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China's future is arguably the most consequential question in global affairs. Having enjoyed unprecedented levels of growth, China is at a critical juncture in the development of its economy, society, polity, national security, and international relations. The direction the nation takes at this turning point will determine whether it stalls or continues to develop and prosper.

Will China be successful in implementing a new wave of transformational reforms that could last decades and make it the world's leading superpower? Or will its leaders shy away from the drastic changes required because the regime's power is at risk? If so, will that lead to prolonged stagnation or even regime collapse? Might China move down a more liberal or even democratic path? Or will China instead emerge as a hard, authoritarian and aggressive superstate?

In this new book, David Shambaugh argues that these potential pathways are all possibilities - but they depend on key decisions yet to be made by China's leaders, different pressures from within Chinese society, as well as actions taken by other nations. Assessing these scenarios and their implications, he offers a thoughtful and clear study of China's future for all those seeking to understand the country's likely trajectory over the coming decade and beyond.

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From Reader Review China's Future for online ebook

The Uprightman says

Shambaugh's 'China's Future' addresses the question at the core of modernisation theory: do the forces unleashed by a market economy drive a political movement towards democracy? He outlines four possible paths China future will take depending on officials' appetite for reform:

Neo-Totalitarianism, Hard Authoritarianism, Soft Authoritarianism and Semi-Democracy.

Shambaugh uses pronouncements made in the November 2013 Third Plenum as the baseline for measuring substantive reform progress. The declaration to grant 'market forces' a large role in China's economy is found wanting, and the problem is being compounded by current political centralisation and increased authoritarianism. Unless economic and political reform is undertaken – that is, more market-based and democratic-influenced – the current trajectory is forming a witches brew Shambaugh believes will result in: probable economic stagnation through debt accumulation, an inability to fully transition from investment to consumption-led economic growth, continued declining efficiency in credit, and an inability to unleash China's full capability for innovation.

If China is unable to fully harness economic growth potential and persistently generate wealth, the rank and file will become more vocal in their demands for greater freedoms and quality State-provided services that are typical in developed countries. China's market-driven economic reforms must be accompanied by loosening systemic political control over society. If the CCP are unwilling or unable to follow this trajectory, Shambaugh predicts eventual regime decay or collapse over the long term.

Worryingly, the current government is showing diminished capacity or visible appetite to undertake political reform. The ideological conviction of influential CCP officials in the current administration and a convergence of domestic events have stifled the Party's enthusiasm for releasing political control. Shambaugh argues that differing conceptions of the Soviet Union's collapse is the fundamental point of contention between opposing political factions within the CCP, and the core issue which shapes their respective visions for China's future. Conservative (Leftist) CCP elements hold that the Brezhnev-instigated and Gorbachev-accelerated economic reforms were the fundamental cause for regime collapse; Liberal-minded officials emphasise political institutions' decay and inadaptability – not the implementation of market-based economic policies – as the source of downfall.

Judging China's current administration as Leftist and 'hard authoritarian', Shambaugh believes that the current path will yield little in terms of reform on either political or economic fronts.

Although Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin's liberal economic and political policies greatly contributed to national prosperity, four factors between 2008-2009 have resulted in a return to political authoritarianism and nullification of their respective reformist agendas: riots in Lhasa and Urumqi during 2008; the coalescence of the Party propaganda apparatus, internal security organs, the SOE sector, military and paramilitary into a unified political front; persuasive liberal reformers like Zeng Qinghong (who Shambaugh sees as the mastermind behind much of the contemporary political reform) manoeuvred from positions of influence (leaving the allegedly ineffectual Hu Jintao open to manipulation from Conservative factions); and hubris resulting from a perceived superiority in the 'Beijing Consensus' after the GFC. Powerful players within the Party 'made the case for abandoning the political reform program, reversing the main elements of it, and instituting tighten security and Party controls in its place.'

This leftist lurch has intensified under the Xi administration, resulting in repression of NGOs, regime-critical academics, lawyers and civil society organisations, and increased internet censorship. Furthermore, the bureaucracy is paralysed in its ability to undertake meaningful reform or dynamic policy solutions through fear of being implicated in Xi and Wang Qishan's anti-corruption drive.

