

The “Four C’s” of Contemporary China

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Although this article has no pretension that it captures more than a fraction of the complex reality that is contemporary China, it explores what the author calls “the Four C’s” — the Communist Party, censorship, corruption and construction — that shed light on important facets of that reality. Extensive reading about China’s recent history has provided the author with a trove of information that he thinks will interest readers of this Journal. His reference to “the Four C’s” is a fanciful application of China’s love for numbering so many things, such as “the Four Cardinal Principles” and “the Five Nos.”

Key Words: Chinese Communist Party, China’s censorship, China’s corruption, China’s construction, China’s movement of peoples, China’s “Four C’s.”

China loves to number things, producing such lists as the “Eight Immortals,” the “Five Nos,” the “Four Cardinal Principles,” the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence,” the “Eight Honors and Eight Disgraces,” and “One Belt and One Road,” among many others. It seems fitting, then, that for our discussion of selected aspects of recent Chinese history we should concoct a list of our own — the “Four C’s.” These refer to the Communist Party, censorship, corruption, and construction. (The last of these, construction, will be treated very broadly, to include the massive movement of peoples from rural China to the coasts, where enormous cities have been created, as if overnight.)

By no means is the treatment of these four subjects equivalent to a full-blown exploration of the many facets of China’s highly complex society.¹ The mere fact that China has almost 1.4 billion people would be enough to make this true, but there is much more besides. The subjects,

¹ This author has been making an extended study of the literature about China’s recent history, and will continue until he has what he hopes will be a well-rounded grasp of its complex reality. In the meantime, he is writing this article as something of an interim report, and is basing it primarily on the information imparted by six books written by observers who have spent a lot of time in China and who, though voicing the many criticisms reported here, are by no means adversarial in tone.

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however significant, are just parts of a study this author is conducting that is for him an on-going project. Before we begin, just one more caveat: because there is so much that is negative that will be revealed in our discussion of the Four C's, we need to entertain the possibility that a complete picture, if it is possible to get one, may (or may not) justify a more favorable assessment.

The information given in this article is mainly drawn from six of the books included in the study. Because readers will feel the need to evaluate the books' authors' competency for telling about China, we are giving a brief (actually, all-too-truncated) description of each author's qualifications in this footnote.²

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

Former U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, Jr., says that in 2014 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had almost 87 million members.³ This is out of a Chinese population of nearly 1.4 billion people. The members join by invitation, and with so many members the Party is ubiquitous, so that it is no exaggeration to say that, with three and a half million local branches, it pervades almost everything. The branches are present in nearly all parts of the government, in business firms (whether state-owned or private), civic groups, virtually all villages, and professional associations. The composition is some 76 percent male. Most members are Han Chinese, and not quite forty percent are farmers or workers in the cities.⁴

The Party's top leadership comes close to being hereditary. President Xi Jinping is himself the son of one of the Communist Party's "Eight Immortals,"⁵ much-revered Party elders who led China during

² Rowan Callick is a former China correspondent in Beijing and is Asia-Pacific editor of the *Australian*. Jason Inch has lived in China for more than 14 years and is the author of four books about China. Henry Paulson is a former U.S. Treasury Secretary and CEO of Goldman Sachs who worked for several years helping China develop its financial system. Thomas Campanella has variously been on the design faculties of the University of North Carolina, Harvard, MIT, and Nanjing University. Evan Osnos was the China correspondent for *The New Yorker* from 2008 to 2013.

³ Henry M. Paulson, Jr., *Dealing With China: An Insider Unmasks the New Economic Superpower* (New York: Twelve, 2015), p. 355.

⁴ Rowan Callick, *The Party Forever: Inside China's Modern Communist Elite* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 25, 17.

⁵ Callick recalls that "the news agency Bloomberg was blocked in China for a considerable period in 2012 after it detailed wealth amassed by the extended family of Xi Jinping... -- though not, Bloomberg stressed, by Xi himself." He tells us the public is

the first two decades of the post-Mao years; i.e., the 1980s and 1990s. (It would be easy to confuse these with the Eight Immortals of Chinese mythology, but the two are not the same.) In his book on the CCP, Rowan Callick tells us ‘the party is effectively controlled by 200 to 300 influential families.’⁶ This control is particularly evident when we consider that the “democratic centralism” that is one of the declared principles of the Party is much more centralist than democratic; everyone below the top level is told what the correct policy and thought is to be, with only a charade of electoral choice.

