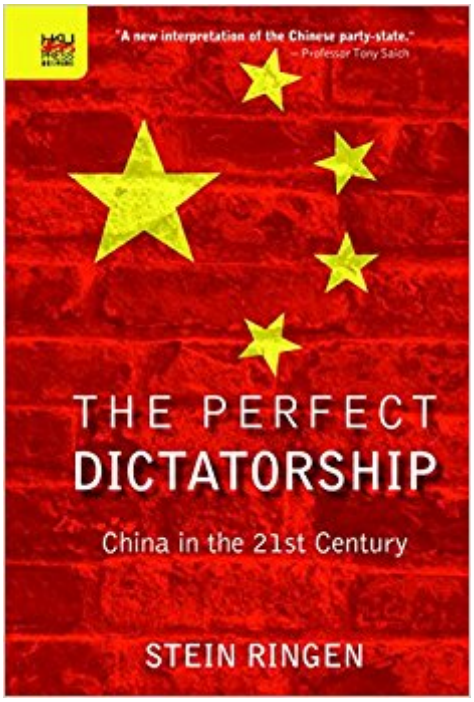
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The Perfect Dictatorship: China In The 21st Century



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Synopsis

The Chinese system is like no other known to man, now or in history. This book explains how the system works and where it may be moving.Drawing on Chinese and international sources, on extensive collaboration with Chinese scholars, and on the political science of state analysis, Stein Ringen concludes that under the new leadership of Xi Jinping, the system of government has been transformed into a new regime radically harder and more ideological than the legacy of Deng Xiaoping. China is less strong economically and more dictatorial politically than the world has wanted to believe.By analyzing the leadership of Xi Jinping, the meaning of "socialist market economy," corruption, the party-state apparatus, the reach of the party, the mechanisms of repression, taxation and public services, and state-society relations, The Perfect Dictatorship broadens the field of China studies, as well as the fields of political economy, comparative politics, development, and welfare state studies.

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A new interpretation of the Chinese party-stateÃ¢â ¬â ¢shows the advantage that derives from a comparative theorist looking at the Chinese system. (Tony Saich, Harvard University)This is an excellent book which asks important questions about China’s future. In a lively and persuasive manner, the author vividly analyzes key data in a comparative and theoretical manner. Far and away the best introduction to how the CCP dictatorship works. (Edward Friedman, University of

Wisconsin-Madison)There is no lack of scholars and pundits abroad who tell us that dictatorship in China is for the greater good. In a timely and engagingly written book, Stein Ringen systematically demolishes all the components of this claim. (Frank DikÃƒÂ¶tter, University of Hong Kong)Ringen provides a wealth of information regarding Chinese leadership and policies in a style that doesn't assume prior knowledge, thereby making it accessible to a wide range of readers interested in the region.Library Journal (Library Journal)Mr. Ringen explodes this favorite propaganda slogan [that Beijing has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty] even further and does so with the fresh eyes he promises. (Howard W. French Wall Street Journal)Essential reading. (China Perspectives)

Stein Ringen is emeritus professor at the University of Oxford. He brings to this study extensive experience of state analysis in America, Britain, Scandinavia, Europe, and Korea. He is the author, most recently, of Nation of Devils: Democratic Leadership and the Problem of Obedience.

China's political system is better described as harshly dictatorial than mildly authoritarian. The regime uses a combination of legitimacy and control to maintain its highly prized stability, buying legitimacy with the spreading of economic rewards and fostering a reputation of effective governance. It exercises control with the help of propaganda, thought work, and brute repression. With the pace of economic growth sliding downwards, the regime turned more strongly to the use of controls, scaling back collective leadership for a new kind of one-person rule. Ideology has become stronger than at any time since Mao, though now a new brand - a nationalistic China Dream. The Chinese party-state is a system with two overpowering bureaucracies, side-by-side and intertwined. The state controls society, and the party controls the state. Citizens are allowed many freedoms, but only up to a point.Three ghosts haunt Chinese leaders. The first is the memory of the century of humiliation. Going into the 19th century, China was the world's biggest economy and the leading power in technology and administration. Then followed a century of catastrophic decline - it was subjugated by foreign powers that established colonies and bases on Chinese territory, sometimes under the label of 'concessions,' and took control of much of China's foreign trade. The imperial regime eventually collapsed, central control was lost, and the nation disintegrated into warlordism and civil war. Large parts of the country were invaded and occupied. The view persists that China has a rightful place in the world and that that place is at the center. The reclaiming of the nation's rightful place is on the leaders' minds, and probably something they are under intense pressure from below to pursue.The second ghost is the memory of Mao's destructive excesses. After 1949,

