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The Health System and Access to Healthcare in China

David Shambaugh, *China's Future*,

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book is a valuable contribution to understanding the Chinese criminal process, and his recommendations may light a path to sorely needed meaningful reform.

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1. Supreme People's Court, Supreme People's Procuratorate, Ministry of Public Security, "Opinions on Advancing the Reform of Making Criminal Procedure System Trial-Centered," 10 October 2016, translation available on *China Law Translate*, <http://chinalawtranslate.com/%E5%AE%A1%E5%88%A4%E4%B8%BA%E4%B8%AD%E5%BF%83%E7%9A%84%E5%88%91%E4%BA%8B%E8%AF%89%E8%AE%BC%E5%88%B6%E5%BA%A6/?lang=en> (accessed on 23 November 2016).



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Many observers are rightly concerned and also divided over the issue of China's future. Not a year passes without several books being published espousing the thesis of a future Chinese superpower or contrarily that of its coming decline or even collapse, pure and simple. In 2016 alone, noteworthy among others have been *The Dictator's Dilemma* by Bruce Dickson, *China's Crony Capitalism* by Minxin Pei, and *Forecasting China's Future* by Roger Irvine.⁽¹⁾ But without doubt *China's Future* by David Shambaugh has been the most outstanding.

China's Future is a short work of a few more than 170 pages (endnotes and index not included) divided into five chapters presenting respectively an analytical model and then the country's economic, social institutional, and geopolitical evolutions. The central argument is that President Xi Jinping's ultra-authoritarian line stands little chance of solving endemic problems of a China in crisis: inefficient public enterprises; corrupt authorities; massive debt; an archaic, even opaque financial system; an ageing, sullen, and wounded population; environmental pollution; and an increasingly firm international posture. As the author had already set out in an article in *Washington Quarterly* in autumn 2016, without political liberalisation, Chinese society will become increasingly unstable and unpredictable.⁽²⁾ Shambaugh thus distances himself from most "pessimist" commentators in that he doesn't harp on the economy (like Gordon Chang and Minxin Pei do), which could in his view stagnate or keep growing slowly, but rather focuses on political and institutional aspects: "Quite simply, the country is presently not moving forward politically, and therefore is not moving forward economically or socially. China can stay on the current road... or it can open up politically and enjoy far better chances of becoming a fully developed economy and modern country."⁽³⁾

The author therefore advises partial adoption of the Singapore model, that is to say, a semi-democratic, progressive, and liberal system, which under a

single but popularly-backed party relaxes state influence over essential aspects such as resource allocation, judicial decisions, scientific research, and higher education.⁽⁴⁾ This would free necessary forces, now suppressed in civil society, to reignite the economic machine so as to launch China into the small circle of innovative nations while also avoiding the "middle income trap" that many developing countries face – all this in the framework of a new social contract between a renewed CCP and a placated society.

Nothing new so far: the polemic is in fact less the result of exposed arguments than that of amazement among Chinese and Western commentators as regards the apparent evolution – some say reversal – of the position of one of the most respected Sinologists. Shambaugh is professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University and a researcher with a prestigious think tank, the Brookings Institute. He is one of the most reputed Sinologists and among the best known in the highest circles of Chinese universities and politics. In 2015, the American NGO Asia Foundation listed him among the most influential "China Watchers," along with David Lampton, Cheng Li, and Kenneth Lieberthal. He is a prolific author and has worked on Beijing's foreign policy, contemporary Western Sinology, and Chinese military and institutional reforms. In recent years, his work on the development strategy adopted by Beijing has been most remarkable.⁽⁵⁾

Until 2015, his writing swung between academic neutrality and a certain admiration for reforms pursued under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. He attributed to them the Party's resilience and flexibility without, however, neglecting the extent of the obstacles faced on the country's long path to economic and political modernisation. In late 2014, i.e., two years after the ascent of Xi Jinping, he wrote a starkly neutral article highlighting ten major challenges China must confront. He concluded that the country was at a crossroads and had to act.⁽⁶⁾ The article made no waves. To everyone's surprise, six months later, his article in *The Wall Street Journal* shocked the "China Watcher" community. Its caption set the tone: "The endgame of communist rule in China has begun, and Xi Jinping's ruthless measures are only bringing the country closer to a breaking point." Shambaugh continued: "Despite appearances, China's political system is badly broken, and nobody knows it better than the Communist Party itself."⁽⁷⁾ The article was avidly commented on and