Although the Army has long been an essential linchpin of the Party’s power, it is itself, not surprisingly, an instrument of the Party. Almost all Army officers are members, generals receive their appointments through it, and all units contain Party committees. The trade union movement is under the total control of the Party, and we are told *The People’s Daily* is “an organ of the CCP.”⁷

Children are integrated into the Party system from an early age. Most between seven and thirteen wear the red scarves of the “Little Red Pioneers,” reminiscent of the Soviet Union’s Young Pioneers (from 1921 to 1991) for children between nine and fifteen. The pledge they chant at their initiation evokes thoughts of the Hitler Youth: “I am a Little Red Pioneer! Beneath the Pioneer flag I swear that I am determined to obey the teachings of the Chinese Communist Party, that I will study, work and labor diligently, and that I am prepared to dedicate all my efforts to the cause of communism.” There are two thousand party schools committed to “entrenching party values.”⁸

Callick’s book tells about the role played by the Party’s millions of members: they “can raise issues, but mostly they are only expected to absorb what they are told.” This includes being instructed about which candidates to vote for in the elections to the National People’s Congress and even to local positions. The committees’ frequent meetings consist mainly of receiving instructions from above. Members, even officials across the country, are called upon to write self-criticisms and make public confessions, and Callick quotes one member as saying “young

seldom told anything about how the leaders live. Callick, *The Party Forever*, pp. 181, 194.

⁶ Callick, *The Party Forever*, p. 173.

⁷ Jason Inch, *China 4.0: The Man, the Plan, the Dream* (No city or publisher named, 2017), p. 82.

⁸ Callick, *The Party Forever*, p. 33, 32.

people [learn] to express nonsense from an early age. You learn to make it up.” The same hollow genuflection is poured into the annual essay in which each Party member is to tell what he thinks of the Party and its policies.

When we are told that members are selected from “the best and the brightest,” we can well imagine how stultifying it must be for them, unless any given individual has been fashioned by the system into an automaton (and it is hard for us to assess what fraction of the Party’s membership this might describe).⁹ We are reminded of how much Communist societies count on ideological fervor, and how hard it is to keep such fires burning from one generation to the next. When Adam Smith found the motive-power of self-interest to be a much better long-run social organizing principle, he was onto something. Indeed, the Communist Party under Deng Xiaoping learned this soon after Mao Zedong’s death when it created the underpinning of the spectacular economic boom of recent years by abandoning the system of farm collectives, allowing farmers to run their own farms and letting them freely market some of their produce.¹⁰

An attentive reader is bound to wonder about the implications of all this. A question that comes to mind is to what extent the pervasive presence of 3.5 million Party committees, consisting of 87 million people, must constitute an instrument for the Chinese people’s spying and reporting on each other, literally on a daily basis. It is hard to imagine that that is not one of its purposes. If it is, would not a vast cauldron of mutual suspicion, acrimony, and quasi-paranoid anxiety have to follow? It would be well if the literature discussed such human factors.

One would suppose the universal presence of Party operatives would create a blanket of social control tightly constraining such things as unauthorized expression and corruption. It would appear, though, that it is not nearly as effective as we might suppose it to be. As we move on to discuss China’s censorship and corruption, we will see that the Chinese public is by no means a complete captive caught in the Party’s web. The living vitality of the Chinese people is such that extraordinary measures need to be taken to control their thinking and expression, which tends to bubble out, even from Party members themselves, despite the ever-watchful eye of Party cadres. The same is true of corruption. (Perhaps this flowing beyond the bounds of the constraints is just “hu-

⁹ Callick, *The Party Forever*, pp. 21, 24, 27.

¹⁰ Inch, *China 4.0*, p. 7.

man nature” showing its head, much the same as traffic along America’s highways tends to move about ten to fifteen miles an hour over the speed limits despite everyone’s seeming commitment to the “rule of law.”) It wouldn’t be unreasonable to call the system “totalitarian,” but contemporary China shows how hard it is to exercise total control.

Censorship and thought control

The freedoms of speech and press are provided for by Article 35 of the Chinese constitution, but as has been typical in Communist countries, the guarantees exist on paper but not in reality. As we will see in this section, censorship is pervasive, there is ubiquitous surveillance, and much is done to restrict expression and to mold the public’s thinking through active propaganda. As the CEO of Goldman Sachs and then as the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Paulson had extensive contact with the Chinese in assisting their financial development, and he says that during those years the Chinese government was rather tolerant of discussion about economic topics, even allowing criticisms. He adds, however, that people were given “little latitude” to talk about human rights or civil liberties. He ascribes this to the government’s “concern for political stability.”¹¹ We will see that the always-present anxiety over maintaining control takes the Chinese government well beyond what Paulson indicates; it demands channeling opinion and expression not simply about rights and liberties, but about all subjects other than the strictly banal. The present trend is reinforcing this. Paulson says that President Xi’s “administration is proving to be even more restrictive than its predecessors.”

