



12th Giri Deshingkar Memorial Lecture Series

The Communist Party of China in the Post-Mao Era: From Mass to Elite Party

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**Giri Deshingkar
Memorial Lectures
were begun in
2001, as a tribute
to the work and
contribution of
one of India's
leading China
experts, a
philosopher of
science and an
exceptional
scholar on the
history of China
and India**

Professor Brødsgaard began his lecture by highlighting the importance of studying the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). He recalled a visit paid by Liu Yunshan the then member of the Politburo Standing Committee, to his university where he claimed that in order to understand China one has to understand the CCP.

Brødsgaard argued that important works on the CCP has already been done in the 1960's by John Lewis and his contemporaries. He then stated that during the Cultural Revolution the focus of China studies shifted from studying the CCP to studying the mass movements, Red Guard movements and the factional struggles. Then in the 1980's the focus shifted to the structural and bureaucratic aspects of the state functioning and policy making framework.

Subsequently in the 1990's after the Tiananmen Square massacre emphasis was laid on the study of state-society relations and the centrifugal social forces after which there were doubts among the China scholars about the legitimacy of the CCP.

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He then went on to give his contrarian view to David Shambaugh's argument of the CCP being in decline, owing to the lack of reforms. Brødsgaard argued that on contrary to this view, he believed that the CCP has been able to adapt and is not in decline. Therefore, he yet again reaffirmed the need to study the CCP, its evolution, its policymaking and its organization.

Moving on, the Professor stated that the CCP in the 1950's had a membership of 5.8 million people which has now grown to be more than 89 million people. There is nevertheless, a change in the composition of the CCP since the 1950's when two thirds of its members were peasants and workers and now they comprise only one third of the total. In the 1950's only 0.6 percent of the party members had a higher education but now 43 percent of the members have a college degree.

The speaker further argued that China is not directly governed by the CCP rank and file but by millions of cadres in responsible positions. The cadre according to Lenin in 1902 were meant to be the vanguards of the revolution however the concept of cadre has been modified in China and in the 1950's the cadres were defined on the basis of their job category. Today there are around 42 million cadres in China, out of which less than half of these cadres are members of the CCP, nevertheless the cadres of the higher strata belong to the CCP. Approximately 96 percent of the leading cadres are from the CCP.

He then went on to highlight the importance of the ranking system in China, as it determines the formal authority as well as the salary and benefits. The system consists of 27 ranks and 14 grades. The salaries of the President are comparatively lower than the salaries received in countries like Singapore, but nevertheless the Chinese leaders at the top receive benefits such as housing, cars, travel expenses and health benefits. These benefits however, vary according to the ranks of the cadres.

Professor Brødsgaard then talked about the power elites in China, with a special mention of Xi Jinping's reference of the "key minority" of which the top leaders are an important part, but also includes county leaders. He then defined capitalism as a class stratified system where the economic capital dominates and communism as a rank stratified society where the dominating factors are social capital, institutionalised capital and political capital. Therefore the CCP is the main source of the political force.



He then highlighted how the cadres make it to the elite leadership in China. He stated that only 4.4 percent of all section members in China make it to the elite county level, out of which only 1 percent have the chance to make it further up to the Director General level. Hence, there is a lack of promotion opportunities, however any member who has been stuck in the same position for 12 years then they get the benefits of the next level but without the rank.

The Professor argued that the Chinese elite have a relatively open pattern of recruitment and a high level of integration. The CCP is also trying to co-opt rich entrepreneurs into the party and especially Jiang Zemin's 'three represents' was an attempt to co-opt these people. These people are also invited to the meetings of the National People's Congress (NPC) and also that of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Therefore, this indicates an open pattern of recruitment in China. Nevertheless, none of these people are members of the Central Committee and nor do they have a formal state or party rank.

He then moved on to talk about the current situation in China. With Xi Jinping being probably the strongest Chinese leader since Deng Xiaoping, he has often been compared to Deng. However, Professor Brødsgaard argued that Xi's ruling style is different than that of Deng Xiaoping. There are two main differences, the first being Xi's insistence of acquiring formal posts and not allowing others to out-rank him, whereas Deng ruled informally. Secondly, Xi has a different view of the role of the party as compared to Deng Xiaoping, where Deng argued for the separation of the party and government however in 2016 Wang Qishan introduced the "division of labour" between the party and the government and it was explicitly said that there is no such thing as separation between the party and the government but there is only the division of functions.

Therefore, there is a development in China where Deng Xiaoping's formulations and policy-lines, no longer apply. There is not just CCP led governments but there is a unitary system headed by a hegemonic party, where the party is taking over the state. elite party, there are a highly educated and a young cadre core. The party has also focused on maintaining bureaucratic quality rather than quantity and also the maintenance of the ranking system.



Professor Brødsgaard concluded his lecture by highlighting the fact that after having been neglected for two decades the study of the CCP, it has now yet again become a very important part of the contemporary China research. He also stated that owing to the lack of statistical material, it is difficult to study the CCP and especially the elites and the core. Also, he pointed out that there is too little application of social science concepts on the study of the CCP and lastly he argued that there is a tendency among the China scholars to want the CCP to wither away, which has been greatly influencing the field. However, the party has undergone a process of rejuvenation and has moved from a mass party to an elite party, there are a highly educated and a young cadre core. The party has also focused on maintaining bureaucratic quality rather than quantity and also the maintenance of the ranking system.

Report prepared by Sanjeevan Pradhan, Research Assistant, ICS

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