

Book Reviews

Democracy in China: The Coming Crisis

Jiwei Ci

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In this dense tome, Jiwei Ci applies insights from millennia of profound thinkers from Europe and China to argue that the Chinese Communist dictatorship is likely, in some mid-term future, to be confronted by a serious crisis of legitimacy. That crisis, he contends, will threaten China's social stability. To avoid chaos, the sophisticated and learned Ci suggests, the nation would be best served by the ruling Leninist Party finding a way to carry through a democratization suitable to the particular conditions of China.

The crisis is likely because prior legitimations no longer work. In a profit-oriented society, people find it implausible that the ruling group is a carrier of the revolutionary communist utopia promised by the CCP in the era of high Maoism, 1957–1977. Clearly, the CCP is not building socialism.

Ci also argues that performance legitimacy from economic growth is too weak a need to support the weight of the heavy Party-state. In addition, that growth is accompanied by palpable negatives: intensifying polarization, a self-enriching ruling caste and environmental degradation. Besides, it is inevitable that at some point growth will slow and that a recession will occur. Performance, or a lack thereof, would then discredit the CCP. Xi “alone stands between today's relative calm and tomorrow's storm” (p. 84).

Although many dictatorships have tried to hold on to power by democratization, including the KMT on Taiwan, Ci does not examine these cases. It is not because the well-informed Ci is unaware. Rather, he is making an appeal to a CCP leadership that believes its situation is *sui generis*. Ci knowingly only invokes arguments which he believes resonate with the value presuppositions of CCP ruling groups.

Still, I wish that the brilliant and thoughtful Ci had spent some time explaining why the regime cannot persist with diminished legitimacy. There are many such governments. Also, I wish he had better examined the notion that right populist chauvinism is a source of legitimacy in China and around the world. He could have done more to persuade the reader of the imperative to solve a coming crisis of legitimacy.

What Ci does do extremely well is construct a prudential case for democratization that attempts to appeal to the values and preferences of the CCP. He therefore goes out of his way to discredit the notion of a universal template which some call Western democracy, a term I abhor since most of the people in the world who enjoy the blessings of political liberty happen to be Asian.

I assume such things are well known to the well-informed Ci. But mentioning them would not be attractive to today's CCP ruling groups. Any criticisms which ignore

Ci's purpose of being persuasive to Xi Jinping's successors would not be fair to Ci and his project.

Ci imagines that post-Xi polity. There will be no authoritative leader to follow Xi as Deng followed Mao. Instead there will be an attempt to share power among diverse factions. But meanwhile the Leninist dictatorship will be confronted by a democratic society of people who want "good jobs" and an "enjoyable life" (p. 108). A feudal notion of red family heritage will not legitimate the ruling caste. Yet Ci does not call for citizens to rise up.

Instead his appeal is to ruling groups and their desire to hold on to power. He builds on the Xi era demonization of the prior two decades of leadership by Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. The Jiang era, in this perspective, brought "ten years of moral and reckless self-aggrandizement." The Hu era made the CCP "rotten to the core" (p. 84). Ci then asks, "What was this rot, as evidenced in the shocking malfeasance of these powerful members of the party [Zhou Yongkang, General Guo Boxiong, General Xi Caihou and Liang Jihua] but the moral and behavioral manifestation of a near-terminal legitimation crisis" (p. 85).

Writing for CCP leaders who may be loyal to this Xi vision, Ci cannot remind us that Jiang tried to constrain military hawks and that Hu, in order to seek reconciliation with Japan on maritime territorial issues, had to try to marginalize Han racists who demonized Japan. In contrast, Xi's ruling group incorporates the hawks and the racists. Their foreign policy assertiveness challenges the sovereignty of neighbours and leads them to seek ways to maintain their independence which upset the new right populist chauvinist legitimations of the CCP. Future peace and tranquillity are not givens.

In short, in singularly addressing CCP ruling groups, Ci is forced to omit factors which may impact future Chinese stability and legitimacy. Ci's prudential arguments therefore cannot be fully persuasive, something that Ci, of course, is well aware of. Therefore, he concludes by imagining alternative futures. What happens, he asks, if the future brings "China's further rise and democracy's future decline." In that case, Ci bravely concedes, "all bets are off" (p. 380). That is, Ci's penetrating analysis would not be applicable in that very different reality.

But in our age of rapid change and radical uncertainty, none of us can know the future. Projecting from key tendencies, albeit incomplete, Jiwei Ci's book is a heroic attempt at a contribution to help bring about a better future for the people of China and of the world.

EDWARD FRIEDMAN

efriedm1@wisc.edu

Creating the Intellectual: Chinese Communism and the Rise of a Classification

EDDY U

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Intellectuals have suffered a great deal at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Who were these unfortunate souls, how were they defined, identified, employed and then dismissed, with many persecuted, and how