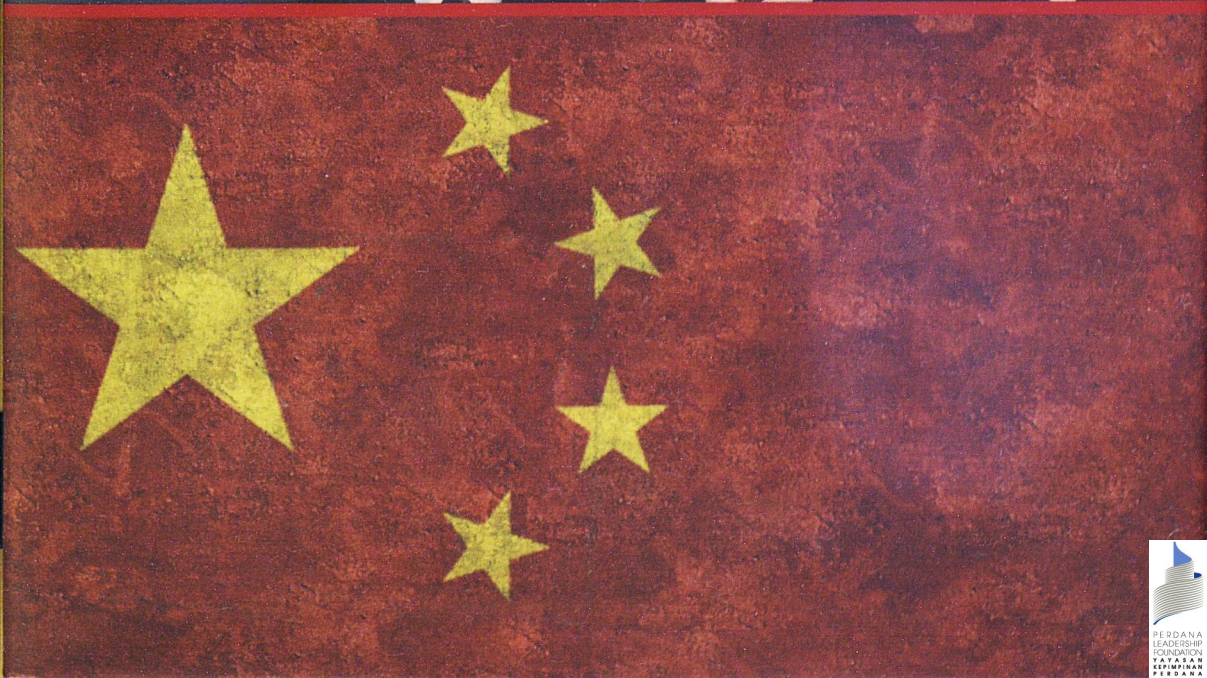


DAVID M. LAMPTON

# FOLLOWING THE LEADER

RULING CHINA,  
FROM DENG XIAOPING TO XI JINPING



With unique access to Chinese leaders at all levels of the party and government, best-selling author David M. Lampton tells the story of China's political elites from their own perspectives. Based on over five hundred interviews, *Following the Leader* offers a rare glimpse into how the attitudes and ideas of those at the top have evolved over the past four decades. Here China's rulers explain their strategies and ideas for moving the nation forward, share their reflections on matters of leadership and policy, and discuss the challenges that keep them awake at night.

As the Chinese Communist Party installs its new president, Xi Jinping, for a presumably ten-year term, questions abound. How will the country adapt as its explosive rate of economic growth begins to slow? How does it plan to deal with domestic and international calls for political reform and to cope with an aging population, not to mention an increasingly fragmented bureaucracy and society? In this insightful book we learn how China's leaders see the nation's political future as well as its global strategic influence.

