be the first official statement targeting the phenomenon, immediately made headlines nationwide.

The ban is actually long overdue.

Such student actions before the exam have been a recurring scene in recent years in some senior high schools around the country. It has even become a kind of tradition at this time of year.

Some schools have even acquiesced in such activities as a way to boost the morale of students.

But while students shouting at the top of their lungs may be interpreted as inspiring, depending on what it is they are shouting, tearing up textbooks and old exam papers should not be encouraged.

Books and papers are witnesses of students' hard work. Bitter or sweet, they are mementos that will help

students recall precious memories of this special period in their lives.

And they are still valuable references that they will be able to use in college.

Tearing them up in impulsive group frenzies leaves nothing but piles of garbage that their schools have to clear up.

However, this way of releasing their pressure also reflects students' dissatisfaction with the current education system.

Academic performance remains the overriding priority throughout school education. A

decent score outshines any other abilities in the eyes of teachers as there are often strict college entry rate requirements in many high schools.

Failure to ensure a certain number of students go to college can affect teachers' performance appraisals. That explains why at some schools teachers try and persuade the weakest students who have little chance of going to college to drop the *gaokao* to ensure a good enrollment rate from the school.

Like a sword of Damocles, the national college entrance exam hangs

above students' head.

Considered a life-changing opportunity for students, due to its fierce competition, surviving the exam to enter a good university is described as "fighting to pass a single-log bridge against a legion of soldiers".

High expectations from parents, teachers and schools mean huge pressure for students.

The exam-oriented cramming method of teaching also fails to arouse students' interest.

After years of hard study for the sole purpose of taking the exam, the pressure builds up as it approaches.

Releasing the pressure is necessary for students to ensure they are in the best state both mentally and physically to sit the exam.

The official ban is a ban on extreme acts like tearing up books, not against student's releasing the pressure they feel.

In this sense, it is the responsibility of schools to guide students to relieve their pressure in more reasonable ways.

They could organize some group activities such as an outing to help students let off steam.

In the long run, though, the root problem still lies in the exam system.

Instead of deciding a student's fate through a single exam, the education authority should speed up its reform to diversify the exams for students with different talents.

Meanwhile, universities should be given more freedom to select the students they need.

Scores in the *gaokao* should be only a reference. A comprehensive evaluation system should be established to give students an objective chance to show their overall capabilities.

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LI FENG/CHINA DAILY

YI FAN

Let reason and cooperation prevail in South China Sea

As the Arbitral Tribunal in The Hague ponders its ruling on the South China Sea arbitration unilaterally initiated by the Philippines, the region and indeed much of the world will be wondering how it may affect the already strained relations between China and the Philippines and the larger picture in the South China Sea.

It is often easy to forget that China and the Philippines have been friendly neighbors for centuries. Many Filipinos have Chinese ancestry, including former President Corazon Aquino and her son, outgoing President Benigno Aquino III.

Since the 1970s when the Philippines illegally occupied eight of China's Nansha Islands and reefs, the South China Sea has become a source of friction between the two countries.

Yet, previous Philippine governments opted for dialogue and consultation with China, and each flare-up ended with reaffirmations of the two countries' joint commitment to addressing disputes through consultation and negotiation.

For example, in 1999, President Joseph Estrada ordered the vessel the Philippines stranded on Huangyan Island to be towed away. And in 2004, President Gloria Arroyo approved a joint marine seismic undertaking in the South China Sea between the two countries, which, upon the consent of both China and the Philippines became a tripartite one with Vietnam's participation the following year.

Bilateral relations flourished despite the disputes and trade grew threefold between 1995 and 2007.

However, things quickly slid into a downward spiral when President Aquino III presided over a serious

confrontation with China over Huangyan Island in 2012, which culminated in the initiation of arbitration without prior consultation with China in January 2013.

Clearly, the US sees the South China Sea as an emerging frontline for geostrategic rivalry with China. Such a grim view only exposes the US' own strategic anxiety and risks evolving into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Philippines knows well that its submissions, which concern territorial sovereignty, are beyond the scope of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. As for maritime delimitation, the Chinese government made a declaration in accordance with UNCLOS in 2006, excluding disputes concerning, among others, maritime delimitation from the compulsory dispute settlement procedures of UNCLOS.

Furthermore, the arbitration move both breached the Philippines' bilateral agreement with China and its obligations under the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, which calls for negotiated settlement of disputes among the sovereign states directly concerned.

The Philippines' real motive is to challenge China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea and seek legal cover for its illegal occupation of Chinese territory. It is entirely lawful for China to take the position of not accepting or participating in the arbitration. As a matter of fact, the ruling has neither legal force nor binding effect.

The arbitration drama has much to do with the United States. Some-

times seen as an outsider, the US has loomed large in the South China Sea issue from the very beginning. After Japan's defeat in World War II, it was the US which provided military vessels for Chinese troops to take back the South China Sea islands pursuant to international legal instruments, including the Cairo Declaration and Potsdam Proclamation. The US did not challenge the Dotted Line when it was publicized by the Chinese government in 1948.

Over the recent years, however, the US' stance has changed from somewhat tacit recognition of Chinese sovereignty to neutrality, and then to instigating trouble by proxy. Now it has become a protagonist itself by flexing its military muscles and challenging China's sovereignty.

Clearly, the US sees the South China Sea as an emerging frontline for geostrategic rivalry with China. Such a grim view only exposes the US' own strategic anxiety and risks evolving into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

China remains committed to upholding peace and stability and addressing disputes through consultation and negotiation. But for China, there is very little room for compromise on issues of territory and sovereignty. The US provocations will only create a real danger of a head-on collision with China.

Having said that, for all the saber-rattling by defense hawks in Washington, there is little appetite in the

US for conflict with China over a few rocks in the faraway West Pacific. And China, which is pursuing a policy of good-neighborliness, has little interest in seeing relations further strained. The best way out for all sides would be to work toward an easing of the situation.

First, China should seek ways to work with the incoming Rodrigo Duterte administration to minimize the negative impact of the arbitration and achieve a turnaround in relations with the Philippines, especially when Duterte has indicated a willingness to engage China on the South China Sea issue.

Second, China should solidify mutual trust and cooperation with its neighbors in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which will provide an anchor of stability in the South China Sea. We should promote the early conclusion of the code of conduct for the South China Sea with ASEAN countries based on consensus and work toward a rules-based regional order.

Third, China and the US should find a way out of their security conundrum. They should enhance crisis management mechanisms to avoid accidents, and engage in more candid dialogue at the strategic level to avoid misjudgment and build trust through cooperation.

Both US President Barack Obama and his successor should share the vision of Chinese President Xi Jinping: There is no such thing as the Thucydides trap, but should major countries repeatedly make the mistake of strategic miscalculation, they may create such traps for themselves.

The author is a Beijing-based observer of international studies.