The Internet simultaneously offers the government the greatest need for censorship and the best means to convey its propaganda. The Chinese equivalent to Twitter is *weibo*, which has grown so rapidly that Callick says it “has become a core social institution” that “teeters between being the country’s great change agent and the ruling communist party’s most useful tool for control.” He adds that Facebook and Twitter *per se* are “effectively banned.”¹²

China employs many thousands of “net police,” who delete anything considered damaging. They are aided by search engines looking

¹¹ Paulson, *Dealing With China*, p. 107, 370. There are many reasons for this concern. One that especially deserves mention is the worry felt by both China and Russia about the “Color Revolution” subversion that has been exercised in so many places by Western non-governmental organizations and the United States government.

¹² Callick, *The Party Forever*, p. 87.

for unacceptable keywords. Jason Inch says this censorship “is so skillfully done that it is very hard for the users themselves to detect.”¹³ Callick seconds this, telling how China’s research into surveillance technology “leads the world,” allowing the government to “reach into almost every Chinese home by keeping tabs on the family’s electronic devices.” He tells how in 2010 Google backed off of its effort to open the Chinese Internet after experiencing a vast cyberattack “which Google attributed to Chinese agents.”¹⁴ To keep anything from “going viral,” a prison sentence is provided for cases where “false defamatory” comments are forwarded five hundred times. The censorship has gone so far as to impose a ten-month digital blackout in an incident involving civil unrest in far western China.¹⁵ Paulson says filters are used to affect access to “thousands of Internet sites throughout the world.” He says Google has now pulled out of China entirely, and that YouTube has joined Facebook and Twitter among the services banned. The sum total amounts to what he and others call “The Great Firewall,” described as a “vast digital barricade.”¹⁶

It isn’t just the Internet that is tightly controlled. A central propaganda department makes almost daily contact with all media, telling them what they aren’t permitted to cover. If there is a story about corruption, say, media can’t run it until it is released by the Party’s discipline department. Party leaders can’t be depicted in cartoons. There is an All China Journalists’ Association under the control of the CCP.¹⁷

The literature brings out many examples of what can’t be revealed. Here is some of what Callick tells us:

The Party has “mostly remained silent” about the Cultural Revolution, the decade of terror between 1966 and 1976, and that “tens of thousands of ‘net police’ constantly patrol the web” to prevent any mention of it. Years before the Cultural Revolution, there was a time when Mao encouraged intellectuals to “Let a hundred flowers bloom,” and then cracked down with severe punishments after they spoke up. The media today are told never to mention the crackdown.¹⁸

In the art world, some painters are banned from showing their work,

¹³ Inch, *China 4.0*, p. 276.

¹⁴ Callick, *The Party Forever*, p. 89.

¹⁵ Evan Osnos, *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), pp. 364, 201, 30.

¹⁶ Paulson, *Dealing With China*, pp. 371, 30.

¹⁷ Callick, *The Party Forever*, pp. 80, 84, 85.

¹⁸ Callick, *The Party Forever*, pp. 28, 124, 100.

and a cultural bureau sends exhibitors lists of what is not to be depicted. It is interesting that this cultural concern would almost certainly seem desirable to American conservatives (were it not government-imposed), barring a major fraction of what appears on American television today: vulgarity, sexual innuendoes, violence, premarital cohabitation, superstition, and even fortune-telling. A Ministry of Culture limits the excesses of pop culture, and in 2007 the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television limited programs to only “healthy and ethically inspiring” songs.¹⁹ (This cultural conservatism appears to be in odd contrast to what Osnos speaks of as prostitution that is “everywhere in a country overrun with cash-rich new entrepreneurs on business trips.” He points out another apparent reason for the prostitution: that the Chinese preference for male children led to so much aborting of baby girls that there are expected by 2020 to be 24 million men incapable of getting wives.²⁰)

Even news about catastrophes and public health issues is censored. A publishing house was penalized for mentioning the earthquake that killed over 250,000 people in Tangshan in 1976. The facts were at first kept from the public when several thousand peasants caught AIDS after taking part in a blood-donor program.²¹ (And both Paulson and Osnos tell about the six-month cover-up of the SARS virus epidemic in Guangdong Province in 2002-3, a delay that caused hundreds of deaths.²² Jason Inch mentions that 70,000 people were killed in 2008’s Sichuan earthquake, but doesn’t say whether news of that was suppressed.²³)

Osnos cites other examples. He describes the all-encompassing censorship powers of the secretive Central Propaganda Department, which controls all billboards, decides what can and cannot be the subject of scholarly research, fires editors and professors, and even recuts movies. Although the world is acutely aware of the pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and its bloody aftermath, these have become non-history in China, among other unmentionables. After hundreds of school buildings collapsed during the Sichuan earthquake in 2008 because corruption had, among other things, caused bamboo to be substituted for steel, “thousands of children were trapped or dead in the rubble.” News coverage was banned; and when some

¹⁹ Callick, *The Party Forever*, pp. 98, 101, 108-9.

²⁰ Osnos, *Age of Ambition*, pp. 27, 47.