On an optimistic note, the leadership reshuffle at the 19th Party Congress in 2017 may clear the way for liberal-minded reformers. Four of the seven politburo standing committee and thirteen of the twenty-five politburo members are due for retirement due to age requirements. Shambaugh judges that nine of the twelve who will remain in office have 'politically reformist records'.

Shambaugh is certainly part of the China-watching camp that is sceptical of China's current global power, and his book paints a rather dire picture. However, one factor he has neglected to examine in detail (understandable because of length) is the CCP's skill for adaptability. Bruce Dickson's publication 'Wealth and Power: The Communist Party's Embrace of China's Private Sector' has demonstrated that the CCP has been resourceful in their adaptability and skilled at bringing capitalist forces into the fold. Further, current research suggests that the populace's desire for political participation in China is rather low. Although this may change over time as social and economic malaise exacerbates, if there is no groundswell aspiration towards representative government the CCP will continue to muddle along. Time will tell if China's dynastic cycle is a remnant of the imperial era or an enduring cultural thread.

Economic Problems:

GDP growth - secular stagnation; middle income trap; wage rises and associated labour costs; an economic model based upon fixed asset investment and low cost manufacturing is delivering lower returns; industrial overcapacity; SOE reform is almost non-existent (flirting with asset sales, mixed ownership, and operational separation), however, ultimate objective is to strengthen SOEs into industry giants despite the fact that they are globally uncompetitive and consuming disproportionate amounts of state finance.

Innovation is the silver bullet to solve China's economic woes. In terms of feasibility, the questions remain, however, as to how wide and deep it will penetrate the economy, and across which sectors? The type of wide-scale innovation trumpeted by Beijing cannot occur without education reform.

Financial reform – banks need to decouple from the Party; tighten lending requirements based on ROI; better lending accessibility for SMEs and private enterprises; capital market reform; and develop RMB internationalisation

Social Problems:

Internal security expenditure larger than defence budget; cracking down on public sphere; Tibet, Hong Kong, Xinxiang, Taiwan all have the potential to provoke instability; income inequality is widening; lack of public services demanded by increasingly affluent classes; adjustment to urbanisation.

Political Problems:

Older influential liberal economic reformers have retired from office. The current trend is towards personalised and centralised decision-making, and conservatism where state will play a larger role in all aspects of life.

Hadrian says

The field of China Studies is littered with the corpses of those who have made wrong predictions. Shambaugh knows that no one has a crystal ball to see into the future, and he knows enough to list some existing trends in Chinese politics, and a list of possible outcomes for political reform.

Shambaugh takes a short, yet comprehensive overview of the many policy challenges facing China today - the environment, employment, the banking system, financial transparency, social services, demographics, foreign relations, corruption, the 'volatile periphery' of Taiwan and Hong Kong, etc., etc. Some of these are unique to Chinese circumstances, but there are certain political characteristics - a East Asian 'developmental state', as well as a Leninist one-party state, which have other historical examples. These are not necessarily beneficial for the reforms which would best address these issues. China is not doomed, but these do not help.

From this, he emphasizes the possible trajectories of political reform. The current set of restrictions on civil society and crackdowns are a form of path dependency, and it will be difficult to get away from the current state of 'hard authoritarianism'. The worst extreme is 'neo-Totalitarianism', which is similar to China from 1989-1992, which cuts off China from the rest of the world and institutes a series of draconian controls which limit foreign investment and economic ties. A better case would be 'soft authoritarianism', which loosens up some party control and restores some freedom of action to civil society and local democratic reforms. This was China from 1998-2008. Even better would be a 'semi-democratic' reform, which resembles more of Singapore than what China is today. Such a state would create an economy and society unseen in world history, but that is also an unlikely outcome.

An astute and reasoned book on the Chinese political system, and what the reforms of the past decade imply for the next few years.

