

Kerry Brown, *CEO, China: The Rise of Xi Jinping*. London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2016. 262 pp. ISBN 978-1-784-53322-9.

Subscribing to a Foucauldian understanding of a capillary notion of power, the book is an exploration of power dynamics in China as personified by Xi Jinping and his relationship with the political party he heads, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In identifying the pursuit of power as a universal attribute while at the same time underscoring the need to contextualize the modes and mechanisms through which power operates, the volume is an attempt to demystify Chinese politics. The author, Kerry Brown, is Professor of Chinese Studies and Director of the Lau China Institute at King's College, London, and Associate Fellow specializing in Asia at Chatham House. As the title of the book suggests, the author describes the CCP as a business firm with Xi Jinping as its chief executive officer (CEO), although with a marked difference. It is suggested that unlike a business entity and instead analogous to a religious and cultural organization such as the Roman Catholic Church, the CCP aspires to go beyond economic parameters to inspiring devotion among the people. The central thesis of the book is that the CCP's clout in contemporary China lies in its 'emotional power', and it is by trying to resurrect the party's moral appeal that Xi intends to elicit obedience and discipline, nonetheless amidst numerous challenges. Quite clearly, Brown asserts, the power metrics have changed since the time of Mao from coercion to inculcating faith in the Party's mission.

In analysing where power is located in China and what the nature of this power is, Brown begins with the acknowledgement that since Xi's power is intimately linked to the CCP, decoding Xi's power requires understanding the CCP as the power centre. That Xi is not the ultimate power holder, despite much talked about centralization and monopolization under him is something that Brown emphasizes throughout. In his words, 'without the Party Xi is no one. But the Party, with or without Xi, has to continue. The Party is the power in China, and Xi is only powerful through it, operating within the limits it sets' (p. 228). The Party's own appeal, however, goes beyond an instrumental role in guiding China to glory, but in its portrayal of self as symbolizing 'the nation' itself. 'Almost like a state within a state, with its own universality and comprehensiveness' (p. 22) that encompasses all aspects of life, the CCP sees itself as in charge of the fate of the country. What is of significance according to Brown are the spiritual overtones in the Party's articulation of its aim, this being increasingly defined not in terms of making

the people of China materially affluent but 'satisfied and fulfilled', and to that extent resembling the Catholic Church. In other words, what is distinctive about the CCP under Xi is that its might lies in its conviction that it can steer China towards its 'idea of perfect modernity', which involves, besides the modernization goals, the restoration of the nation's honour and glory and the redressal of historical injustices.

Institutionally, it is Xi's top rank within the Party's seven-member Politburo Standing Committee – the locus of power and whose members according to Brown in some sense personify Plato's philosopher kings – that empowers Xi to exercise a hegemonic role within the Party. Mirroring the Pope, Xi's foremost task is to revitalize the organization by cleansing it of all corrupt elements and infusing a renewed sense of mission, so that the Party can claim the moral high ground in the eyes of the people and validate its continued mandate. At an individual level, Brown suggests that what lies at the base of Xi Jinping's power is Xi's portrayal of the trials and tribulations he underwent in his rise to power. It is on the basis of enormous sacrifices coupled with the knowledge and familiarity of the rural hinterland he gained that Xi seems to vindicate his position to be at the helm of power as a matter of right.

To fully understand the complexion of power that inheres in Xi and the manner in which he exercises it, Brown points to the need to disentangle the fluid matrix of relationships, ranging from family, close aides, associates and also opponents, that surrounds Xi. In an incisive analysis, the author lays bare how, contrary to the common perception of a one-man show, mapping power in contemporary China reveals the crucial and often unacknowledged role of those in and around Xi. Basing his analysis on the Foucauldian understanding of power as a 'network' and a 'relation', Brown highlights how the inevitable consequence of the need to delegate responsibilities has meant that Xi is dependent on people around him not just for implementation but also to think and articulate on his behalf. Ensuring trustworthy allies is thus crucial for him, more so in the face of persuasive critics and opponents. For Xi as an embodiment of the Party's mission, it is the attribute of loyalty that has the potential to hold the balance within a power matrix that is constantly in flux, and this explains the urgency for Xi to revive the Party's moral credibility.