²¹ Callick, *The Party Forever*, pp. 101, 178.

²² Paulson, *Dealing With China*, p. 156; Osnos, *Age of Ambition*, p. 126.

²³ Inch, *China 4.0*, p. 29.

outlets covered it anyway, they were punished. Parents were detained when they demanded information. Similarly, the national news ignored the deaths of more than forty people from food poisoning in Nanjing in 2002. After a high-speed train accident in 2011, “the Central Propaganda Department ordered editors to give the crash as little attention as possible.” When officials such as Zhao Ziyang (“blamed for not suppressing the [Tiananman] demonstrations earlier”) and Liu Zhijun (the railroad minister, known as Great Leap Liu, charged with corruption in the building of the high-speed rail system) fell out of favor, they were expunged from the histories, a process that evokes memories of “The Vanishing Commissars” under Stalin in the Soviet Union. Among the things Osnos mentions that relate to the Internet: in 2012 an alert was issued that “all websites are not to repeat the news headlined, ‘UN Releases World Happiness Report, and China Ranks No 112.’”²⁴

At the same time censorship creates a void, active propaganda fills it. Osnos says “no country has devoted more time and care to the art of propaganda than China.” To this end, a Bureau of Public Opinion was created in 2004. The Internet is loaded with pro-government propaganda, and “ushers of public opinion” channel discussion on the Web. A film director told Osnos that he was required to “portray all the Communists as superheroes.” In the United States, there has been much mention of “Fake News,” and this has a corresponding reality in China; Osnos was told by one of his contacts, in reference to China Central Television, that it is “replacing truth with lies, manipulating public opinion, desecrating culture, abusing facts, concealing wrongdoing, covering up problems, and creating fake images of harmony.” A TV talent program called the Red Song Contest features songs like “Why Are the Flowers So Red?” and “The Red Star Sparkles as I Go to War.” Since 2005 there has been an active program of “red tourism” going to historic Party sites, such as those along the Long March. In the center of Tiananman Square, Mao’s remains can be viewed in a glass case in what Callick calls “the great helmsman’s mausoleum.” Mao’s picture is on the currency. A house in Shanghai has wax figures of the thirteen revolutionaries, including Mao, who began the CCP in 1921.

Much is done to create monumental showcases of Communist

²⁴ Osnos, *Age of Ambition*, pp. 117, 126, 21, 130, 183, 209, 236, 272. Intriguing information about the USSR’s “vanishing commissars” is worth checking out on Google and YouTube. A succession of photos shows that one man after another was air-brushed out of group photos with Stalin.

achievement. We are reminded of “Potemkin Villages,” which got their name when Grigory Potemkin had fake villages built to beguile Empress Catherine II on her 1787 tour of Crimea. As China prepared for the Summer Olympics in Beijing in 2008, “large swaths of the city were being demolished or refurbished to create a clean, modern backdrop,” according to Osnos. He says that when a girl who was to sing in the opening ceremony wasn’t pretty enough, another girl was substituted for her, with the original girl then lip-syncing the song.²⁵ Jason Inch tells how before various world leaders met in Hangzhou in 2016, “Hangzhou was made to look pristine by rushing to completion major infrastructure projects, boarding up construction sites and other eyesores, and shutting down polluting factories weeks beforehand” to allow clean air.²⁶ Probably the most impressive showpiece is Pudong, across the Huangpu River from Puxi, the center of Shanghai. More than a million people lived in Pudong before the 1988 Comprehensive Plan of Shanghai called for the creation of the Pudong New Area. In *The Concrete Dragon*, Thomas Campanella tells how wrecking crews leveled the villages and how within a very short time an incredible skyline of immense buildings came into being. (It is worth looking at the before-and-after pictures on YouTube.) Among the structures is the 1,535-foot Pearl of the Orient broadcasting tower, started in 1991.²⁷ Indeed, as we will see in our section on “construction,” China now boasts vast urban areas featuring magnificent high-rises. Often the impression is mostly a Potemkin Village; speaking of Beijing, Campanella says that “like nearly all recent monumental architecture in the capital, CCTV Tower [a spectacular showpiece] is little more than a glorified piece of sculpture.” With many of the structures, the quality of construction is so bad that the impression is belied by the lack of function.

Just the same, there is reality, not just braggadocio, behind much of it. The ceremonies at the Beijing Olympics were indeed a work of exquisite art that put to shame the British demonstration, at the very end, of what was planned to come at the London Olympics four years later. And the growth of enormous cities reflects the movement of some 300 million people from rural China to the coast since 1978. Paulson says this is expected to continue, with 300 million more expected by 2030.²⁸

²⁵ Osnos, *Age of Ambition*, pp. 131-2.

²⁶ Inch, *China 4.0*, p. vi.