A

*Philip E. Lilienthal*

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B O O K

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# Following the Leader

TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

# Following the Leader

*Ruling China, from Deng Xiaoping  
to Xi Jinping*

David M. Lampton *To: Dr. Mahathir,*

*With all the best,  
David M. Lampton  
6/27/16*



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*To Noah Joseph and Sadie Mae Lampton,  
who will live with and shape this century's  
relations with China*

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*David M. Lampton*  
*Washington, D.C.*  
*September, 2013*

# Introduction

“Mao was great because he made China unified/independent. Deng Xiaoping opened China. And Jiang Zemin, he let the Chinese people have a normal life. Before, when I was young, my folks told me not to make political mistakes. Now I can tell my kids to learn in school well and they can be millionaires. The environment is now free, more relaxing. People now like to go see *Titanic* [the movie], and one lady saw it nine times and cried every time. Enjoy everyday life, this is our new idea. Before we had to talk about contributing to the masses. But we came to the world to enjoy our short lives. A normal life is very important for Chinese. In the Cultural Revolution I was a Red Guard, and my daughter was surprised and said I had been a bandit. In my house, growing up, before every meal, before a picture on the wall of Mao [Zedong], we recited quotations from Mao. Now it seems funny to have done such stupid things.”

—Secretary-general of a special event, July 2003, Beijing

Based on 558 interviews with Chinese leaders, on case studies, and on innumerable documents, this book humanizes China’s extraordinary course of development since Deng Xiaoping’s 1977 return to power, examining domestic politics, foreign relations, natural and manmade disasters, civil-military relations, and the Chinese style of negotiating. This volume reveals the human frustrations China’s leaders feel, the nightmares disturbing their sleep, and the sheer scale of the challenges they face. Challenges run the gamut from meeting rising political expectations and keeping the economic juggernaut going, to providing citizens breathable air and potable water and reassuring an apprehensive world that Beijing’s growing power is not a threat. In the second decade

of the new millennium, China is in a far different political space than it was in 1977. Today, with weaker leaders, an increasingly fragmented society and bureaucracy, and empowered societal and interest groups, bringing a lagging political system into increasing harmony with a changed society is the central challenge.

China's unparalleled growth and societal change since 1977 poses a vital question: "Will the Chinese government be able to control its own internal and external behavior in the years ahead?" If not, major trouble lies ahead for China and for the world. Part of the answer to this question of whether control will continue to be maintained lies in the types of leaders China has had and will produce. What vision do China's leaders convey to their people and the world, and how might that change? How will these leaders interact with the ever more complex and pluralistic society they seek to govern? Will China's pluralism become progressively more anchored in institutions, laws, regulations, and ethical norms that are increasingly shared worldwide?

Leaders count in world affairs. Their behaviors are grounded in a complex and ever changing combination of personal and group experience, domestic economic/social/political forces, institutional structures, international regimes, external pressures, and luck. Since leaders count in explaining the behavior of states, one must inquire into the specific motivations, capacities, and perceptions of individual leaders to anticipate future behavior. General theorizing is inadequate. China's leaders face internal governance tasks of such magnitude and complexity that they will be preoccupied for a long time. Present and future PRC leaders are, and will remain, ambivalent about assuming international burdens and responsibilities that many outsiders consider essential. These leaders are torn between the attraction of gaining greater global status and protecting the PRC's growing world-wide interests and the knowledge that their country remains poor and their grip on power tenuous. As China's citizens, companies, and other organizations expand their global reach, Beijing will find it increasingly difficult to control their myriad activities.

Since the early 1970s, how have Chinese leaders at all levels evolved their thinking about governing their own nation and dealing with the outside world? To what extent is the Chinese political system different than it was when Deng Xiaoping returned to the national and international stages in July 1977—the date at which I reckon the reform era began?<sup>1</sup> This book allows Chinese leaders to speak for themselves.

However, this book has broader purposes than simply to humanize China's extraordinary course of development—it presents an evolution-

ary picture, concretely specifying changes and continuities and revealing the reality, inasmuch as possible, of working in the often frustrating Chinese system. This work is a selective history of challenges confronting contemporary PRC leaders, illustrated with case studies and individual-level data. It defines in both graphic and theoretical terms how China has changed and the future challenges this presents to its people and to the world.