the country was under central control and gaining in strength and economic prowess. This was all lost by the Great Leap Forward (1958-60) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). These were self-inflicted catastrophes by a regime that had allowed a single supreme leader absolute authority. The lesson for subsequent leaders has been that protections need to be built into the procedures of the party-state and its system of management against its built-in propensity to excess.The third ghost is the memory of the gradual decline and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, the regime on which communist China had modelled itself. The Soviets, as seen from Beijing, had neglected their own system, denied its continuity (eg. the denouncement of Stalin), allowed the economy to falter, and relaxed controls. They made great claims on the obedience of their people but failed to reward them with prosperity. Under Deng Xiaoping, China reformed and took to governing by rewards. The question now is whether, under new leadership, the pendulum is swinging back towards more government by ideology.Today's rulers insist their regime is the one that came into being with the communist victory in the civil war in 1949, and the CCP embodies the continuation of that regime. Their right to rule comes from having liberated the country through revolution and lifting it out of humiliation, and having shown themselves able to hold it together.The inescapable bottom line is the preservation of the regime and its power - displayed in 1989 when the PLA was turned on the people. There were nationwide uprisings and serious revolts in many cities - somewhere between 80 and 130. Those within the regime who were include to political opening up and compromise were sidelined. In Beijing, it was not contained in Tiananmen Square - the revolt spread through the city.Deng did not turn his back on the project of national glory, but advised the country 'for now to hide its capacity and bide its time.' The regime has not been and is not single-mindedly dedicated to economic growth - rather its own preservation. Economic growth is a means, not an end. Hu Yaobang, the nominal head of the party, was seen to be a voice for liberal political reform and was purged. (?)China has gone ultra-capitalist. State enterprises have been relieved of their previous welfare responsibilities and are mostly subjected to profit expectations. Combined with a massive shedding of smaller enterprises and the pushing of legions of workers into unemployment has brought the state-owned sector into high profitability. From the late 1990s, the majority of SOEs were profitable.Behind the official banks, which are state-owned, is a quasi-private shadow banking system, much of it technically illegal. This sector accounts for a third or more of credit in the economy, and has been growing at an estimated annual rate of 30%.State controls operate through public ownership and preferential treatment of public enterprises in credit, resources, raw materials, energy, and terms of competition. There are 120 or so big state conglomerates, state banks, innumerable town and village enterprises, most 'strategic sector' firms (defense, energy, petroleum

and petrochemicals, telecoms, coal, civil aviation, and rail and waterway transport), and many 'pillar industry' firms (machinery, automobiles, IT, construction, steel, base metals, and chemicals). All land is in public ownership - urban land is state owned, and agricultural land is owned by co-operatives. Land cannot be bought or sold, but 'the right to the use of land can be transferred.'Through its control of banking, the state holds ultimate control over structural trends in most of the economy. When David Cameron went to China in 2013 seeking investments in British nuclear energy and high-speed rail, he went to the Chinese state.Important prices continue to be set administratively, and at a good distance from potential market prices, including the price of bank credit and bank interest rates, of privatized land use, and of wheat, rice, pharmaceutics, petroleum, gas, and electricity. Another heavy-handed state intervention is in a high level of corporate taxation. Businesses that obey the law pay heavy social contributions on top of wages - social insurance, housing provident funds, Disabled Persons' Federation, and to official trade unions. These fees vary across localities, but represent a burden of at least 40% of payroll.On top of state controls in business operations, the part-state operates through the presence of party organs in economic enterprises. It is the state that allows private business and entrepreneurs that whatever opportunity they have is by the grace of the state. In the early 1990s, prices were deregulated in the airline industry, but when that led to a weakening of the position of the three big state-owned carriers in what is officially a 'strategic sector,' prices were regulated in the late 1990s, allowing the big three to regain their dominance. The housing price boom that followed the commodification of housing and the resulting unavailability of affordable housing forced the government to revive a policy of public housing from about 2010. In early 2014, plans were announced to consolidate much of the country's iron--ore mining into a large state-controlled conglomerate.The Shanghai economy is about 80% public ownership, measured in production. Thus, those admiring its skyline are admiring the face of state, not private capitalism. Private entrepreneurs have massively, and for strategic reasons, joined the Communist Party, and most private firms, certainly those of some size, have encouraged the establishment of party committees and disions of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions.About of third of its 800 - 900 million jobs are in low-productivity agriculture in which tenant peasants work collectively owned land on time-limited contracts, mostly of 40 years. The next third is made up of migrant/irregular workers, who by state regulations are held down in second-class citizenship. The final third is in regular employment or business in the modern sector, and about a third of them consists of public sector workers.Big cities want to control the level and quality of in-migration, something they can do thanks to the 'hukou.'At least 75 million are in jobs paid for from the public purse (not including SOEs), producing a never-ending stream of papers in a formalized system in