²⁷ Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon: China’s Urban Revolution and What It Means for the World* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), pp. 73, 76, 136.

²⁸ Paulson, *Dealing With China*, p. 270.

This is a massive demographic shift, not just showmanship.

Despite all that we have described, some independent opinion seeps through. Osnos says “the establishment media was being undermined by the Web.” Callick observes that “private conversations in China today range widely and can be extraordinarily frank.” Even though Party members are ever-present, “the old anxiety about speaking one’s mind even to friends or relatives has pretty well evaporated.” It is a different story, though, about public debate. Jason Inch writes that a part of President Xi’s anti-corruption drive has been to be “much more open” about the problem to “build awareness to drive prevention.”²⁹

Corruption

Although we will cite specific examples of corruption, they are necessarily anecdotal, making the more general observations of those who have been on the scene important. It is remarkable that Henry Paulson, who worked at the highest levels for several years to assist China’s financial development, is willing to be so candid as to say that “graft, bribery, and even outright theft of state-owned assets are rampant, infecting massive projects and ordinary daily transactions alike.” He writes of officials’ wearing \$10,000 watches and “their children driving \$250,000 cars,” consumption that is far out of proportion to the officials’ salaries.³⁰ Jason Inch speaks of “China’s culture of corruption,” and Osnos mentions an “epidemic of fraudulence” that reaches “into every corner of life.”³¹ This has been one of President Xi’s main concerns. Soon after assuming office, he appointed an anti-corruption czar. In 2013, criminal charges were brought against Liu Zhijun (the railway boss who was one of the “vanishing commissars” mentioned earlier) for taking bribes of \$10.6 million.³²

The corruption takes many forms. Bribery is used to procure a place in the Army, and a high official was expelled from the Party for “selling promotions, sometimes for millions of dollars.” Hundreds of millions of dollars of bribes and kickbacks came into play in the context of railway construction, which Osnos describes as “an ecosystem almost perfectly hospitable to corruption.” Fake drugs and food additives are

²⁹ Osnos, *Age of Ambition*, p. 165; Callick, *The Party Forever*, p. 84; Inch, *China 4.0*, p.128.

³⁰ Paulson, *Dealing With China*, p. 358.

³¹ Inch, *China 4.0*, p. 101; Osnos, *Age of Ambition*, p. 174.

³² Osnos, *Age of Ambition*, pp. 361-2.

put on the market. Journalists are bribed not to run negative stories. As in the United States, insider trading is among the business crimes. Fake invoices and overcharges boost the cost of major projects. There is a demand for forged *hukous* (residency documents). When residents have been forced to relocate for urban land reclamation, Inch says, the process has been tainted in “a number of notable cases” in which legal process and fair compensation have been brushed aside. He tells us the evictions are sometimes carried out by “truckloads of private thugs.” Some people pay kickbacks to get apartments either free or at lower-than-market prices. Paulson tells of some Bank of China executives who stole “almost a half a billion dollars” through one banking branch during a nine-year span that ended in 2001. Fake receipts and expense reports are pushed by a great volume of spam calls. Academic fraud such as plagiarism and faking data is “rampant.” While China had its “one-child policy,” if a couple had more than one child some officials would confiscate the extra baby and sell it for adoption overseas. The list goes on, but we’ll end it by telling of the 140 judges who were caught for courtroom corruption.³³

Punishments are often severe. Osnos says 668,000 Party members were punished for all sorts of graft during a five-year period, with 350 death sentences. In 2007, the man heading the State Food and Drug Administration was executed; and during an eight-year period “at least fourteen yuan billionaires” were put to death. Other top people, such as a former vice chairman of the Central Military Commission who was also a member of the Politburo, and another who was a former head of internal security, have been expelled from the Party. We are told that “by 2007, nearly half of all Chinese provinces had sent their chief of transportation to jail.” Life sentences and other prison sentences, some quite long, enter into the mix.³⁴

Construction (and movement of peoples)

Words can hardly describe the last few years’ urban development in China, which ranks among the wonders of world history. Nothing matches what has occurred, both as to quantity and as to magnificence (subject, of course, to the caveat that, as we will see, the beauty and enor-

³³ Osnos, *Age of Ambition*, pp. 213, 242-3, 55, 321, 331, 261; Callick, *The Party Forever*, pp. 84, 200, 201, 230; Inch, *China 4.0*, pp. 296, 108, 109, 119; Paulson, *Dealing With China*, p. 148.