It is the idealistic faith in a perfect future that can be achieved only through 'reforms' regulated by the party that grants Xi's political agenda a 'programmatically nature'. The constant need to maintain the health of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which Brown designates as 'central

government's ATMs', makes Xi's position similar to that of a company CEO. It is not 'rule of law' but 'rule by law' that defines contemporary China in so far as it ensures functional predictability. As Brown puts it, 'The Party that was once one of disruptive revolution is now the servant of peaceful evolution' (p. 147).

For Brown, in its external relations China comes across as a 'pragmatic and realist power', with other countries ranked in order of preference in 'concentric circles' around itself. In what he describes as 'a new world order with Chinese characteristics', the USA holds pre-eminence for China, and Xi's efforts are directed towards carving out a relationship of parity with it. As a supplier of technology and as a massive export market, the European Union (EU) is another region where China has stakes. The rhetoric of 'civilizational partnership' with the EU coupled with the 'new Silk Road' with central Asia, the Middle East, Russia and maritime neighbours, called the 'Belt and Road' since 2014, idealizes what Brown sees as necessarily material interests. In Xi's reckoning, a friendly external environment that ensures loyalty and predictability is the essential background condition if China is to be able to concentrate its energies on achieving its goals. Towards this, Brown discerns Xi's proclivity to project China as a cultural hub with a long history of civilization.

Brown attempts to deconstruct Xi Jinping's idea of the 'China Dream' so as to gauge how Chinese leaders imagine China 20 years down the line. Broadly, the transformation since 1978 is seen as 'a transition from ideological to material goals' to be achieved in phases, with the official goalposts in the period 2020–50 to be a full modernization of both rural and urban China. Having said that, Brown cautions that the achievement of this blueprint may be marred by potential threats that might escalate into a major crisis. Whether or not the 'China Dream' becomes a reality depends on how skilfully the leadership is able to manage some of the lingering issues and emerging concerns around stark inequalities that provoke social discord, reform of the country's administrative and political system, geopolitical issues and the urgent need to maintain a sustainable growth in gross domestic product with socially desirable outcomes.

The book comes across as a fascinating account of the nature and roots of political power in contemporary China, which is unfolded through analysing the elevation of Xi Jinping within the party apparatus. The novelty and strength of the book lies in its analytical rigour and interpretation. With an engrossing writing style and through a

gripping narrative that blends historical facts and discourses with embedded analysis, the author brilliantly captures the essence of power in contemporary China that lies in networks and discourses. Broadly, Xi has attempted to weave Chinese history of the Maoist and post-Maoist periods into a seamless web, with an idealistic faith in the teleology of history and in achievable perfect outcomes. Having said that, the author points out that the contingency that comes along with networked power dynamics makes Xi vulnerable. In a thought-provoking volume, the author succeeds in making a dent in the insularity that surrounds Chinese political culture.

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Damien Kingsbury, *Politics in Contemporary Southeast Asia: Authority, Democracy and Political Change*. New York: Routledge, 2017. 197 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-88944-6.

The region known as Southeast Asia is a unique combination of countries whose values, economies, political systems, ethnicities and languages agglutinate common points and huge distinctions. In addition to the peculiarities of the countries that make up the region, its neighbourhood makes our understanding more difficult and yet more necessary. To the west the region is bounded by India, while to the north is China. The states that make up Southeast Asia are Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam on the mainland and Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, the Philippines and Timor-Leste in the maritime area.

These countries share a European colonial heritage. This legacy has caused distortions in the constitution of the union between the countries. The region's borders are more strongly influenced by this colonial history and by geographical distribution of territory than by individual countries' identities and by their ethnicity. According Kingsbury, in the introduction of his book, this situation creates a considerable ambiguity.

Damien Kingsbury emphasizes that the region of Southeast Asia was peopled by waves of migrations. Ethnic groups from the southern region of China, together with Sino-Tibetan and Austro-Asiatic groups, and migratory movements between the islands, gave rise to a region with strong ethnic and linguistic differences. These differences were neither