1. Bruce Dickson, *The Dictator's Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party's Strategy for Survival*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2016; Minxin Pei, *China's Crony Capitalism: The Dynamics of Regime Decay*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2016; Roger Irvine, *Forecasting China's Future: Dominance or Collapse?*, London, Routledge, 2016.
2. David Shambaugh, "Contemplating China's Future," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Autumn 2016.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
4. It may be noted that Singapore now has a multi-party system but with the PAP remaining dominant. Shambaugh is perhaps touting the Singapore model because when faced with tough times, the ruling party there sped up the democratisation process in order to douse civil society protests.
5. David Shambaugh, *Is China Unstable? Assessing the Factors*, Armonk, M.E. Sharpe, 2000; *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002; *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006; with Robert Ash et Seichiro Takagi, *China Watching: Perspectives from Europe, Japan and the United States*, London, Routledge, 2007; with Michael Yahuda, *China Foreign Policy and International Relations*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008; *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008; *Charting China's Future: Domestic and International Challenges*, London, New York, Routledge, 2011; *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013; *Tangled Titans: The United States and China*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013.
6. David Shambaugh, "China at the Crossroads: Ten Major Reform Challenges," Brookings Institute, October 2014.
7. David Shambaugh, "The Coming Chinese Crack-up," *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 March 2015.

was seen by some, especially in China, as an abject volte-face by a noted scholar.⁽⁸⁾

A year later, Shambaugh has come out with *China's Future*, reprising the themes briefly presented in the two articles referred to. It has set off furious polemics. Some observers see in it an attempt to seek a job in the Obama administration. Others said he was merely conveying the frustrations of his reformist contacts and friends in China, and yet others that Shambaugh was expressing in his latest writings his frustration over the excessively weak or intransigent measures adopted by the Chinese authorities. The reactions, often sanguine or politicised, soon eclipsed the author's arguments and set off a debate among optimists, pessimists, and the undecided. The book itself has been waylaid.

Nevertheless it has undeniable qualities. It is well documented and is extremely clear, succinct, and synthetic, in the author's usual style. It gives a very good insight into the serious problems facing the country. It can help the lay reader better understand twenty-first century China and be better informed in presenting viewpoints against persuasive and well-articulated argumentation. Finally, it should be admitted that Shambaugh has been courageous, because with this book he clearly had more to lose than to gain and he knew without doubt what to expect from his peers and the Chinese public.

More than his observations, which are little debated, it is certainly his conclusions that seem contestable. The complicated observations Shambaugh has indulged in could have done with more nuance and circumspection given that, as John Van Oudenaren has noted, excessively specific predictions often turn out false while excessively general conclusions are of little use.⁽⁹⁾ To the extent that China has veritably metamorphosed in a space of two to three decades, it is difficult to choose between success and failure.

The Singapore model that the author recommends may not really be appropriate for China. That a single relatively authoritarian party has ruled a country that has scored great economic success does not in itself constitute a model. Governing a city-state is not the same as governing a country as large and complex as China. The political dynamics, economic decisions, and social problems in the two types of entities have nothing in common. The People's Action Party (PAP) could exercise control since 1965 only because of Singapore's special geographical and strategic position and its importance to Britain and the United States as well as the affluent Chinese diaspora in Asia. As a financial paradise with 5.4 million inhabitants, 75% Chinese, and a pro-Western enclave in a rather unstable Southeast Asia, Singapore managed to specialise economically, enjoy lasting US support and a massive capital influx from entrepreneurs of Chinese origin present throughout the region, and benefit from China's growth. The Chinese situation is vastly different. Moreover, current economic problems may not play to the PAP's advantage for long. Despite its amazing rebound in the 2015 elections, the fact that it only got 60% of the votes in 2011 shows that Singapore is changing. The PAP realises that it could well be ousted from power. More worrying is that Singapore's economy has yet to recover from the consequences of the 2008 crisis. If Singapore, much like Taiwan, Hong Kong, and some other Southeast Asian countries, is facing difficulties, it is not due to US policies but rather to weakening Chinese growth. One might well wonder whether the PAP's destiny is linked indirectly to the success of the CCP's reforms.

Be that as it may, whether one endorses Shambaugh's conclusions or not, *China's Future* is a slim and persuasive book that pushes readers to reflect

on essential problems: China's prospects and their impact on the authorities, on Chinese citizens, and on the world at large.

■ Translated by N. Jayaram.

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8. Among the most negative commentaries: Dingding Chen, "Sorry, America: China Is NOT Going to Collapse," *The National Interest*, 10 March 2015; Xie Tao, "Why Do People Keep Predicting China's Collapse?," *The Diplomat*, 20 March 2015; Andy Rothman, "The Coming Chinese Crackup," *Matthews Asia*, 1 April 2015; Chen Weihua, "Shambaugh China Essay in Shambles," *China Daily*, 13 March 2015; "Shen Dawei tuhan Zhongguo bengkui wei na ban" (Why is David Shambaugh shouting about the "collapse of China?"), *Huanqiu shibao*, 9 March 2015.
9. John Van Oudenaren, "China's Uncertain Future," *The American Interest*, 19 March 2015.

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