Andrew Carr says

Why does the public taxpayer fund academics? The answer is so that scholars can write books like this.

While increasing numbers of social scientists believe that we need to study the human world as we do the physical - dispassionately, microscopically, and numerically - Shambaugh's book is an important demonstration of the public value of scholars.

In this short and easily readable book, Shambaugh argues that unless the political system of China is reformed, the economic and social systems will stagnate and ultimately collapse. He is forthright in his view that only by moving to a more open political system, will China be able to achieve the economic reform it needs, and in turn avert the social and regional crises that seem to loom.

Shambaugh identifies four possible pathways for China. These are Hard Authoritarianism (the current path since 2009), Neo-Totalitarianism (the direction many fear Xi is taking the country), Soft-Authoritarianism (the 1998-2008 path) and Semi-Democracy (think Singapore but with Chinese characteristics).

Across four major chapters, the author reviews the economic, social, political and regional position of China. As one of the West's leading experts on China with dozens of books under his belt, each chapter is a strong summary of the key issues, core trends, and major debates and issues at the heart of the policy and scholarly

debates.

In each chapter, Shambaugh returns to his four models and assesses how they would help or hinder China in addressing the almost overwhelming problems it faces to move from the middle income trap to a truly 21st century economy, to manage its internal harmony, declining demographics, struggle to create public institutions like the rule of law and geopolitical challenges.

While keeping the book short was a necessity, I would have liked to see more by Shambaugh on the problems a more democratic (and thus populist) China could pose. Particularly in the international sphere. No doubt the author could reply he didn't do so because the semi-democracy path seems the most unlikely of the four today, but given it is where his sympathies most clearly lie, a reckoning with its own problems would have been welcome.

This book doesn't separate the dependent, independent and intervening variables so as to make a specific scientific claim about China's future. That outcome is of course unknown and unknowable. Yet so much of our public debate, policy choices, spending and prognosis for the world is based on having a sense about what the answer is. Getting the answer wrong would cost more than the total education budget for the United States this century. In providing four decades worth of experience to help inform readers, Shambaugh is proving the public have gotten value for money from their investment in scholarship.

Eddie Choo says

Good overview of China

Author takes a good view of China. Just thought that the consequences of hard authoritarianism could have been fleshed out more. And should also acknowledge the risks of both soft authoritarianism and semi-democracy. Both paths are not without risks.

Youguanqun says

not bad. but nothing new. just cliché. sorry to say that. but its true.

Anders Hjortshøj says

David Shambaugh is a well-known pessimist in debates on Chinese politics. While he recognizes that it is wisest to expect the unexpected when it comes to China, he makes a convincing case that the current economic, political and social model is unsustainable in even the medium term.

In less than two hundred pages, he offers a fairly accessible runthrough of China's stunning transformation since 1978, the numerous bottlenecks it currently faces, and four scenarios for its future development - in itself no mean feat.

The first two of these four scenarios are the most likely: Hard Authoritarianism (what we are currently seeing under Xi Jinping) or Soft Authoritarianism (what was tentatively pushed by reform-minded cadres between

1998 and 2008). Continuing with the former would do little to improve the acute crises of debt, an ageing population, anger in ethnic minority regions, a worried Asian neighbourhood etc. etc. And yet, this seems to be the course that Xi and his associated factions are most inclined to continue at all costs.

Should reformists maneuver their way to a position of strength at the Party Congress next year, it may be possible to return to a course of Soft Authoritarianism. By allowing some breathing space for civil society, higher education, and other key sectors for China's future, this could allow the communist system to survive longer and perhaps even carry out the necessary reforms to once again radically transform the economy.

Shambaugh does not discount the faint possibility of a slide toward Neo-Totalitarianism (akin to the post-Tiananmen repression or even the darkest days of the Mao era) or a transition to Semi-Democracy (akin to Singapore, with a clearly dominant party, but one that submits to genuine limits on its power and allows a slightly more than symbolic opposition). These scenarios, however, he judges to be exceedingly unlikely in the current climate.

