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# Berlin Wall Anniversary and China: Five Readings

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November 9, 2009 in [The Five-List Plan](#) by [The China Beat](#) | [4 comments](#)

1. ["What Came Down Was the Wall and What Stood Up Was the People,"](#) by Shi Zhe, a translation of an op-ed from *Southern Weekend* (hat tip Danwei):

The resurgence of Germany after the war was achieved by each and every person living in a misshaped land. In the end it was regular people that were the main reason West Germany was able to win the peaceful competition between two systems. Their hard work day in and day out proved themselves to the world, redeeming the dignity of the entire ethnicity. Outsiders usually like to evaluate the Berlin Wall from the vantage point of geopolitics, competing powers, social systems, ideology and economic base, but the legacy of regular Germans is a story permeated with humanity and the freshness of life. There are sad, joyful and even funny stories, such as the first youth to try to sneak over the wall who was shot to death.

2. ["The German Wall That Fell—and the Chinese Regime That Didn't,"](#) by Jeffrey Wasserstrom at *Huffington Post*:

The following paragraphs focus on the considerable strengths and also a couple of weaknesses of a recent publication that I find it very helpful to have on hand whenever I grapple with the puzzle of the longevity of the Beijing regime: David Shambaugh's *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (University of California Press).

Written by a high-profile political scientist and published in hard cover in 2008 and then in a paperback edition this year, Shambaugh's book is a very fitting one to turn to just now, as the media is filled with retrospective looks at the last days of the Berlin Wall. Why? Because the destruction of that great Cold War symbol, more than any of the other wondrous events of 1989, inspired the erroneous belief that the days of all Communist Party regimes were about to end (they live on not just in China but also Vietnam, Cuba, and North Korea). And because Shambaugh provides one of the best accounts yet of the post-1989 reinvention of the Chinese Communist Party that has kept China a Leninist country during what many assumed would be a post-Leninist era — not just for Europe, but for the world. He sheds important light, in other words, on why, when speaking of China, we need to think not of a Leninist Extinction but rather a Leninist Mutation.

China's Communist Party emphasizes the need to think of the current regime in dualist terms, as an entity that combines rigidity and even paranoia on some matters (the "atrophy" part of the equation) with breathtaking openness and flexibility in other domains, especially economic but sometimes also cultural ones (the "adaptation" part). 2009's global China headlines have illustrated beautifully the Janus-faced nature of today's CCP. For example, there were reports last spring of the Party refusing to admit that a June 4th massacre occurred (score one for rigidity), and also accounts of the regime ramping up of security measures to ensure that the 20th anniversary of this alleged non-event was not publicly commemorated in China (score one for paranoia). But there are also stories in June about how dramatically lifestyles in China and the countries place in the global economic order have shifted since 1989. In rapid succession, just before the highly charged June 4th anniversary date, the *New York Times* ran a piece called "To Shut Off Tiananmen Talk, China Disrupts Sites" (June 2), but just after it, the same paper carried one called "What Would Mao Drive? A Little Red...Hummer"(June 7).

3. ["Chinese Netizens Leap Great Firewall of China to Mark Berlin Wall's 20th,"](#) by Aileen McCabe at *Montreal Gazette*:

Chinese netizens are marking the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall with a little anarchy of their own.

They are flying over the Great Firewall of China (GFW) in exuberant numbers to send messages to an anniversary website in Berlin that was set up to allow people to share memories of the night the wall came down, or, recommend "which walls still have to come down to make our world a better place."

The opportunity to use the forum to chip away at Beijing's heavy Internet censorship was obviously too good a chance for many Chinese netizens to ignore and they deluged the site with calls for web freedom. Until the Chinese government caught wind, that is.

On the evening of Nov. 2, 13 days after its launch, the Berlin Twitter Wall became inaccessible in China. At that point, according to organizers, 1,500 of the 3,300 tweets posted had been written in Chinese.

"Ordinary people pushed down the Berlin Wall. Let us follow suit. No guilt falls on a crowd. If we are all anti-GFW, the result will be surprising," Xiaoxiaoqiu wrote in Chinese at [www.berlintwitterwall.com](http://www.berlintwitterwall.com)

"Freedom leads the Internet and leads the people. Chinese people stood up 60 years ago. Now the Chinese need to rush to push down this wall blocking us from the world," read another Chinese-language twitter message, or tweet as they are called.

Yet another mimicked Ronald Reagan's famous plea to Mikhail Gorbachev and said: "Mr. Hu (Jintao) tear down this wall."

The censorship slowed down Chinese netizens, but not by much.

Website co-ordinator Carsten Heins said in an interview Friday: "We have about 4,700 tweets, 2,200 are in Chinese."

#### 4. "No Celebrations for the Fall of the Berlin Wall in Beijing," by Wang Zhicheng for AsiaNews:

As Europe and the world celebrate the fall of Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, in mainland China the anniversary has gone unreported. Prominent international public figures are in Berlin today to celebrate the start of a peaceful revolution that would see East Germany disappear, and by domino effect, bring about the end of Eastern Europe's Communist regimes. However, no prominent Chinese will be there.

The main news item carried by Chinese newspapers and the *Xinhua* news agency today was the pledge made by Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao to provide hungry Africa US\$ 10 billion worth in aid. The second most important story related the meeting between President Hu Jintao and top air force brass.

In the last two days, *Xinhua* has only published photos of the Berlin celebrations, without any commentary.

The only article that does mention the Wall refers to the call by the government of French President Sarkozy to bring down the barrier that divides the island of Cyprus between Greeks and Turks.

#### 5. "A New World Architecture," by George Soros at *Project Syndicate*:

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism, the world is facing another stark choice between two fundamentally different forms of organization: international capitalism and state capitalism. The former, represented by the United States, has broken down, and the latter, represented by China, is on the rise. Following the path of least resistance will lead to the gradual disintegration of the international financial system. A new multilateral system based on sounder principles must be invented. ...

China's leadership needs to be even more far-sighted than Obama is. China is replacing the American consumer as the motor of the world economy. Since it is a smaller motor, the world economy will grow slower, but China's influence will rise very fast.

For the time being, the Chinese public is willing to subordinate its individual freedom to political stability and economic advancement. But that may not continue indefinitely – and the rest of the world will never subordinate its freedom to the prosperity of the Chinese state.

As China becomes a world leader, it must transform itself into a more open society that the rest of the world is willing to accept as a world leader. Military power relations being what they are, China has no alternative to peaceful, harmonious development. Indeed, the future of the world depends on it.