³⁴ Osnos, *Age of Ambition*, pp. 261-3, 91, 269; Paulson, *Dealing With China*, pp. 359; Callick, *The Party Forever*, p. 73; Inch, *China 4.0*, p. 120.

mous scale are undercut by the often-poor quality of construction). As we have seen, in the last forty years, 300 million people have come from rural China to settle in the burgeoning cities, mostly along the coast, and 300 million more are expected by 2030. Campanella says the number of cities increased from 193 in 1978 to 667 by 1999, and Callick reports that there are to be 221 cities of over one million people by 2025.³⁵

To understand the vast construction, it is necessary to appreciate several associated factors. One is the changes in rural life and the consequent movement of peoples. Another is the astonishing extent of displacement, whereby the Chinese governments, national and local, exercise the totalitarian power of the Communist Party to move neighborhoods and other concentrations of people around like pieces on a chessboard.

The migration. After Mao's death, rural reforms moved China away from agricultural collectives, instituting a "Household Responsibility System" that provided families with land and allowed them to sell any excess after they had met a production quota.³⁶ Paulson says the migration of tens of millions from the countryside to the east coast was "initially inadvertent, the result of the stunning success of [the] rural reforms." Farm production went up rapidly, producing a boom crop by 1984, and a large pool of farm labor (said to be 300 million people) was made superfluous. Whereas at the time Mao died four-fifths of China's people were rural, this was reduced to less than half by the early 21st century.³⁷

What started inadvertently was soon backed by government policy. Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin led the economic revitalization of China, and this produced the vast manufacturing activity that we associate with its booming economy. Jason Inch says "the eastern coastal areas received most of the attention and investments in the 1980s and 1990s," and that "the government wants more urbanization not less."³⁸

The literature differs about the number of migrants. Campanella estimates 140 million in 2003; Callick speaks of about 200 million; and Jason Inch, "more than 250 million."³⁹ The *hukou* residential permit system puts these people in a limbo (Paulson calls it a "legal nether-

³⁵ Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, p. 180; Callick, *The Party Forever*, p. 223.

³⁶ Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, p. 31.

³⁷ Paulson, *Dealing With China*, p. 275.

³⁸ Inch, *China 4.0*, pp. 211, 238.

³⁹ Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, p. 181; Callick, *The Party Forever*, p. 155; Inch, *China 4.0*, p. 41.

world”). Osnos tells the situation for a migrant in Guangdong: earning half of what those with a Guangdong *hukou* earn; needing to pay several times more for schooling for a child; having no prenatal care, and “second-class health care.” In Beijing in 2008, “migrants shared bunk beds in tiny rooms” with no air conditioning. He tells of a boardinghouse where ten men shared a room, and ten young women another; and says that such facilities are called “ant tribes” in Mandarin.⁴⁰

It is interesting that in recent years the coastal urbanization has been offset in part by the “Go West” drive under the 11th Five Year Plan (2006-2010). This encourages firms to set up production in the erstwhile rural areas away from the coast. (Noticeably, though, the 13th Five Year Plan’s map of what the high-speed rail coverage is expected to be by 2030 shows the lines running to only the eastern 40 percent of the country, with two exceptions being a line running to the far northwest and another to the far north. This suggests a limit to the “go west” aspiration.)

Urban development. The Pearl River Delta has become one of the world’s largest urban expanses, going from farms and rice fields to an anticipated 30 million people by 2020. Campanella describes its Guangdong Province as now “the workshop of the world,” with most of the consumer goods sold in the United States being made there.⁴¹ The city of Shenzhen, near Hong Kong, is part of it, and went from a fishing village to 11 million people. It features, Callick says, “exciting new buildings by the world’s most expensive architects.”⁴² In Shanghai, the Pudong New Area replaced a low-lying marshland bearing a million people with a financial center that sports a Manhattan-like skyline. The scale of many things is astonishing: Campanella writes about enormous shopping malls larger even than the Mall of America. One has 250 escalators and over a thousand shops. He tells of a Buddha statue twice as tall as the Statue of Liberty, and an even taller one for the Buddhist female bodhisattva Guan Yin. All of this is not without its costs, which cause him to speak of “China’s looming environmental crisis” with “nearly all of the most terribly polluted cities in the world.”⁴³

Infrastructure. The People’s Construction Bank of China has provided vast funds for infrastructure projects since 1989. China adopted

⁴⁰ Paulson, *Dealing With China*, 280; Osnos, *Age of Ambition*, pp. 44, 163, 352-3.

⁴¹ Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, p. 51.

⁴² Callick, *The Party Forever*, p. 153.