which the central and local party and government organs issue decrees ranging from ’orders’ (that are to be implemented to the letter), to mere ’opinions.’ There are thousands of units, committees, and agencies reporting to each other in ways that are rarely straight and clear.Villages, however, are constitutionally autonomous and not part of the hierarchy of command. Village leadership is nominally elected by the people of the village. These elections, and especially the selection of candidates, have mostly been controlled or manipulated by the village party and town cadres.The party is everywhere in Chinese society - every government agency, unit of the military, town and village and neighborhood, school, university and university department, student residence, business, and officially registered social organization. Non-scrutiny is the rare exception, though not all those involved are competent and/or motivated. Wherever the party is present it is the ultimate decider. Insurrection that is manageable is not necessarily stamped down, but that which is dangerous (threatens to form networks or be organized) certainly is.The CCP has over 87 million members, organized from 3.5 million primary units. The party officials (a select group, still numbering in the millions) are predominantly technocratic, with higher incomes. Being a member is a way of both advancing and protecting one’s advancement. Big money is sometimes paid for seats in even provincial people’s congresses. Becoming a member normally depends on being recommended by existing members, serving a period of probation, surviving examinations, swearing loyalty, and being approved by a higher party level. Most of those in leadership positions anywhere in the system are party members.Internal discussion about party direction is tolerated and to some degree, encouraged from above. Systemic dissent, however, is suppressed. This controlled openness helps ensure policies that get adopted withstand the test of deliberation. Top party officials are nominally elected by the Central Committee (about 370 members, meets 2X/year). Lower-level discipline organs now report directly to the central commission, rather than through local party organs - a recent change giving Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption drive more force.The party runs about 2,800 political and administrative schools, from the Central Party School and down, offering short (2-3 months, or less) and longer (eg. a year) courses that those with ambitions need attend to get ahead, and are often obligated to attend at regular intervals. Elections for leaders are settled in advance through discussions and manipulations between people representing party factions, simplified by (more or less) term limits and retirement rules - a term limit of five years in most top jobs, maximum tenure of two terms, maximum age of 67 to start a new term, that can be relaxed when needed.The party monitors the follow-up to and compliance with leadership’s will - first by brute control and by the presence of party committees in non-party organizations of all kinds. The party controls personnel matters and appointments in all sectors and levels, including executive

agencies, the military, police, the judiciary, SOEs, cultural institutions, media, academies, universities, institutes and schools. Officials from the lowest level up are monitored annually and their performance graded in relation to established priorities, targets, and performance indicators - resulting in their being classified as excellent, competent, or incompetent. This is done by party officials one level up. Leading cadres sign performance contracts in relation to policy priorities and are held personally responsible for their attainment. Party and administrative leaders are subjected to 'democratic appraisal meetings' where they are evaluated by colleagues and representatives of the 'masses below.' Good performance is a condition of promotion and also rewarded with economic bonuses, promotions, and fancy titles. This personnel management is an effective tool of management control, but also rife with corruption (buying positions and promotions), and cheating.The PLA is represented in the major state organs and exercises indirect veto power in top appointments. Almost all top PLA leaders are party members. It is an organization between 2 and 3 million strong.According to the Ministry of Finance and the IMF, World Bank, public revenue and expenditure is in the order of 25 to 30% of GDP. The tax system is very regressive. There is no welfare state.