“Leaders” I define here as those persons in the public, private, and social organization sectors who exert significant influence over diverse realms of policy and public discourse (political, military, social, economic, and intellectual). Leadership in China is broader in scope than simply the small number of members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo who sit at the apex of the national power hierarchy. One of the most important changes in Chinese society over the reform era has been the gradual enlargement of the scope and diversity of individuals who reasonably can be counted as leaders.

There have been both continuities and dramatic changes in the reform period with respect to how Chinese leaders view the governance of China and its role in global affairs. Understanding these continuities and changes is important to those who live *in* China and to those abroad who must live *with* China in the twenty-first century. For example, one area of continuity with significant consequences for both citizens of the PRC and the outside world is the still deeply engrained idea among the vast majority of the Chinese population that the state has a legitimate, essential, and expansive role in information management; one Chinese Academy of Social Sciences study found that more than 80 percent of those urban Chinese respondents surveyed agreed that the Internet should be managed or controlled, with nearly 85 percent of those respondents arguing that the government should be the entity to manage it.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, one great change over the past four decades is that the idea of global interdependence is increasingly recognized and accepted, not only by elites but by ordinary citizens as well. The biggest change is the development of a domestic social and political system characterized by a weaker, less cohesive leadership group, a more pluralized society and bureaucracy, and subnational actors in government, society, and the economy with more resources to promote their interests. If these trends continue in the absence of (a) more legal and regulatory control, (b) more transparency and accountability, and (c) more ethical constraints, an untethered China will spell trouble for itself, its neighbors, and the international community.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the twentieth century, China had three revolutions, two of which were in the communist era: the first was the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and with it the demise of the traditional dynastic system. After a protracted transitional period of domestic and international strife in the first half of the twentieth century came the second (communist) revolution with Mao Zedong in 1949 and what soon emerged as his grotesque exercise of power, which lasted until his death on September 9, 1976. Finally, in the last two-plus decades of the twentieth century came a third revolution, albeit a more gradual, less violent phase, in the communist order itself—the reform era. Its character is illustrated by an exchange between Deng Xiaoping and CBS journalist Mike Wallace in 1986. When Wallace commented, “The China of Deng Xiaoping is different from the China of Mao Zedong. It’s a new revolution that is going on here, at least you are trying to make a new revolution, it seems,” Deng replied, “You are right. We too say that what we are doing now is in essence a revolution. In another sense, we are engaged in an experiment. For us, this is something new, and we have to feel our way. Since it is something new, we are bound to make mistakes. Our method is to review our experience from time to time and correct mistakes whenever we discover them, so that minor mistakes will not grow into major ones.”<sup>3</sup>

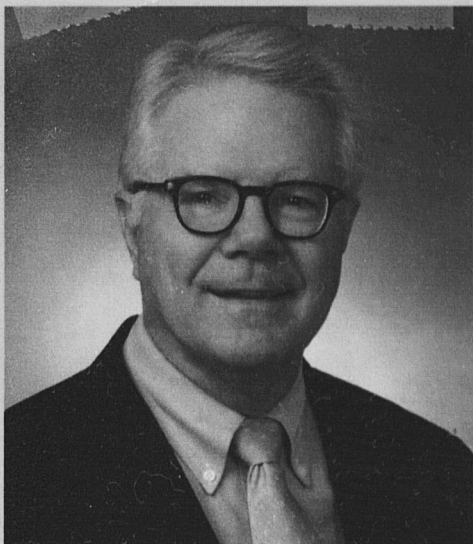
After decades, the extremes of Mao’s era appear distant, almost ephemeral, while the implications of the changes Deng Xiaoping wrought become clearer and loom larger. Though there is a certain popular nostalgia for the faux equality and simplicity of Mao’s era, deep dissatisfaction with some of the unwelcome consequences of the reform era that followed his rule, and deep resentment at changes that have failed to occur, there is no significant constituency for the deprivation, brutality, social and economic control, and national dysfunction that were the central features of Chairman Mao’s “order.” Chinese society has changed so fundamentally since 1977 that, barring something approaching total social breakdown, the preconditions for such national tyranny no longer exist.

