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BOOK REVIEW

*¿ADÓNDE VA CHINA? LOS PLANES DE
FUTURO DE LOS DIRIGENTES CHINOS.*

*(THE SPANISH TRANSLATION OF
THE BOOK “FOLLOWING THE
LEADER: RULING CHINA, FROM
DENG XIAOPING TO XI JINPING”,
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS,
2014)*



Author: David M. Lampton. Barcelona: Stella Maris, 2015, 460 pag ISBN: 978-84-16541-11-9

INTRODUCTION

China is a country wrapped in a shroud of exoticism and symbolism, to the extent that many attempts to analyse it have been fraught with clichés that push the rigour/accuracy binomial into the background. However, this is not the case with David Lampton's book.¹

Professor Lampton approaches this complex subject with a deep respect for the scientific method. The result is an outstanding piece of work that covers China's past, present and future. Before commencing, he carried out thorough documentation work and conducted numerous interviews with Chinese officials, thus enriching his work.

Aware of the difficulty of the undertaking, which would involve explaining and linking economic, political, geostrategic, cultural and social aspects, Lampton used a series of guiding questions to order the content and facilitate reading and understanding of the message. On this point, the remarkable changes that came about after Deng Xiaoping took over the leadership of the Chinese government in 1978 with respect to the legacy left by Mao Zedong, which tends to be associated with poverty, illiteracy and international isolation, take on enormous significance.² However, while Lampton takes a positive view of the role played by Deng Xiaoping, he also holds him responsible for some significant errors, such as his persecution of the rightists in the 1960s and, therefore, does not empathise with him.

DENG XIAOPING AS SYNONYMOUS WITH MODERNISATION: LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

The modernisation of China is inextricably associated with Deng Xiaoping, who gave technocracy and the economy priority over the ideological dogma that had been a distinctive feature of Mao's tyranny and had its main embodiment in the Cultural Revolution. The latter, as pointed out by Felipe de la Morena, was applauded "by the sectarian and ignorant European pseudo-intelligentsia".³

1 There are a number of experts in Chinese policy in the Spanish academic landscape, as evidenced by the works of Doctors Mario Esteban, Xulio Ríos and Fernando Delage, which are quoted extensively throughout this paper.

2 For a more detailed insight into the personality and policy pursued by Mao Zedong, see CHANG, Jung and HALLIDAY, Jon: *Mao. La historia desconocida*. Barcelona: Taurus, 2016, 1029 pages (in English, *Mao: The Unknown Story*, Jonathan Cape, 2005).

3 DE LA MORENA, Felipe: *Deng Xiaoping y el comienzo de la China actual (Recuerdos de un testigo)*. Madrid: Cuadernos del Laberinto, 2016, p. 63.

Deng, on the other hand, was aware of his country's backwardness, which was to the detriment of its population: "Poverty is not socialism. Economic development is the priority of priorities" (p. 127). In this regard, Felipe de la Morena, who was appointed Spanish Ambassador to China just as Deng Xiaoping came to power, explains the phenomenon as he saw it upon his arrival in Beijing in 1978: "China is changing decisively and this change will, above all, mean abandoning two paths it now considers erroneous: the one that led it to adopt the Marxist economic doctrine of the USSR after the triumph of the Revolution and the one it took in adherence to the Maoist ideological dogmatism that culminated in the disastrous Cultural Revolution. Today's leaders believe that the two paths have led to its current economic backwardness, payment of a heavy price in social cohesion and stagnation in all areas".⁴ In this regard, Xulio Ríos believes that where Mao contributed his leftist doctrine, "Deng Xiaoping revolutionised it, claiming that the market was not incompatible with socialism".⁵

However, the significant changes should not be seen as a radical break with the parameters that had guided the country's policy during the period from 1949 to 1976. To the contrary, some of the constants that characterised Maoism became even more pronounced under Deng Xiaoping, such as the fear that the USSR would turn China into a satellite state like the countries of Eastern Europe. On this point, Spanish diplomat Felipe de la Morena was able to witness how Beijing interpreted Moscow's intentions, pointing out that Deng Xiaoping believed that the Soviet Union "pursued an aggressive and imperialist policy inherited from the old tsars, with its divisions and missiles aimed at China whose cooperation had been withdrawn in 1960 in the cruelest of ways".⁶

Despite the progress made by China in the 1980s, certain dialectics that still persist today were observed under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, perhaps the main one being the dialectic that pits freedom against security, allowing us to conclude that China is not contemplating a Western-style democracy in the near future.⁷

Indeed, under Deng Xiaoping, the role of the Communist Party of China (CPC) remained unchanged, given that "it had to be the only authority in the State with total decision-making power in order to maintain the country's cohesion".⁸ Evidence of this assertion was that the army stopped pledging allegiance to just one person

