

Illustration by Valentina Verc

BOOKS

Books for One Hundred Years

A spate of new books has come out to mark the CCP's centennial. These are the ones worth reading.

BY ALEC ASH — AUGUST 29, 2021

Last month the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) celebrated one hundred years of existence, having survived its abusive childhood, war-steeped twenties, murderous middle-age and prosperous silver years. The Party has engrained itself so deeply into the terroir of contemporary China that the two are often difficult to separate.

A spate of books has come out to mark the anniversary, and in this bimonthly column we're using the occasion to recommend a few of them. At the top of the list is a historical narrative by Harvard's [Tony Saich](#) that lays out how the Party evolved, and why "as an authoritarian leader I would want to learn from China." Also on the list are profiles of the leaders and other figures instrumental in the party's long period of success; studies of its journey to market capitalism, surveillance control, and geopolitical clout; as well as a reminder of the historical crimes that its house is built upon.

The One to Read

From Rebel to Ruler: One Hundred Years of the Chinese Communist Party by
Tony Saich

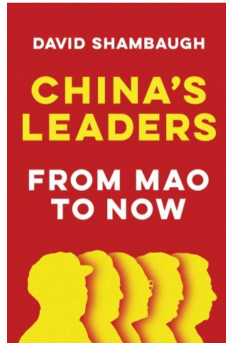


When the CCP held its first meeting, in Shanghai near the end of July 1921, there was little indication that it would come to rule China one day — let alone after the existential threats of Chiang Kaishek's communist purges and the ordeals of the Long March. Yet here we are: the CCP has ruled China for the last 72 years, with apparently broad popular support for much of the time. This historical account of how China got to this point is one of the best and clearest treatments of the subject to date. Divided into two parts — 'How the East Was Won' before 1949, and 'How the East Is Ruled' after it — academic Tony Saich walks us through the myriad transformations the Party and its members have been through: from rebels to survivalists, revolutionaries

to crushers of rebellion, and finally to socialist capitalists. With clarity and attention to detail — albeit without getting too bogged down — this is a truly authoritative text on one of the most successful political parties in history.

The Shortlist

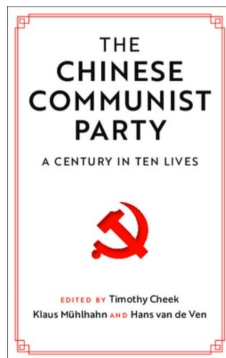
China's Leaders: From Mao to Now by David Shambaugh



Topping the shortlist is a biographical approach to the history of the CCP by scholar [David Shambaugh](#), profiling its five paramount leaders over the decades: Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping. Each had or has a different leadership style (tyrant, pragmatist, bureaucrat, technocrat and strongman), and Shambaugh takes pains to stress the discontinuity of their helmsmanships as well as what they might have in common. He also incorporates elements of 'leadership studies' to dissect the differing personalities and priorities of the five, attempting to get under the skin of their decisions in order to show how they changed both China and the Party.

July 1, 2021 | Polity; 1st edition. \$30. | [Buy.](#)

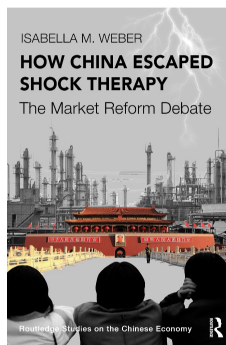
The Chinese Communist Party: A Century in Ten Lives Edited by Timothy Cheek, Klaus Mühlhahn, and Hans van de Ven



This collection of chapter-long profiles, by a range of respected China experts, takes a more original approach to telling the story of the CCP. The ten individuals in question — one per decade, from the 1920s to the 2010s — are not central leaders (with the exceptions of Zhao Ziyang and Jiang Zemin) but lesser known figures from Party history. There is a Dutch communist who was instrumental in the formation of the CCP; a journalist expelled from the Party by Mao; a silver screen actress persecuted during the Cultural Revolution; Liu Shaoqi's wife; even a Peruvian Maoist guerilla leader. Fascinating reading, all the more so for its unusual perspectives on historical events that shaped China.