This monograph of China explains the entire government structure, including naming all the opaque black boxes in the schema. It lays out the rankings, the social services, the offices, the departments, and most importantly, the guiding principles of all of them - The Party. It is comprehensive, realistic, and most of all, revealing. China is not doing nearly as well as it says or we think.Ringen says the present nihilistic, materialistic, money grubbing state of China is a direct result of the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989. At that time the Chinese believed they were on an upward curve, but The Party/state informed them in no uncertain terms that freedom was not and never would be available to the Chinese. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The economy is for the state; it is not for the other way around,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• Ringen says. As long as the perception is that China is growing at near double digit rates, people and business are pacified, and The Party can flourish. That is why the official statistics are all lies.Like any garden variety dictatorship, China is paranoid. There are files on literally everyone. There are untold numbers of different police forces, operating thuggishly and plainclothesed. Local officials are promoted on the basis of their intelligence gathering. Local housewives are community spies. Photocopy stores feed directly to intelligence services. Arrest and unlimited detention do not require charges, and when they come, they are often bizarre and clearly not in violation of any law. Nonetheless, people are sometimes held for life, their families evicted, and if they had students, they can be jailed and tortured too. Nothing can interfere with the ethos

The Party wants for China. RingenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s longest most detailed chapter concerns such cases of arrest or censorship. It seems that ChinaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s whole internal focus is to prevent people coming together. Any concerted effort from anywhere is crushed, often before it can act. That is how thorough and subversive the intelligence gathering is. The country can afford over a million people censoring the internet, but it wonÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t allow people driven from the countryside to the cities the same social rights as city dwellers. Ringen says China has performed remarkably poorly in raising living standards, compared to other countries such as South Korea or even Britain when compared from the same starting point in 1949. The Party, however, has performed miracles for its members. Ringen estimates the state skims more than half and possibly two-thirds of GDP. It clearly does not give that much back. Taxes are oppressive, and daily corruption adds to the burden.The bulk of the book examines the structures in place: the tax structure, the safety net, the justice system, the hukou residency system, the class system, and of course, The Party, for which everything else has been built. Ringen says China is not there for its people (a welfare state) and it is not there for its vision (ideological state). It is there purely to support, sustain and promote The Party, which he calls a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“trivial stateÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ no greater purpose.Ringen cautions that we might be at common turning point, one we always miss. The rise of the Nazis, the rise of the USSR ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ and maybe now China. The parallels are eerily similar. We have long, and continue to pretend, that China is moving towards liberalization and democracy. It isnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t. It is moving to secure the future of The Party, and that does not involve either democracy or liberalization, he says. The leadership makes no bones about it. The sooner we start taking the official words of Chinese leaders literally, the better we will be positioned to deal with the fallout.David Wineberg

A force to be feared.'Extensively promulgate and realise that the China Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is precisely what will strength the nation; Extensively promulgate that the future and destiny of every person is inseparably linked to the future and destiny of the country and the nation'China Daily - 5 April 2013As a freedom loving Chinese, it is timely to read this book. If you hate those nitty-gritty on how China perfected its dictatorship, you can just skip the first few chapters and jump to the Postscript section where the author predicts China under the leadership of Xi Jinping may become a perfect fascist state. 'China Dream' is going to be the totem of the new ideology, in which individuals cease to exist as an autonomous being and every thing is going to be subsumed in the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'. In other words, in order to

upheld the 'China Dream', everything can be sacrificed, no matter if it is personal freedom, rights or even properties. Ultimately, if waging war accords to the ideology of 'promulgate the China Dream', it is also good for each person's future and destiny. That's why China, according to Professor Ringen, is going to be a force to be feared - a big and powerful country, a strong state, an ambitious and shrewd leader and a commanding ideology. If I were you, when powerful leader turn to ideology, there is always danger and we must pay attention. The future isn't pretty.

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