

The 100-Year Trajectory

Jérôme Doyon and Chloé Froissart; *The Chinese Communist Party: A 100-Year Trajectory*; *The Australian National University Press, Australia, 2024, 466.*

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The Chinese Communist Party: A 100-Year Trajectory offers a detailed account of the strategies and performance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) while commemorating its centennial evolution (1921-2021). French scholars Jérôme Doyon and Chloé Froissart have undertaken a huge scholarly leap in editing the book which bears remarkable literary contributions by a team of eminent scholars. The book contains four chapters and sixteen articles that explore various dimensions of the 100-year trajectory of the CCP.

The focus of analysis remains on the genealogical path adopted by the CCP since its birth while simultaneously forecasting its future trajectory through four different lenses, each represented by a chapter: *organisational trajectory, ideological bricolage, China's path to modernisation and its challenges, and territorial control & nation-building*. Though pre-PRC historical discourse has been debated yet, three distinct post-PRC eras have been covered in greater detail.

These eras include firstly, Mao's legacy (1949–76) which is considered a cornerstone for “*socialism with Chinese characteristics*”; second Deng Xiaoping and his followers, renowned for introducing *reforms and opening China* to the outside world; and lastly, the ongoing Xi Jinping's regime since 2012 under the banner of

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“*great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.*” The historical approach followed in the book stresses the apparent permanence of the Party’s organisation and ideology in the first two chapters. As the third part explores the CCP’s attempts to modernise the country, and how, in turn, it compels the CCP to adapt to a diversifying society, the fourth part delves into its efforts, from subtle cooption to forced assimilation, to build a unified nation despite ethnic and territorial diversity.

The initial part of the book examines the secretive top-down hierarchy of the Party, the opaque and multifarious roles of the CCP in the state functions, and its engagement with society beyond the defined limits of the state authority. *The embedded Party-State model of PRC has been subjected to critique for its non-democratic structures and functions once equated with Western liberal democratic models of governance.* It is believed that the CCP has transformed and expanded its organisation globally with over 95 million members in the past 100 years, without fundamentally reforming its core non-democratic structure.

Finding its lineage in the Leninist conception of “*freedom in discussions, unity in action,*” the notion of *Chinese democratic centralism* is based on a democratic political structure strictly under the centralised leadership of the CCP. To augment party-building efforts on the external front, the CCP has also applied its “*sharp power*” to project its political philosophy and ideology by seeking ingress in various foreign educational and economic institutions to image a semblance of a global force. *Here it must be noted that the globalisation of the CCP is consistent with the rise of China, however, it has been conceived as a major threat to Western liberal democracies and their values.*

While tracing the ideological makeup of the party, a detailed explanation is offered as to how the CCP’s ideological foundations and objectives derived from the Marxist-Leninist school of thought have had a long-lasting impact on the Chinese nation. *The*

heterogeneous ideological makeup of the CCP with a homogeneous Chinese outlook has often been classified as shades of red. Though changing throughout its evolutionary history, these shades are often shaped by the political leadership to gauge its members' loyalty, virtue, and party spirit.

To assert ideological governance and legitimise its rule, the CCP employed various strategies. It sought refuge under the *united front*, a concept considered as a central pillar of Chinese communism. Declared as a “*magic weapon*” of Mao, this notion remained central in steering the Chinese nation to serve political purposes during various eras. In personifying the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, the CCP has also strategised phrases like “China Dream” to promote the political rhetoric of nationalism under Xi Jinping. *Such performativity of language is not alien to the host of propaganda tools available to bricoleurs of Chinese ideology.*

The challenges faced by the CCP on its path to modernisation besides its determination and resilience to continue with its core mission of sustained development have also been commented critically. The best description of unflinching devotion is often narrated with the phrase “*Whatever It Takes*” which also holds significance in the ever-growing CCP’s political economy. Powered by Marxist–Leninist legacy, ‘*Economic Stalinisation*’ has been declared as the core idea for developing the economy of the new republic under Mao.

The reorientation of development strategy during the reform era opened the Chinese economy to the capitalist system and notably, the PRC joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001. *Currently, the economic nationalism of the PRC is symbolised by the ‘Birdcage’ theory wherein the bird in the cage is a free market, and the cage denotes the state system.* It is pertinent to highlight that in the last three decades, China has witnessed the fastest economic growth and improvement in the living standards of its people. *Regarded as a*

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socialist virtue, ecological civilisation discourse from 'war against nature' to 'war against pollution' has witnessed the CCP continuously updating and modernising its collaborative environmental doctrines to ensure that development is pursued with concurrent protection of the environment.

Western democracies in international forums often objected rapid industrialisation of China and labeled it as the main threat to the global environment, but it is noteworthy that the industrialisation of Europe commenced much earlier than that of China. *The modernisation trajectory of the CCP also faced challenges concerning the management of the Chinese demographic profile and its consistency with sustained development.* Since the Qing dynasty, the oldest extant institution of 'Hukou' has been utilised as a population management tool for the census, conscription, tax collection, maintaining social order, urbanisation, and economic development.

Conceived on the stratified and functionalist notion of social citizenship, *Hukou has been critically viewed for its utilisation by the CCP to exclude the rural agrarian population thereby socially polarising the modernisation of the country.* The modernisation project of the CCP after the reform era also presented an opportunity to redefine and renew its ambiguous relationship with the privileged Chinese bourgeoisie or private entrepreneurs. *With legal reforms and the recruitment of CCP members as private entrepreneurs, the Chinese bourgeoisie cadre is now often labeled as 'national capitalists' or 'political actors.'*

In the terminal part, the efforts of *nation-building* undertaken by the CCP after 1949, have been lensed with a critical attitude. The diverse demographic challenges faced by the party demanded the inculcation of a nationalist spirit in the multi-ethnic society inherited from the Republic of China and the establishment of state monopoly in the territories of Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. *To determine 'unity within diversity,' the CCP securitised the concept of 'Minzu' which*

served as a melting pot for 55 ethnicities representing five racial legacies. ‘Multiple Yet One’ philosophy gained currency in the Han and Non-Han dialectic process of forging collective national consciousness.

The CCP strategised the modernisation of underdeveloped Xinjiang to curb the antagonist and fissiparous tendencies that were essentially tangent to the communist ideology. Conversely, the case of Hong Kong required a different recipe from the party for its national integration. To establish its dominion, the CCP once again advanced the idea of the *‘United Front’* to enhance its political influence as well as pro-Beijing following through politically motivated friends. In the case of Taiwan, China’s dream of eventual *‘peaceful unification’* of the two sides of the Taiwan Strait has remained unfulfilled. *‘One China’ principle despite being constructed on strong ideological foundations remained short of its realisation on the ground.* To the leadership of the PRC, the unification project is a matter of time.

The secretive facets of the CCP revealed in the book provide enough justification for its legitimacy for the longest-known tenure in modern times. Since the book is mainly written by scholars associated with the Western school of thought, therefore, a tinge of inclination in the analysis of the CCP strategies and performance is imminent. Nevertheless, the centennial trajectory of the CCP covered in the book serves to fulfill the appetite of those scholars who are on the quest for greater insights into the largest undiscovered political entity in the world.■