This book chronicles, explains, and assesses the evolution of the ongoing revolution from the death of Mao Zedong through the eras of Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao and into the era of Xi Jinping that began in the fall of 2012. Revolution is an abrupt and systematic change involving the repudiation and overthrow of the preexisting

sociopolitical order. Though it can be initiated from above or below, revolution is energized by mass popular participation and characterized by new institutions and patterns of behavior. As Crane Brinton observed in *The Anatomy of Revolution*, revolutions often go through cycles of initial moderation, growing excess, popular reaction, and sometimes a new revolutionary sequence—this describes the Mao Zedong-to-Deng Xiaoping progression.<sup>4</sup>

In October 1949, with the ascension to power of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), China entered its communist revolutionary phase. Chairman Mao's increasingly excessive and ever more costly experiments over the next more than quarter century set the stage for what I will term (and what Deng himself called) a second communist-era revolution beginning in July 1977, when Deng Xiaoping returned from political exile to the upper reaches of leadership and quickly emerged as China's supreme—though not entirely unconstrained—leader. In a policy sense, the first dramatic evidence of Deng's revolution was expressed in the policies of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978. This conclave defined the new era as concerned with socialist modernization and decentralized rural production systems and came immediately on the heels of the announcement of the establishment of formal diplomatic ties between the United States and the PRC—a bold move that marked an entirely new posture toward the outside world.<sup>5</sup>

Much as Mao Zedong's 1949 assumption of power marked an abrupt and enormous change in governing regime, legitimating ideology, leadership characteristics, institutions, distribution of power, socioeconomic foundations, and active support of a large percentage of the governed (in the beginning, at least), Deng Xiaoping's rise nearly three decades later marked a similar immense revolutionary transformation. In the new reform era, there was dramatic change along a number of dimensions: from Marxist/Maoist political dogma to measurable and pragmatic economic and governing performance indicators; from the planned economy to a substantially more market-driven system and all that implied; from rule by older ideologues, peasants, and heartland revolutionaries to rule by younger, more urbane, coastal, educated technocrats and others with diversified disciplinary backgrounds;<sup>6</sup> from an autarkic economy to a pacesetter for globalization and interdependence; from a system shut off from the outside world intellectually to an increasingly information-saturated society that sent its best and brightest abroad for study in great numbers while simulta-



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DAVID M. LAMPTON is Professor of China Studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and Director of China Studies at SAIS. Former President of the National Committee on United States–China Relations, he was the inaugural winner of the Scalapino Prize (2010). His books include *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds* (2008), *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing U.S.–China Relations, 1989–2000* (2001), and *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform* (editor, 2001).

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“This book is a gift for those seeking to understand in all of its complexities the preeminent issue of our times—the rise of China and the implications for the rest of us. With data-rich analysis, it captures the sweeping political, economic, and social changes of China’s last forty years and, without being alarmist, delineates persuasively the things that both we and the Chinese should genuinely worry about. It is an important guide to both scholars and policy makers.”

JOHN MCLAUGHLIN, Distinguished Practitioner-in-Residence  
at Johns Hopkins University and former deputy director of the CIA

“The best book on contemporary China today, *Following the Leader* is a true insider’s account of how the Chinese think about the world and how the world should think about China. A compelling and engaging read for first-time China travelers, seasoned China watchers, and anyone else interested in understanding the emergence of this global power.”

ELIZABETH C. ECONOMY, C. V. Starr Senior Fellow  
and Director for Asia Studies, Council on Foreign Relations

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