⁴³ Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, pp. 236, 244, 249, 250, 295.

a stimulus program to offset the Great Recession (of 2008 and thereafter), and the two-year program of \$586 billion was spent mostly on infrastructure. The high-speed rail project (which we have seen featured so much corruption) extends almost 7,000 miles, and Paulson says the intention is to increase subway systems from 21 cities to 40 by 2020.⁴⁴ Osnos tells of plans “to build another hundred thousand miles of highways, another fifty new airports, and more than five thousand additional miles of high-speed rail.”⁴⁵

Housing. Most of the housing construction has been in high-rise condos. Between 2011 and 2015, the government built “36 million units of affordable housing” according to Paulson. Campanella says the concrete slip-form method of construction is so effective that a floor can be built in three days. Even for rich families, the living-units are much smaller than Americans are used to. Apartment buildings of six or eight stories, perhaps more, are walk-ups. Not all has been high-rise, however. We think with amazement about how nine villages have been built around the fringes of Shanghai replicating several world cities. Known as “One City, Nine Towns,” they feature the half-timbered homes of a German city, canals “inspired by Amsterdam,” a Swedish town, an Italian town with neo-Venetian canals, and an English “Thames Town.” Elsewhere, there are all sorts of surprising touches resulting from what Campanella speaks of as “China’s merchant elite’s penchant for arriviste extravagance.” These include a full-scale replica of the White House, a small U.S. Capitol Building, the Washington Monument, Mount Rushmore — even a copy of Copenhagen’s Little Mermaid.⁴⁶

Urban planning. Speaking of Shenzhen in the Pearl River Delta, Campanella says the development was laid out in a “comprehensive master plan,” with the goal of making Shenzhen ideal for investors. He does refer, however, to a lack of enforcement follow-through, so that “a variety of forces quickly altered whatever vision was put on paper.” A photo in *The Concrete Dragon* shows three men looking down on a large room the floor of which is covered by a sprawling model of Shanghai at the Shanghai Urban Planning Exposition Center. The model is a phenomenon in its own right. The Five Year Plans are supplemented by ex-

⁴⁴ Paulson, *Dealing With China*, pp. 36, 96, 258, 276.

⁴⁵ Osnos, *Age of Ambition*, p. 360.

⁴⁶ Paulson, *Dealing With China*, p. 276; Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, pp. 236, 218, 88-90, 22.

tensive sub-plans that in one instance laid out the plan for cluster cities.⁴⁷

Outside architects, planners and engineers. It is surprising how much of the monumental development has involved Western architects and planners. Campanella says “most major landmark buildings in Beijing... have been the work of foreign architects.” He reports that the rebuilding of Beijing’s downtown was done according to a master plan “awarded by competition to a small Los Angeles firm.” Callick writes of French, British, Dutch and German architects then carrying out that refashioning. A German architect was Albert Speer, Jr., working in the same monumental style as his famous father. The “Olympic Green” in Beijing, an amazing three times as big as Central Park in New York City, was planned by Speer and done by the Massachusetts firm Sasaki Associates. The National Stadium for the Beijing Olympics went to Swiss architects, and the huge National Aquatics Center called “the Water Cube” was designed by Australian architects. A British engineering firm did the engineering for both the National Stadium and the National Aquatics Center. The startling skyline of Pudong in Shanghai was “all designed by U.S. architectural firms.” We are left wondering whether the Chinese themselves played any part in the aesthetics or planning, so it is a relief when at last Campanella mentions the “Beijing supercouple” Pan Shiyi and Zhang Xin, who did several developments, one of which included twenty high-rise buildings to house 50,000 people.⁴⁸

Displacement of millions. It could be said that one of the land-use-planning advantages of a totalitarian government such as China’s is that has a free hand to displace literally millions of people, tearing out ancient neighborhoods and resettling those millions, usually in high-rise apartments. It isn’t surprising when Campanella tells us that “community input and public participation” is left out entirely. In Beijing, much displacement was done in preparation for the 2008 Olympics to make the city dazzle as a world showpiece. As early as 2002, the city government announced a plan that called for demolishing the homes and moving the residents in 25 older areas. Nine hundred families were immediately told to get out within one month. By early 2005, 300,000 people had been displaced. We have already noted how one million people were moved to make way for the Pudong New Area in Shanghai. Campanella tells us even more: between 1988 and 2002, 192 million square feet of old homes were cleared away in Shanghai, and this was

⁴⁷ Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, pp. 42, 90; Inch, *China 4.0*, p. 221.

⁴⁸ Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, pp. 167, 81, 131-139; Callick, *The Party Forever*, p. 5.

after 200,000 families had been removed from the inner-city areas between 1992 and 1994.⁴⁹

By no means was the process limited to Beijing and Shanghai. The industrial city of Chongqing lies along the Yangtze River just above the Three Gorges Reservoir. As it became a center for Hewlett-Packard, Lenovo, Acer, Asustek, Sony and Toshiba, the city's efforts to attract such firms included, according to Paulson, "billions in subsidies toward housing and business start-ups," as well as the "clearing away of miles of shantytowns" and building enough subsidized housing for two million people. When the Three Gorges Dam was built, almost a dozen cities were wiped out, with over a million people moved. Campanella says that so much rural land has been lost to urban development (almost 44,000 square miles) that China has gone from being self-sufficient in agriculture to importing food. There are hundreds of millions' fewer farm workers now than there were three decades ago, even though there are hundreds of millions more still in place.⁵⁰

What we have described gives enough specifics to bring home the reality of it all, but there is much, much more as hundreds of millions of people are shuttled about. Given China's 1.4 billion people, everything is done on a scale that dwarfs anything the world has seen before.

