

Comment

The Party explains what the Party is about

UNPRECEDENTED SERIES OF BOOKS SHEDS LIGHT ON HISTORIC TRANSFORMATION FROM 'REVOLUTIONARY' TO RULING PARTY

The Communist Party of China just did what it has never done before and it is important to appreciate what happened and why. It happened in New York, at BookExpo America where an unprecedented series of five books, titled *Understanding the CPC*, was published in English by the CPC's Organization Department. I am not a dispassionate observer: I wrote the introduction to the books and gave a speech at the book launch.



Robert Lawrence Kuhn

Many foreigners do not understand the CPC — particularly its historic transformation from a “revolutionary party” seeking power to a “ruling party” exercising power. The CPC has ruled China since 1949;

it has more than 85 million members. Why then is the Party such a mystery? Perhaps remembrances of the collapsed Soviet Communist Party, hidden and sclerotic, or of China during the “cultural revolution” (1966-76), fanatical and chaotic? Perhaps the Party's sense of secrecy? Whatever the reasons, the veil should be lifted.

President Xi Jinping says that for China to achieve its goals of building a moderately prosperous society by 2020 and a fully modernized nation by 2050 — which defines the Chinese Dream — the Party must rule China, and rule itself with discipline, dedication and competence. Party effectiveness, Xi said, “should ultimately be measured by the real benefits the people have reaped, by the improvement in their lives and by how well their rights and interests are protected.”

“Strictly governing the Party”, one of Xi's “Four Comprehensives”, has become a signature policy, the power to energize and implement the other three comprehensives (building a moderately prosperous society, deepening reform and governing according to law). Here then is the nexus between Xi's Four Comprehensives and *Understanding the CPC* — both of which reflect Xi's commitment to Party power and purity.

Just as a blacksmith needs a hard hammer, an analogy goes, the Party needs strong members — hence, the far-reaching anti-corruption campaign (bagging “tigers” and swatting “flies”) and quashing the extravagance of officials. The goal is to create a Party system where officials have three attitudes toward corruption: “Don't want. Don't do. Don't dare.”

For understanding the CPC, I suggest an eight-dimensional framework: ideology and its developments; history and its legacies; leadership and elite politics; structure and organization; personnel selection and training; discipline and anti-corruption; contemporary



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challenges; and future prospects.

Here are specific CPC-related questions.

How did the CPC transform the country so dramatically, lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty? What is it about the CPC leadership that enabled China to develop so rapidly?

Why has China opted for one-party rule? How is China's political meritocracy optimum for China's development? How does the CPC claim legitimacy? Why should the CPC be, and continue to be, the ruling party?

How is the Party organized and structured? How does the Party coordinate its three hierarchical levels: central (national), local (provincial), and grassroots?

What is the nature of “Party construction”, a complex amalgam of attitudes and actions? How to build Party institutions that are self-correcting?

Why is the Central Party School called the CPC's “secret” of success? What is its role? How does it operate? How does it educate and train Party officials? What research does it conduct?

How does the CPC build a strong meritocracy, with intelligent leaders who have wide-ranging experience?

How does the CPC actually govern? What is “democratic centralism”? How does the CPC “lead” the legislature (the National People's Congress), the government (State Council), and the judiciary (Supreme Court)?

What is the Party's “advanced

nature”? How does the Party mobilize “productive forces” and encourage “advanced culture”?

What does the Party consider its greatest dangers or tests? What are the so-called interest groups that oppose reform?

Why must the Party be rejuvenated? What is intra-Party democracy? How to establish credible checks and balances in a one-party system? How to promote transparency?

How to engage ordinary citizens in the process of governance?

What is the relationship between the ruling party and rule of law?

What are the root causes of corruption? What systemic mechanisms can control corruption?

What can be learned from the CPC's history, its triumphs and tragedies? How has the CPC handled its errors, particularly the ruinous, decade-long “cultural revolution”? Why was the CPC successful and the Soviet Communist Party was not?

What are the enduring ideals of the CPC? What are its visions? What challenges does the Party face, amidst increasing domestic complexity and international volatility?

One question, asked often by international media, is “If China's one-party system is so good, why does China impose strict media regulations?” This is a larger discussion, with arguments related to imbalances in economics and education and the priority of China's developmental needs, but here I give the flow of China's logic to benefit the Chinese

people: Because improving living standards depends on development, development on stability, stability on one-party rule, and one-party rule on stricter media regulations, therefore improving living standards depends on stricter media regulations.

If one looks at almost every aspect of real life, Chinese people have more personal freedom today than at any other time in their long history. Although I marvel at China's astounding economic success, I still say that economic success is the CPC's second most important accomplishment. The first is opening-up Chinese people's spirits — “the emancipation of the mind” — enabling increasingly greater freedoms in personal and social lives.

Moreover, China's vast population is finally free from widespread famine, pestilence, homelessness, illiteracy, political mass movements, and the social scourges of other eras. And as for involving citizens in the process of governance, the government is developing innovative uses of the Internet, social media and public polling to solicit feedback and assess opinions.

While I argue that a one-party system is optimal for China today, I therefore stress that the CPC has a higher standard of accountability to enhance personal welfare in the broadest sense, which includes transparency in governance, public oversight of government, rule of law, increasing democracy, various freedoms, and human rights. President

Xi states that the CPC, as the ruling party, should be governed by rules and procedures that are standardized and open to public scrutiny.

I am impressed by the strong meritocracy of the CPC, whose leaders are intelligent and well educated, have wide-ranging experience, and focus on their operational data and statistics. Only if the CPC maintains its high standards of leadership, and prevents arbitrary and autocratic rule (particularly at the local level), will the CPC continue to lead China successfully.

The CPC claims a historic mission. In a thousand years, when the long annals of political systems are compiled, China today may well be a case study of what happens when a country with a one-party political system seeks to construct a prosperous, democratic society.

I credit the CPC for publishing *Understanding the CPC*. If the world does not understand the CPC, do not blame foreign media or conjure up conspiracy theories. The best response is to engage in the world marketplace of ideas. That's what this new book series does, offering a clear, comprehensive description of the CPC by the CPC.

The author is an international corporate strategist and political/economics commentator. His CCTV News show, whose executive producer is Adam Zhu, is Closer To China with R.L. Kuhn. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.