This is not the definitive account of Chinese politics, nor does it claim to be. But it is a very good way to get an overview of how China got here and where it might go next.

Trish says

This book was named among *The Economist's* Best Books of the Year, but if you've ever heard that end-of-year podcast, you'd know that list is not exactly discriminating. However, I did not know that when I ordered this, and I also did not know that *The Economist* also named Shambaugh's 2013 *China Goes Global* as Best of the Year. Frankly, I am not impressed, either with this book or *The Economist's* list.

This book was actually a speech that Shambaugh had been schlepping around various outlets for a couple of years until he discovered that, with a little tweaking, he could actually sell it as a book. It is, thankfully, brief. That is the best thing that can be said about it.

Shambaugh is an academic who, although he has been studying China for forty years, has never actually put himself in the leader's place, and therefore cannot adequately convey the feeling Chinese leaders must have of sitting atop an active volcano, knowing changes are necessary, and handling some while stomping out flames as their pants catch on fire.

Shambaugh is dismissive and arch when contemplating the difficulties and constraints facing China's leaders, while not for a moment considering that *every* country, even the "free market" democracies in the West, are facing enormous issues with crippling debt, infrastructure, wage-gap, health delivery systems, education and innovation. I really hate his smug attitude.

Now that I have gotten that off my chest, it's a wonder that we still have under-innovating academics like Shambaugh still peddling their tired lectures at universities and think tanks when the world has actually changed in forty years, and we can sit around and discuss, with innovation and rationality, what one would do if one were facing China's issues, without the attitude. Since the West clearly doesn't have it all worked out perfectly, why couldn't we try to imagine a system that uses some state control and unleashes the creativity of the populace without allowing the wide gaps that appear in, say, America?

I find it astonishing that Shambaugh is worried China's universities are not good enough or that China doesn't have enough innovation. China is going to *eat our lunch* in twenty-five years, as anyone who has spent any time there will be happy to tell you. The entire economy has enormous vitality because these folks have known scarcity, and are extremely cunning in knowing how to get by. More than I have ever seen

anywhere, it is a nation of entrepreneurs. The leaders' problem stems from trying to keep it all under control.

Which is the best thing to address first? Deregulating the banking and financial system will cause a vast economic unbalancing, but not doing so is also a problem. Corruption may be endemic, no matter whether leaders are appointed or elected, or how free or tight the central control of the business relationships. Addressing it straight on, and sharing its devastating impacts via a freer press may actually bring more social goods.

The dissidents? They clearly care enough to speak out and see things that the center is avoiding. Rather than jailing them, put them to work coming up with solutions with the brightest poli-sci students, giving them real-life constraints and limited scope, e.g., a province may privatize their largest glass factory. What are the political, social, economic implications, and can it be done discretely within one province? How can the enormous job of introducing needed changes be done piecemeal if moving one piece shifts an entire economy?

Yes, China has to deal with rising expectations. Don't we all? Shambaugh raises all the moving pieces China must address, but he seems out of touch. His lecture is drowning in very old-fashioned platitudes and attitudes towards "the communists" and he has no apparent enthusiasm for the experiment China undertook in their revolution and since. This is exciting stuff, folks, but you'd never know it from Shambaugh.

The most interesting observations were made by other authors that Shambaugh was quoting:

"Thus, I see China as currently *stagnating* in what scholar Minxin Pei very astutely and presciently described in 2006 (!) as a 'trapped transition.' In this wishful and visionary book [*Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy*], Pei...describes...economic foundation is inevitably constrained by its political superstructure. Without fundamental and far-reaching political reforms, China's economy will stagnate and the regime may well collapse...I did not agree with his argument at the time, but have come around to agree with him now. The reason for my changed assessment is that *China has changed in the interim.*"

Good god, folks. Just read Minxin Pei. I plan to. He has a new book just out, called China's Crony Capitalism.

The other legitimately interesting idea Shambaugh tells us about is a book published in 1989 (!) by Zbigniew Brzezinski, called *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century*. In it Brzezinski apparently discusses communist party-states in the "post-communist authoritarianism" stage:

"In this phase, the communist leadership loses confidence, evinces a deep insecurity, and tries to reassert control."