May 6, 2021 | Cambridge University Press. \$79.99. | [Buy.](#)

How China Escaped Shock Therapy: The Market Reform Debate by Isabella Weber

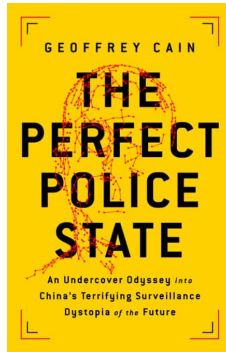


Arguably the most crucial inflection point in the history of the CCP was not its victory in the civil war, or Mao's socialist revolution that followed, but what happened after Mao died and the nation transitioned toward market economics under Deng Xiaoping. Most history books portray that as a sudden sea-change in approach, but [Isabella Weber's](#) insightful study lifts the lid on the internal debate that took place over how quickly or slowly to open up the economy. The path Beijing followed of gradual marketization, avoiding the titular 'shock therapy' of a sudden cliff-edge, enabled the Party to land eventually on its current model of Leninist capitalism — although that economic debate still applies today.

May 27, 2021 | Routledge; 1st edition. \$39.95 | [Buy.](#)

The Perfect Police State: An Undercover Odyssey into China's Terrifying Surveillance Dystopia of the Future

Geoffrey Cain

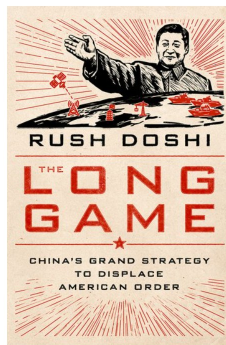


'Orwellian' is a word that gets thrown around a lot when people talk about China in dystopian terms. For a while, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* was the better literary analogy for the nation — its populace appeased by the coma of consumerism — but in Xinjiang, Orwell himself couldn't have imagined better the extent and depth of the surveillance state. Journalist Geoffrey Cain gives us a riveting account of the realities on the ground in China's huge western province, based on his own reporting and accounts from exiles, with a single story of escape at the heart of it. His prose leaps off the page, and brings to life the human cost when Big Brother is always watching.

June 29, 2021 | PublicAffairs. \$17.99 | [Buy.](#)

The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order

Rush Doshi



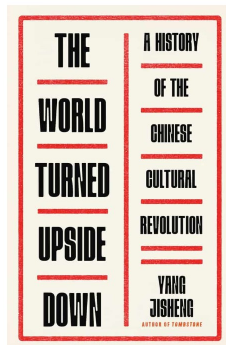
Having picked at the past and pondered the present, I would be remiss not to include a book that discusses the future. [Rush Doshi](#), a foreign policy expert now on President Biden's China team, lays out the big picture of Beijing's ambitions to "displace an established hegemon like the United States" and its strategies to do so "short of war." Grounding his analysis of China's intentions in an understanding of its history, he argues that China aims both to 'blunt' America's dominance in the military, political and economic spheres, and also to 'build' its own rival institutions and guarantees to other nations. A compelling take on what China wants, and what America can do about it.

July 8, 2021 | Oxford University Press. \$27.95. | [Buy.](#)

In Case You Missed It

The World Turned Upside Down: A History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution

by Yang Jisheng, translated by Stacy Mosher and Guo Jian



No list of new books on the Chinese Communist Party would be complete without remembrance of the historical atrocities committed under its watch. Independent Chinese historian Yang Jisheng, whose previously translated work *Tombstone* recounted the famine that followed the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s, gives the same careful treatment to Mao's Cultural Revolution in this recent translation. Comprehensive in scope and based on primary sources — including conversations with those people who lived through it — he recounts in close detail a decade-long period of chaos and class warfare that the latest incarnation of the Party would like its people and the world to forget.

January 19, 2021 | Farrar, Straus and Giroux. \$22. | [Buy.](#)



Alec Ash is the books editor for *The Wire*. He is the author of *Wish Lanterns*. His work has also appeared in *The Economist*, *BBC*, *SupChina*, and *Foreign Policy*. [@aleccash](#)

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COVER STORY



Pole Position

BY EYCK FREYMAN

In public, Chinese diplomats and climate negotiators deny that they see any link between climate change and geopolitics. But there is a deeply cynical consensus within China's academic and policy communities that climate change creates geopolitical opportunities that China can exploit — and must exploit before its rivals do. Greenland was the proof of concept for this strategy. And it caught the U.S. flat-footed.

THE BIG PICTURE



Transsion's Triumph

BY GARRETT O'BRIEN

A look at Transsion's monumental growth, unique marketing strategies and future growth potential.

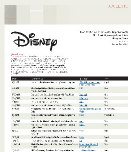
Q & A



Jörg Wuttke on China's Self-Destruction

BY ANDREW PEOPLE

The EU Chamber of Commerce in China president talks about China's self-inflicted problems; how he gets away with being so outspoken; and why he believes in China's comeback gene.



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