

China's Elite Politics: Governance and Democratization, by Bo Zhiyue. Singapore: World Scientific, 2010. xx + 427 pp. £83.00/US\$125.00 (hard-cover).

This book is divided into two parts. In Part I: "Who Governs: China's Political Elites", Bo discusses the profiles of the ruling elite (in particular, the CCP Politburo Standing Committee and its selectorate, the Central Committee) and tries to locate power among different institutions and explain the competition between different factions. In Part II: "How to Govern: Challenges", Bo uses four cases in 2008 to illustrate the effectiveness of governance in China. I received this book with much anticipation, but unfortunately it fails to meet my expectations about work by an experienced researcher at an "internationally-esteemed institution of China studies" (Acknowledgements). From theory to research method to data, the book is plagued by a multitude of problems.

Bo begins with the claim that what makes a good government is that it governs, not whether it is democratic or authoritarian, and goes on to argue that the "times have changed. Merely 20 years ago, Francis Fukuyama declared the triumph of the Western liberal democracy as the end of history. Now we are witnessing democratic decay everywhere . . . As the world is embroiled in the most serious global economic crisis since the Great Depression as a result of the American subprime loan fiasco, a government that actually governs is in demand. The Chinese government, for what it is worth, meets such a demand" (p. 383).

Although constrained by the use of official data and by his sympathy for the government position, as an independent researcher Bo could have adopted one of two strategies to make a convincing argument: use of official data to support an unofficial argument, or use of unofficial data to support an official argument. Clearly, his claim that China's governance has been effective aligns with the official line from the Chinese government itself, but the book is trapped in circularity: Bo mobilizes mostly official data to support his argument, and thus ends up echoing the official line.

The book is obviously based on "internet research", with data predominantly from official outlets maintained by the Chinese government. In Chapter 5, 76 out of a total of 96 endnotes are from *Renmin ribao* alone! Most of the remainder are from other official news outlets. In Chapter 7, endnotes 94 to 136, 160 to 168, 175 to 201 and 207 to 292 all come from *Renmin ribao*. By far the greatest part of the information on which the book relies comes from three sources: *Renmin ribao*, Xinhua News and "gov.cn".

Bo often copies official reports without cross-examination and critical evaluation, although he does occasionally cite reports from overseas Chinese materials and (although rarely) from dissident communities. Many sentences such as the following occur: "During the entire process of rescue and relief efforts, China was open, transparent, and effective" (p. 12); "They disrupted the torch relays in

several Western cities, in particular Paris, offending not only the Chinese government but also the Chinese people around the world” (p. 13); “The Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, in the end, was indeed the best games ever in Olympic history” (p. 13); “Provincial leaders ... proved to be very effective”; “Minister Liu Zhijun’s performance during this crisis was truly outstanding” (p. 193).

While Bo takes the official data at face value, a more serious flaw is his use of an official brush to portray the critics of the Chinese government. For example, he writes: “Except for Falungong followers and Sharon Stone, a good friend of the Dalai Lama, who cursed China for the quake, the international community had nothing but sympathy for the Chinese people, and the international media had nothing but praise for the Chinese government’s relief efforts” (p. 309). Bo does not examine what Falun Gong and Sharon Stone have had to say on the matter. He does not differentiate “China” and “the Chinese people” from “the Chinese government”.

On the Tibetan issue, Bo’s bias is explicit. He writes: “Tibetans in Lhasa, Tibet and the Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, attacked police officers and civilians and set fire to government offices and businesses” (p. 199). A convincing argument would need to consider all the information on offer; information from the Tibetan government in exile and the international community suggests very different scenarios. Bo’s strong bias regarding the grievances of Tibetans, human rights advocacy and so on is evident in his use of value-laden terms such as “Tibetan independence activists”, “Tibetan separatists”, “riots” by the Tibetan Lamas and “religious fanaticism”. In this context, his quick judgements often endorse the official line on Wu Zhongxin’s supervision of the 14th Dalai Lama’s enthronement, the “serfdom system”, the so-called “peaceful liberation”, the “minor” impact of the Cultural Revolution upon Tibet, Hu Yaobang’s “policy failure” in Tibet, the involvement of CIA and NED in Tibet, the “mismatch between the Nobel Prize and the Dalai Lama” and so on. He is also meticulous in finding inaccuracies in the number of deaths of Tibetans (“the holocaust”) given by the Tibetan government in exile, but does not discuss the lack of reliable information from official sources, and blames the victims for their inaccuracy in collecting the number of their deaths! As he discusses “the abolition of serfdom” in 1961, he concludes: “Mao Zedong’s accomplishment in this regard, therefore, may be hailed as a great progress for mankind as much as (if not more than) Abraham Lincoln’s achievement in the emancipation of slaves in the United States” (p. 221).

Bo uses the year 2008 as a good example to illustrate the accomplishments of the Chinese Communist Party in governance. He is lavish with references such as the “greatest successes in history” or “miracle in history”. However, he excludes the Sanlu crisis, the Charter 08 Movement and the impact of the 2008 Financial Crisis on China. In his discussion about the snowstorm that year, he does not mention the stampede and the deaths in Guangzhou; in his discussion on the Sichuan earthquake, he does not mention the jerry-built school buildings

and the deaths of students; and of course, there is no mention of Huang Qi, Tan Zuoren and Ai Weiwei, their activities and arrests. In his discussion on the Beijing Olympiad, there is no mention of the killing of an American on the first day after the opening ceremony, or the experience of the old lady who applied for permission to protest but was sent to a labor camp.

This book raises a question common to all China specialists: should we grant the assumption of innocence equally to both the state and its victims, or apply stricter scrutiny to the official discourse than to the narrative of the weak? Bo here is generous to the biggest and longest-ruling party in the world, but harsh to the weak, the marginalized and the voiceless, despite documented evidence that this ruling party has been untruthful and brutal toward its people for decades.

Bo has been rather self-referential in conceptualizing his work, building his analysis upon previous work within this trilogy. As in the previous book, the two key concepts, the power index and the cohesion index, are problematic, the most serious issue being that of fungibility. He gives points to different institutions and positions, and combines them to indicate the power of these institutions and individuals. Following such a mechanical route would actually make it difficult to assess Deng Xiaoping's power or explain Xi Jinping's ascendancy. Bo's discussion of Chinese factional politics, especially his differentiation of "factions" and "factional groups", does not clarify, but rather confuses. It is debatable whether the CCYL (Chinese Communist Youth League) should be treated as a coherent and meaningful faction after the CCYL became a training ground for the Communist leaders in peacetime, but Bo makes the CCYL the most powerful faction and Li Keqiang the most promising successor to the position of General Secretary.

In conclusion, this book raises concern for the maturity and integrity of China studies as an academic discipline in social sciences, if China scholars easily adopt the position of cheering bandwagoner over critical thinker to embrace a rising but still authoritarian China.

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State and Civil Society: The Chinese Perspective, edited by Deng Zhenglai.
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(hardcover).

As China globalizes, its scholars and intellectuals are no longer content to be passive purveyors of the discourse surrounding important issues and trends such as global governance or development. They want an active role in shaping that discourse, using theories and models drawn from China's own development