I don't think China is in this stage, but just about anything Brzezinski writes about the Soviets is interesting, and this one sounds just about as relevant as you're going to get.

Alexia Armstrong says

Great read for now, with some interesting analysis of China's political paths, but will probably be outdated in two years.

Fernanda says

Very much committed to democratic peace theory.

Nha says

T??ng lai Trung Qu?c ph? thu?c b?n l?a ch?n c? b?n mà David Shambaugh g?i là Toàn tr? m?i (si?t ch?t h?n n?a), Chuyên ch? r?n (ti?p t?c nh? hi?n nay), Chuyên ch? m?m (n?i l?ng ki?m soát) ho?c Dân ch? n?a v?i (cho tranh c? t??ng ??i t? do nh?ng b?o ??m quy?n l?c c?a ??ng c?ng s?n). Tác gi? phân tích các m?t kinh t?, xã h?i và th? ch?, d? báo tình hình phát tri?n theo m?i k?ch b?n nêu trên.

Dharma Agastia says

A timely and insightful commentary on current affairs in China from an expert who has been researching China for a long time. It's not heavy in theory, as I initially expected; rather, Shambaugh uses only relevant tools of analysis in political economy and international relations to provide his projection on China's future. He argues that if China were to avoid decay, it would need to move to a soft authoritarian system or a semi-democracy (as all democracies are unique). Shambaugh shows a proficient use of data and information and synthesises them into an argument that's easy to follow and engaging.

Pratik Dash says

'China is a sleeping giant. Let her sleep, for when she wakes she will move the world.' – Napoleon Bonaparte

This haruspication of Le Emperor Napoleon turned out to be uncannily prescient in light of China's meteoric rise from an impoverished backwater and a chiefly agricultural nation in the 1950's to its present position as an industrial and manufacturing titan, the world's largest trading power, the leading economy on PPP basis, and arguably one of the foci of the global economy.

Predicated on this awesome economic prowess and its immense hard power, one may presume that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) –whose stern stewardship is the cardinal reason behind the multifarious changes brought about in China –has a firm grasp on the reins of power. It also seems highly plausible that under its auspices, China would inexorably supplant the USA as the superpower and the lynchpin of the world economy. Earning this cachet would be especially apposite since China already refers to itself as the middle kingdom.

Not so fast, says David Shambaugh, an eminent political scientist and professor at the George Washington University, who is considered by many (including the CCP) as a doyen on matter pertaining to China,

premised on the grounds that he has been visiting the nation, every year, for last 4 decades and has observed all the manifold changes that China has been through.

The keen insight he has gained into Chinese culture over the decades is expertly leveraged in his latest book, *China's Future*, where he tries to vaticinate what the future might hold for her; and the vision he paints is anything but a roseate one.

According to David Shambaugh, the calm demeanor and oodles of confidence exuded by China's leaders and diplomats (which, leads many to make Panglossian prognostications about her), belies the myriad challenges that lurk beneath. Economic problems fester, social unrest simmers and the polity is at risk of ossifying and atrophying. Essentially, although the azure waters of the sea seem placid and tranquil enough to an outside observer, beneath them lurk undercurrents that threaten to turn into murderous maelstroms that can sunder any boat.

After evincing his apprehensions about China's future and briefly adumbrating the different types of problems, Shambaugh takes up the issues one by one and delves deep into the genesis of the problems, revealing their impact on Modern China by adducing a litany of evidence and interpreting them for us. He then shows how they are inextricably linked with the political system of China and how changes over the decades in the political nature of the dispensation have manifested economically and socially.

According to him, the CCP has two main cliques, the conservatives or reactionaries, and the soft authoritarians. The former espouses hard authoritarianism (strict but not absolute control over all institutions in the nation) and totalitarianism. The latter usually advocates a looser hold on the institutions (soft authoritarianism). These two cliques constantly bicker with each other for helming the nation. When the soft authoritarians come to power, they loosen the stranglehold of the party on other institutions to an extent (but not fully). However, eventually, the conservatives wrest back control over the helm and undo much of the progress made.