4 DE LA MORENA, Felipe: *op. cit.*, p.86.

5 RÍOS, Xulio: *China pide paso. De Hu Jintao a Xi Jinping*. Icaria: Barcelona, 2012, p. 15.

6 DE LA MORENA, Felipe: *op. cit.*, p. 211.

7 ESTEBAN, Mario: *Perspectivas de cambio político en China 25 años después del movimiento de Tiananmen*. Comentario Elcano 38/2014, 2 de junio de 2014, pags. 3-4, available at the following link: <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/dc3ab1004438fbf888d7df80bc5a2e3e/comentario-esteban-Perspectivas-cambio-pol%C3%ADtico-China.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=dc3ab1004438fbf888d7df80bc5a2e3e>. Accessed on 31 July 2017.

8 DE LA MORENA, Felipe: *op. cit.*, p. 109.

(Mao Zedong) and now did so to the party, and there was no civilian control over the military (p. 316). This fact became apparent during the events of Tiananmen Square in 1989, despite which the modernisation of the army was not considered an urgent priority by Deng Xiaoping. On the contrary, priority areas for reform were agriculture, industry and technology. Two factors contributed to this: “we are now building Chinese socialism, and according to the theory we can’t have an arms race that would drain away our resources” (pags. 339-340).

Furthermore, the evolution of China’s “intimate enemy” (the USSR) during the 1980s was seen by Deng Xiaoping as further proof that he had been right to give the party priority over society. Nevertheless, this assumption can also be interpreted in the same way as Guy Sorman: “The historical truth is that there is no room for evolution, there is no path leading to political reform in a totalitarian system: a Communist Party reigns or it collapses, as the Soviet experience clearly shows. When Gorbachev tried to reform the party in the 80s, the Party quickly disappeared”⁹.

Deng Xiaoping was also an “innovative” product of his own pragmatism and his accurate reading of the times in which he lived. Indeed, little by little, he allowed China’s burgeoning entrepreneurial class a presence in the bodies of the CPC, a prerogative that was later extended to sectors of the middle class¹⁰. However, as pointed out by Xulio Ríos, this kind of opening up should not be seen as synonymous with the democratisation of State structures, neither in the case of Deng Xiaoping nor his successors, such as Hu Jintao¹¹.

In this sense, China’s development has also given rise to a series of unprecedented behaviours and situations, the government’s response to which has been timely but tentative. In the first case, society has begun to develop a somewhat rebellious attitude, with the public tending to blame its political leaders for the natural disasters that befall it (earthquakes and floods that have claimed numerous lives). In the second case, migration from the country to the city has not eliminated problems in rural areas, where welfare-state guarantees are as yet non-existent, despite the fact that it is home to 70% of the population¹². Indeed, Wen Jiabao once voiced his concern about the issue to President Obama, saying “I have 600 million redundant farmers on my hands” (p.270).

These territorial imbalances could pose a threat to political powers in China and restrict economic growth if the State does not respond appropriately because, as

9 SORMAN, Guy: *...And Communism Destroyed Asia*. FAES Papers, no. 104, 19-06-2009, p. 7, available at the following link: http://www.fundacionfaes.org/file_upload/publication/pdf/20130520160548and-communism-destroyed-asia.pdf Accessed on 31 July 2017.

10 DELAGE, Fernando: *La política exterior china en la era de la globalización*, in *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, no. 63, 2003, p. 67.

11 RÍOS, Xulio: op. cit., p. 56.

12 RÍOS, Xulio: op. cit., pags. 45-46.

David Lampton points out: “For Americans, government is a danger; for Chinese, government ought to be the solution” (p.101).

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM CHINA?

To answer this question, Lampton uses a theme that recurs repeatedly throughout the book and which appears to suggest that China wants to show the world that it is not a threat, that is to say, that its development is not necessarily fuelled by hegemonic pretensions but, rather, by the consolidation of welfare for the people¹³. Under this goal, which could be regarded as general or rhetoric, international relations, which no longer have the low profile that Deng Xiaoping intentionally cultivated, can be seen in a very concrete way.

Indeed, China has chosen a combination of nationalism and pragmatism in its relations with other countries, even though this has not always proven to be a “magic formula” for resolving every problem, particularly those of a domestic nature, such as the non-integration of certain ethnic communities (for example, the Uyghurs), despite the introduction of positive discrimination measures¹⁴. Nevertheless, nationalism has proven to be a valid tool for rejecting any form of outside interference, particularly when such meddling is intended to influence issues to which Chinese public opinion is sensitive, like Tibet. In Mario Esteban’s opinion, if national sentiment is stirred up among the Chinese population, “the public put increased pressure on the authorities to implement a stronger foreign policy and make them pay a higher political price for succumbing to foreign criticism”¹⁵.

