

Willy Wo-Lap Lam: Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping. Renaissance, Reform, or Retrogression?

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With his recent publication *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping: Renaissance, Reform, or Retrogression?*, Willy Lam is presenting the first book-length analysis in English of the political career of Xi Jinping, his rise to power and his ideological beliefs. Lam is a renowned China watcher working at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and is among others publishing on elite politics in China. This analysis of the fifth leadership generation and its core Xi Jinping is not Lam's first piece of scholarly work on Chinese leaders: he already published analyses of the third and fourth leadership generations with their cores Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, respectively.

His most recent work on Chinese politics under Xi Jinping provides a compelling analysis of recent political trends in China with regard to political and economic reforms, in foreign policy as well as ideological developments. This analysis is based on in-depth discussions of the rise to and consolidation of power of Xi Jinping, his networks and factional power base, the princelings, and his ideological beliefs that are influencing his political rhetoric and actions.

Lam argues that Xi Jinping is an inherently cautious and conservative political leader whose overarching objective is to preserve the status of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as "perennial ruling party". He therefore sees Xi to be a leader who is not bound to come up with major innovations, neither in the ideological sphere nor when it comes to economic let alone political reforms. Lam characterises Xi as a leader lacking novel ideas particularly in the sphere of institutional innovation and political reform and insisting on keeping a tight grip of the party over any kind of economic

reforms without willingness to surrender the initiative for reforms to the market. According to Lam, Xi is paranoid about the possibility of the CCP suffering the same fate as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and hence believes it necessary to keep a tight hold on political, economic and also ideological developments.

Particularly in the ideological sphere, Lam describes Xi as a leader who is rather conservative in his beliefs and engineers a return to Maoist orthodoxy and holds high the "theoretical system of Marxism and socialism with Chinese characteristics". With regard to Xi's ideological concept of the "Chinese Dream", Lam sees it as being in line with the concentration of power at the top of the party-state hierarchy in the form of superagencies like the Central National Security Commission and the Central Leading Group on Comprehensively Deepening Reform since he argues that this concentrated and centralised power is seen as necessary for the realisation of the "Chinese Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese People". This re-institutionalised centralised power and control does according to Lam also fit in with Xi's desire to preserve the CCP's status as "perennial ruling party" and his attempt to keep the party in absolute control. However, he thereby circumvents Deng Xiaoping's legacy of collective leadership and carefully balances factional politics at the top of the Communist Party, particularly, as Lam argues, since the rivalling Communist Youth League faction has been marginalised in terms of positions and influence in both the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee.

In order to analyse Xi Jinping's political orientations, ideological beliefs and policy decisions, Willy Lam repeatedly refers to Xi's factional power base, his networks and political experiences of earlier years. He argues that Xi's main power base is the faction of princelings, a large group of offspring of revolutionary veterans and high-ranking and powerful old party cadres. The

main interest that according to Lam unites this group is to preserve the status quo with its numerous privileges for this "red aristocracy" lacking other common traits that usually define political factions.

Overall, Lam's analysis of Xi Jinping's rise to power, his political and ideological beliefs and his recent policy initiatives describe a conservative and cautious political leader striving to preserve his personal political power and the strength and influence of the CCP. Lam does not see Xi to be a leader of whom a lot can be expected with regard to political and economic development and innovations on the Chinese path of reforms. Making reference to Andrew Nathan's concept of "resilient authoritarianism", he describes Xi Jinping's model of ruling as "non-resilient authoritarianism" incapable of innovating or evolving, but rather harshly cracking down on civil society and any kind of perceived dissent. Lam describes this trend as "the closing of the Chinese mind".

The analysis of Chinese politics in the era of Xi Jinping that Lam presents in this book is a very detailed and compelling one, drawing on extensive, mainly Chinese-language primary material. Lam bases his analysis on policy documents, speeches, writings of Xi Jinping and media coverage in Chinese media, thereby developing an account not only of Xi's personality and his political beliefs, but also of the implications for the future of Chinese political and economic development that these beliefs imply. By doing so, he develops a very convincing and well-argued vision of China's potential future under a Xi-administration and produces a book that should be read by political scientists and analysts working on China.

The only weakness of Lam's chain of arguments concerns his description of the faction of princelings and is a point that he indirectly admits himself when stating that the princelings do not share any other commonalities than the desire to preserve the status quo and their privileges. Although this group does not fulfil the classic definition of

a faction, Lam, like many others, nevertheless treats them like one and thereby fails to address the potential of princeling rivalry and inner-party cleavages along the lines of economic privileges and not necessarily core political and ideological beliefs and the influence this could have on political stability and the preservation of the party's status as "perennial ruling party". Lam's analysis provides a very detailed, well-researched and -argued basis for further studies in this direction though.

Carolin Kautz

Jean Ma: Sounding the Modern Woman. The Songstress in Chinese Cinema

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Der Großteil der Bücher über chinesische Filmgeschichte konzentriert sich auf das Shanghai-Kino der 20er und 30er Jahre, das festlandchinesische Kino ab der fünften Generation oder die Martial-Arts- und Action-Filme Hongkongs. Das bemerkenswerte Nachkriegskino Hongkongs mit seinen Komödien und Melodramen wird leider oft vernachlässigt. Dabei kann ebenso leicht übersehen werden, wie die Figur der Sängerin von der frühen Tonfilmära Shanghais an schon sehr präsent ist und in Hongkong dann ganz in den Mittelpunkt rückt. Die „Songstress“ ist sowohl eine reale und industriell vermarktete Medienfigur als auch eine fiktive Figur innerhalb eines Films. Ihre Ursprünge reichen zurück zur Kurtisane, später wurde sie der Inbegriff der modernen Frau.

Jean Ma liefert in ihrem wohlformulierten, teilweise sehr theoretischen und äußerst kenntnisreichen Buch „Sounding the modern woman“ zu diesem Thema sowohl repräsentative, detaillierte Szenen- und Musikanalysen als auch die allgemeinen filmgeschichtlichen, musikwissenschaftlichen, politischen und ökonomischen Einord-