With his veritable mountain of data, David Shambaugh shows that under the soft authoritarians, China flourishes and does well on the global scene. She is also able to deal with the economic and social issues, although not resolve them fully. However, once the conservatives take over, the progress slows down and the problems that were slowly being fixed, rear their ugly head again.

Considering all this and the examples of the erstwhile Communist states of Eastern Europe and the USSR, Shambaugh opines that China has four roads before it: neo-totalitarianism; hard authoritarianism; soft authoritarianism; and semi-democracy (on the Singaporean model). He avers that choosing either of the first two roads would lead to a China being unable to extricate itself from the middle-income trap. It is a trap that only a mere handful of like Japan and South Korea have been able to escape from, while scores of other rising powers have failed to do so and have languished there ever since or have stalled and fallen into even lower brackets.

Hence, Shambaugh argues that the only way to avoid the fate of these nations is for China's leadership to heed the portents presented and expeditiously and efficaciously chart a course of action that would follow the soft authoritarian route or even more wisely, the semi-democratic one that could possibly allow China to unlock her full potential that is as of yet, trammled by the authoritarian government.

Finally, after dealing with the luxuriant thicket of internal problems, Shambaugh adverts to the topic of foreign policy. After a quick overview of China's present relations with her Asian neighbors, the USA, the EU, Russia, and the global south (essentially, all of Africa. Latin and South America), he augurs what the

future holds: and once again, it is not a positive one. He argues that China's rising economic heft and military clout does not bode well for the world, especially for the reigning superpower, as 11 times out of 15 since 1500, a power on the ascendant has grappled with the incumbent for the crown. This is the famous Thucydides Trap, whose eponym wrote the history of the Peloponnesian War between the Spartans and the Athenians, which happened when the growing strength of the latter spooked the former.

Moreover, to pile Pelion on Ossa, unlike the domestic challenges, Chinese foreign policy is quite independent of the political views of the incumbent dispensation, due to the emergence of hyper-nationalism as the bedrock on which the edifice of the party rests. Modern Chinese do not evince much loyalty or repose their faith in the party but ardently love their ancient nation. The party relies greatly on this and portrays itself as the argus-eyed sentinel of the nation. Only the CCP, it asseverates, can prevent a repeat of the century of humiliation (Mid-19th century to mid-20th century) at the hands of the West and Japan. Hence, there is a need to assume a hard and intransigent outward stance vis-a-vis geopolitics in order to maintain the trust of the public, especially in the face of the multitudes of domestic problems. For this reason, he argues, China's truculence in the Asia-Pacific Region would probably increase and concomitantly the possibility of a war between her and Japan or other powers like India, that might drag in the US as well, would only continue to grow.

To sum it all up, China's future offers a compendious view of what the future holds for China and indirectly for the world because the giant, that Napoleon talked of has indeed awoken, but it remains to be seen if she would move the world into a new era or plunge it into darkness.

Hoàng Lê ỉnh says

Cuốn sách đáng ?? ??c n?u b?n là ng??i quan tâm ??n xu h??ng s? có c?a th? gi?i trong nhi?u nhi?u n?m n?a. M?c dù cuốn sách không t?p trung miêu t? v? ?i?u ?ó l?m...

Tripp says

Excellent coverage by a long standing student of China. He is measured and crisp here, so much so that the book reads like a set of graduate level course lectures (which they sort of are). Great way to get up to speed on what is happening there today and where they may be going in the future.

