

## **Sujian Guo, *Chinese Politics and Government: Power, Ideology, and Organization***

**(London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 342 p. \$50.95  
Paperback; \$160 Hardback**

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Among the numerous textbooks on Chinese politics and government available to students, Sujian Guo's book stands out as a unique and provocative one. As its subtitle indicates, this textbook uses the core or essence of Chinese communist ideology to explain the foundation and exercise of political power and the organizing principle for institutions. This text is provocative because it refutes the epidemic of wishful thinking among China scholars that ideology has lost its relevance to Chinese politics. The author argues, "(T)he party, the state, and the ideology are totally intertwined, and the party's political power is intertwined with ideological power" (p. 8).

Western scholars of China studies predominantly predict that China will be "more like us" over time. In China, scholars offer a diametrically opposed argument that China has created a unique model of political economy. Counter to these two perspectives, Guo argues unequivocally that China differs fundamentally from the West not because of its recent economic changes, but due to its classic communist core. By applying an essentialist approach and linking to classic communist studies, the author believes that out of many competing theoretical models the totalitarian communist model, or a Leninist party-state, best describes the current condition of Chinese conservative politics and its totalitarian nature. The author is ingenious in borrowing two concepts, the hard core (essential component) and the protective belt (operative action means), from Lakatos to explain that changes in Chinese politics and society tend to be in the latter rather than the former. The author states, "Philosophical absolutism, official ideology and the party-state are the most fundamental core features that account for the origins, dynamics, and essences of the Chinese political system while the action means of operative features account for its functioning. The

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fundamental features or hard core must always be there for the Chinese communist state to sustain regime legitimacy; otherwise, it would have been transformed into something else” (p. 30–31).

Guided by this model, the author examines the following major themes: political development, political ideology, political institutions, legal and legislative systems, Chinese society, Chinese economy and foreign policy. The author convincingly contends that continuity exists between traditional Chinese society and communist society, as well as between the Mao era and post-Mao era. The same ubiquitous and powerful logic of philosophical absolutism, ideology and party-state has been running continuously through all the institutional domains and issue areas under discussion in the text. This text catalyzes readers to reflect upon the nature of Chinese politics and its trends based upon what the Party wants, not what the outsiders wish. I believe this book will help both established scholars and young students to understand, analyze and perhaps predict Chinese politics with the Party’s ideological will and determination in mind.

However, this book has one major flaw in that it skips the discussion of the reform decade under Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. This conspicuous absence is indicated by the fact that the index supplies no entry either for Hu Yaobang or Zhao Ziyang. If this is intentional, this absence helps the construction of a tightly coherent Leninist party-state (“one continuous line: Mao-Deng-Jiang-Hu”, p. 135). However, it is misleading of the author to dismiss other theoretical models (such as factionalism or fragmented authoritarianism) too easily. To what extent that the Chinese communist system has had the potential to produce its own Gorbachev and to introduce genuine democratization is worth a discussion in the context of Hu-Zhao decade. This discussion would help readers view the post-Deng era as a messy and conflict-prone process, instead of presenting perhaps an oversimplified image of a linear process. It would also provide a better baseline by which to assess any change in Chinese ideology and policy over the past decade. Excluding the tragic events under Mao (such as the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution) and the traumatic one under Deng (such as the student movement in 1989) that caused systemic breakdown and crisis, scholars are at a loss to understand the dynamics and pathways for the course of communist rule and possible transitions for China in the future. If one believes, as I do, that the essentialist Leninist party-state is unsustainable in the long run, what are the pathways of change? Although the text would have been enhanced by this discussion, it is a well-researched, comprehensive, interesting book with theoretical cogency and a provocative argument.

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