Quality of construction. The construction may be magnificent, but it is often of poor quality. Jason Inch tells of the effects of China's corruption, where bribes, kickbacks, and building shortcuts such as the substitution of lower-quality materials have caused the collapse of an onramp in a \$300 million project and "nearly a dozen other highly publicized failures of roads, bridges and ramps, many of them newly constructed." "Crumbling concrete" now has a name of its own: *doufuzha*. He goes on to give examples of "architectural wonders," all recently built, that aren't holding up. These include the Bird's Nest Stadium in Beijing, which is now rusting and "bereft of people"; the CCTV Tower that is "all but abandoned following a fireworks accident that gutted one of the sibling towers"; and the Capital Airport in Beijing where high winds take off parts of its roof. In July 2018, the Internet site "SmartCitiesDive" told how corruption accounted for "skimping on things like wall insulation, substituting quality exterior and interior cladding materials for inferior ones, and even using cheaper plumbing and electrical equipment." *The*

⁴⁹ Callick, *The Party Forever*, p. 229; Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, p. 155, 146.

⁵⁰ Paulson, *Dealing With China*, p. 286; Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, pp. 14, 17; Inch, *China 4.0*, p. 190.

Washington Post reported in 2015 that “some of China’s concrete buildings may have to be knocked down and replaced in as little as 20 or 30 years,” and that Goldman Sachs says “about a third of the cement that China uses is low-grade stuff that wouldn’t be used in other countries.” A major problem with the concrete is the frequent use of sea salt. Adam Minter, who wrote *Junkyard Planet*, has expounded at length about the “suspicious building materials utilized in Shanghai – and China’s – two-decade construction boom.” Osnos tells how a particularly long bridge in North China was rushed to completion in 18 months, only to collapse less than a year later (in 2012). He points out that this was “the sixth bridge collapse in a single year.” Campanella describes the rotten quality generally. “The life span of architecture in China is measured in dog’s years.” He tells of office towers in Nanjing that were constructed not quite thirty years ago that are being demolished. Supposedly quality housing has crumbling staircases. The showpiece Pudong International Airport is “visibly aging” despite being less than twenty years old. He tells how a shopping mall in Dongguan collapsed in 2000, killing a dozen people.⁵¹

Ghost cities. It is the phenomenon of “ghost cities” that has especially captured the imagination of Western audiences. Much is built far in advance, funded in part by people’s purchase of empty units as investments, but with a realistic prospect of eventually being filled up as hundreds of millions of additional people flood in from rural China. In 2016, *Forbes* said 25 percent of apartments in Beijing were empty, and explained that investors buy the apartments even before construction. Paulson says the Kangbashi New Area in Inner Mongolia is the best known of the ghost cities, and *Forbes* pointed out that 80-90 percent of the apartments were already sold, even though they are empty shells. It will seem odd to Western readers that many units are sold as undecorated concrete boxes. Jason Inch cites private estimates that there are “millions or tens of millions of units empty or under-utilized.” This includes not just residential housing, but even shopping malls and office buildings. Although many have been purchased in advance, “millions of apartments remain unsold and empty, awaiting people.” Jason Inch says the massive stimulus package China adopted in response to the Great Recession accounts for some of the ghost city phenomenon. He also

⁵¹ Inch, *China 4.0*, pp. 96, 34; “SmartCitiesDive,” Internet on July 9, 2018; *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2015; “Personal Blog of Adam Minter,” Internet on July 9, 2018; Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon*, p. 284.

cites “miscalculation of demand” as the reason for many industrial parks that are “today vast industrial wastelands.”⁵²

It may seem we’ve covered a lot of ground in discussing our “Four C’s” of contemporary China, but the six authors whose works have served as our sources have much more to impart. As important as they are, the “Four C’s” are only a fraction of a vast and complicated canvas.

China is tightly controlled, which gives the government powers — and abilities — that no democratic, rights-respecting government can even think of exercising. But underneath it all is a pulsating mass of humanity, almost a billion and a half people living out their lives. Their society is undergoing change at a scale and rapidity never seen before, and where it will lead is a fascinating subject for speculation. To the Chinese themselves, it is a source of excitement and national pride — but it is at the same time full of the dangers totalitarian power is known to pose. It remains to be seen whether the model of tight central power combined with an economy of state-capitalism, a model being emulated in other Communist countries such as Vietnam and Cuba, is benign and constructive or is prone to vicious turns such as Mao’s Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution.

⁵² *Forbes*, April 16, 2016; Paulson, *Dealing With China*, p. 277; Inch, *China 4.0*, pp. 315, 320, 56, 312, 71, 306.