Nguyen Huy Tu Quan says

Trong cuốn sách này, Shambaugh phân tích các v?n ?? Kinh t?, Xã h?i, Chính tr? và Quan h? c?a Trung Qu?c v?i Th? gi?i trong hi?n t?i, t? ?ó nêu ra d? ?oán c?a mình v? t??ng lai Trung Qu?c. Cuốn sách ???c vi?t d? hi?u, khách quan. Cách l?p lu?n c?a ông không hoàn toàn áp ??t m?t tiên ?oán nào. V?i Shambaugh, t?t c? kh? n?ng ??u có th? x?y ra. Tuy nhiên, c?ng có nh?ng kh? n?ng d? x?y ra h?n kh? n?ng khác. Vì v?y, b?n ??c có th? yên tâm v? cuốn sách này. Nó là m?t cuốn sách đáng ??c, cho ta cái nhìn khái quát v? TQ trong kho?ng 40 n?m tr? l?i ?ây.

Ngoài ra, còn m?t ?i?m mình r?t thích ? cuốn này: tính c?p nh?t. Cuốn sách ???c vi?t xong n?m 2015, ???c d?ch sang ti?ng vi?t n?m 2016. Ta có th? b?t g?p r?t nhi?u s? ki?n mang tính th?i s? ? trong cuốn này, nh? cu?c cách m?ng dù Hong Kong, vi?c Nga chi?m Crime, can thi?p Syria,v.v... Vì chính tr? có th? thay ??i

hàng ngày. Nên tính thì sẽ có ảnh hưởng sách lược là một điểm đáng lưu ý.

Trước năm 1978, Trung Quốc nắm quyền cai trị của Mao Trạch Đông, bắt tàn phá trong các cuộc thanh trừng trong các cách vận hóa và các cách ruộng đất. Mao qua đời, thế có lẽ cho Đảng Tiểu Bình lên nắm quyền và tiến hành một loạt các cải tổ kinh tế, tăng đáng kể nguồn cung lao động di dân, thu hút đầu tư nước ngoài vào các ngành công nghiệp chế biến, giúp cho nền kinh tế TQ tăng trưởng mạnh mẽ trong 30 năm. Chính vì vậy này đã gây ra những biến đổi lớn về xã hội Trung Quốc.

Tuy nhiên, nền kinh tế dựa trên sự xuất hàng giá rẻ đã bắt đầu chững lại. Nguyên nhân quan trọng là dân số Trung Quốc đã bắt đầu già đi, cung lao động giảm, giá lao động tăng. Sự thay đổi của dân số không chỉ gây sức ép lên nền kinh tế, mà lên cả hệ thống phúc lợi xã hội vì sự lão hóa ngày càng tăng. Thêm vào đó, tăng trưởng kinh tế tạo ra một tầng lớp trung lưu lớn trong xã hội, ngày càng có nhiều bất mãn với chính quyền. Cộng sự vì tình trạng tham nhũng, ô nhiễm môi trường, bất ổn an ninh. Các vùng Tân Cương, Tây Tạng, Hồng Kông đang trở thành những điểm nóng bất ổn về địa sự và chính trị. Trung Quốc Cộng sự hiện đang trở nên bất ổn và vì vậy giới quy tắc các vấn đề này hiện tại đang rất quan trọng.

Theo Shambaugh, Trung Quốc hiện nay đang trở nên 4 ngã rẽ: Dân chủ nào và (với tòa án lập pháp, báo chí lập pháp tăng cường, có bầu cử và đảng, những CS và nền quy định - tăng trưởng Singapore); Chuyên chế mề (Cải cách mạnh mẽ kinh tế, mở rộng tự do xã hội, cải cách chính trị và có kiểm soát); (Chuyên chế rắn - Cải cách kinh tế, những bóp nghẹt tự do xã hội, đàn áp chế độ dân sự, kiểm duyệt mạnh mẽ internet và báo chí - đây là các điểm của TQ trước 2012 khi Tập Cận Bình lên nắm quyền); và cuối cùng là Toàn trị mới (kiểu như Bắc Triều Tiên).