With regard to the international arena, China is a leading player, making forays into areas formerly unheard of for Beijing, such as South America,¹⁶ and leading initiatives

13 DE LA MORENA, Felipe: op. cit., p. 131.

14 RÍOS, Xulio: op. cit., p. 88.

15 ESTEBAN, Mario: España, Tíbet y Pekín 2008. Memorando OPEX 77/2008, pags. 3-4, available at the following link: http://www.fundacionalternativas.org/public/storage/opex_documentos_archivos/180508051a652ac82c9a61555120514e.pdf. Accessed on 31 July 2017.

16 ARIAS, Julio: *La expansión china en Latinoamérica: opciones para España*. Memorando OPEX, 26/2006, 8 pages, available at the following link: http://www.fundacionalternativas.org/public/storage/opex_documentos_archivos/xmlimport-lBADoA.pdf. Accessed on 31 July 2017; CACHINERO, Jorge, JIMÉNEZ DE ANDRADE, Carlota y BORGES, Adriano: *El futuro de América Latina... ¿apunta al Pacífico?: la historia de cómo China ocupó un espacio dejado al descuido*. Análisis Real Instituto Elcano, 58/2015, 29 de octubre de 2015, 9 pages, available at the following link: <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/21066b004a62b5efb28f8be207bacc4c/ARI58-2015-Cachinero-JimenezDeAndrade-Borges-Futuro-America-Latina-Pacifico-China.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=21066b004a62b5efb28f8be207bacc4c>. Accessed on 31 July 2017; JENKINS, Rhys: “El impacto de China en América Latina”. *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, 85-86, 2009, pags. 251-272.

such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank¹⁷. It can therefore be said that China has a triple global presence: commercial, military and “soft power”, a characteristic also attributed to other countries in Asia, particularly Japan and India¹⁸. On this matter, Lampton has some advice for China: “Developing stronger constitutionally governed civilian control of the military, with more transparent revenue and expenditures and more effective interagency coordination, needs to be part of China’s strategy if it is to reassure others. If China is to grow its “soft power”, in part through a strategy of reassurance, institutional reform of the civil-military relationship must be part of that effort” (p. 356).

All of this is a consequence of China choosing integration over separation and, as Lampton points out, it was not a random choice, given that “China’s people and its leaders now feel empowered to be full and equal participants in regional and world affairs. Beijing is increasingly comfortable with the institutions of the global economic order—wanting to boost its influence within them—and uncomfortable with the U.S.-led security order, founded as it is on bilateral and multilateral alliances of which China is not a part” (pags. 251-252).

Based on this, it can be concluded that in the global chessboard China is pursuing a “wait-and-see” policy, where it will not stand in the way of a consensus reached by others, but will not take the lead in reaching that consensus; “Beijing thereby avoids making enemies in what may prove to be a futile effort to reach a deal and leaves itself room to “sell” its support to the highest bidder in the end game” (p.397).

IN CONCLUSION

After reading David Lampton’s book, it can be stated that China has accomplished the main goal set by Deng Xiaoping when he came to power: the country’s modernisation and development, although this statement must be taken with caution. Society’s improved economic situation is a tangible reality, even if broad sectors of society have yet to benefit from it. Furthermore, no real progress has been made in the area of human rights; in this regard, Xulio Ríos is of the opinion that “the level achieved by the Chinese economy is a reality characterised by a combination of remarkable

17 DAJANIGONZÁLEZ, Jorge: *Un nuevo banco multilateral para relanzar la inversión en infraestructuras en Asia*. Análisis Real Instituto Elcano 45/2015, 17 de septiembre de 2015, 8 pages, available at the following link: <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/e997cf8049e13a3a8ff58f207bacc4c/ARI45-2015-DajaniGonzalez-Nuevo-banco-multilateral-relanzar-inversion-infraestructuras-Asia.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=e997cf8049e13a3a8ff58f207bacc4c>. Accessed on 31 July 2017.

18 ESTEBAN, Mario: *Los cuatro motores de la presencia global asiática*. Análisis Real Instituto Elcano, 74/2015, 17 de diciembre de 2015, 9 pages, available at the following link: <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/9fa91a004af97fef83docfc71300caaf/ARI74-2015-Esteban-Nuevos-Motores-Presencia-Global-Asiatica.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=9fa91a004af97fef83docfc71300caaf>. Accessed on 31 July 2017.

progress and no less spectacular shortcomings. Human development has by no means kept pace with economic development”¹⁹. Lampton explores this idea in-depth and suggests that the great risk facing China when responding to the challenges lying ahead could occur if it remains static.

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¹⁹ RÍOS, Xulio: *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

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