Vậy Đảng CS sẽ lựa chọn ngã rẽ nào? Để trả lời câu hỏi này, tác giả tiến hành phân tích hành vi của Đảng CS. Shambaugh chỉ ra rằng: từ 1978 đến 2015, TQ luân phiên chuyển từ Chuyên chế rắn sang chuyên chế mề và ngược lại. Cụ thể, từ 1978 - 1989, dưới sự cầm quyền của Đảng Tiểu Bình - một tay cải cách và có đầu óc cải cách, TQ đã tăng trưởng mạnh mẽ và không khí tăng trưởng rất tốt. Vì vậy này đã dẫn đến cuộc khủng hoảng dân chủ của sinh viên Bắc Kinh tại quảng trường Thiên An Môn. Do sự thất bại kinh nghiệm của ông Âu, phe bảo thủ trong CS đã ra tay đàn áp sinh viên. Sự kiện này đã gây ra một cuộc khủng hoảng thế giới. Những tay có đầu óc cải cách bắt đầu cách chế. Giới bảo thủ mới lên nắm quyền, tăng cường đàn áp và kiểm duyệt. Mãi đến năm 1997, trong những nỗ lực cuối cùng của ông mình, Đảng Tiểu Bình đã tăng đáng kể thành công uy tín của mình, đưa nhóm cải cách mới gọi là Giang Trạch Dân, Ôn Gia Bảo, Tập Cận Bình,... lên nắm quyền. Nhóm lãnh đạo mới này đã tiến hành nhiều cải cách kinh tế và chính trị, thúc đẩy nhiều cách thức mở rộng tự do và làm cho CS thích nghi với tình hình mới, tránh rơi vào trạng thái trì trệ, thoái hóa của CS Liên Xô trước đây. Tuy nhiên, đến năm 2009, xu hướng cải cách chậm lại khi ông đi đến cuối quá trình cải cách là Tập Cận Bình và họ. TQ đã đi đến với nhiều cuộc khủng hoảng Tân Cương, Tây Tạng. Vì vậy này đã thúc đẩy cho nhóm bảo thủ trở lại. 2012, Tập Cận Bình với cách thức cứng rắn, mạnh mẽ của mình lên nắm quyền, đã ngay lập tức thực hiện đàn áp mạnh mẽ, tiến hành những tham nhũng quy mô lớn và bắt đầu chính trị, tung ra Trung Hoa mới làm mê hoặc chế độ nhà dân tộc Trung Hoa. 5 năm sau thời điểm Tập lên cầm quyền, Trung Quốc có vẻ như sẽ tiếp tục đi theo con đường Chuyên chế rắn. Tuy nhiên, vì vậy này chỉ làm các mâu thuẫn trong xã hội TQ ngày thêm trầm trọng. Trước khi Tập bắt đầu ở trong vị trí này Đảng năm 2017 (rất ít khi Đảng), thì những mâu thuẫn trong nền kinh tế, xã hội của TQ sẽ có thể bắt đầu "cạn". Khi đó, TQ rơi vào một tình trạng suy thoái mới. Nếu bắt đầu như vậy, giới bảo thủ thậm chí có thể còn đàn áp mạnh mẽ hơn, đưa TQ vào tình trạng Toàn trị mới. Tuy nhiên, xã hội TQ đã quá mệt mỏi có thể quay lại chế độ toàn trị, nên vì vậy này sẽ chỉ làm tăng thêm Đảng CS thêm bất ổn. Mặt khác, nếu trong tương lai này, TQ tiếp tục chuyển sang chuyên chế mề, thậm chí là Dân chủ nào và, nền kinh tế có thể chuyển từ chế độ biến, sang nền kinh tế sáng tạo (như Hàn Quốc, Đài Loan, Nhật Bản đã từng thành công). Khi đó, các mâu thuẫn có thể được xoa dịu. Mặc dù vậy, vì vậy này, cần có một nhóm lãnh đạo tốt tin, dám chấp nhận sự thay đổi xã hội và tiếp tục các bước Đảng theo

cách khoan dung h?n. Quan tr?ng h?n c?, nhóm c?i cách này ph?i nh?n ???c s? ?ng h? l?n trong ??ng. ?i?u này khó, nh?ng không ph?i không kh? thi, vì TQ ?ã t?ng tr?i qua các th?i kì c?i cách. ??i khái ?ó là n?i dung cu?n sách.
