

# The Academy of Political Science

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## POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

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Volume 116 · Number 3 · Fall 2001

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*Political Science Quarterly*  
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## Book Reviews

**Cadres and Corruption: The Organizational Involution of the Chinese Communist Party** by Xiaobo Lü. Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2000. 368 pp. \$55.00; paper, \$19.95.

In 1946, while waging a civil war against the Nationalist party regime on the Chinese mainland, Mao Zedong drafted a Central Committee directive in which he predicted that the Communist party would almost certainly prevail. His logic was simple and straightforward: he and his fellow Communists lived simply and worked hard; the Nationalist officials, by contrast, were corrupt and degenerate, thereby impoverishing the millions who toiled under their yoke. Precisely fifty years later, following Mao's victory and several decades of Communist party rule, Transparency International ranked the People's Republic of China as the fifth most corrupt country in the world, surpassed only by Bangladesh, Kenya, Pakistan, and Nigeria.

By way of explaining this troubling transition, Lü offers an innovative and compelling account of the organizational development of the Chinese Communist party and the corruption of its elite in the postrevolutionary era. Cadre corruption, according to Lü, is a direct, albeit unintended, consequence of "organizational involution," a long-term process by which a revolutionary party simultaneously adopts and expands the seemingly "modern" structures associated with impersonal and rational bureaucracies. At the same time, the party "refuses and fails to adapt itself to, and be transformed by the routinization and bureaucratization that characterize modern bureaucracy" (p. 22), ultimately suffering the loss of its organizational competence and identity. Unlike devolutionary development, which transforms party cadres into rational, rule-oriented bureaucrats, or an evolutionary process of continuous revolution, which produces disciplined and committed revolutionaries, the involutionary regime "becomes infinitely patrimonial" and "produces disillusioned, status-conscious, and undisciplined cadres" whose behavior in many ways mirrors that of the pre-revolutionary, traditional local officials whose power they have usurped (pp. 22–23).

The precise nature of this causal link is not uniformly clear. The postrevolutionary party has not consistently eschewed bureaucratization and rationalization, but has done so intermittently. Did involution slow and corruption de-

cline during periods when the party embraced the goals of administrative modernization and rationalization? The author concludes that corruption in the post-Mao era “is more pervasive, serious and regime-threatening than in previous periods” (p. 235), despite the party’s rejection of “permanent revolution” in favor of bureaucratization.

The genius of this study lies in its well-written and lucid history of the post-revolutionary period, the product of Lü’s thoughtful and highly synthetic research. Drawing upon an impressive array of primary and secondary source materials, the author provides an engrossing account of the Chinese Communist party in power by focusing on the sporadic and sometimes spasmodic attempts of the ruling elite to control the undesirable practices of rank and file cadres. Skillfully interweaving his analysis of institutional developments and policy shifts emanating from the upper echelons of the party with richly detailed accounts of how local cadres frequently attempted to circumvent and evade central control, Lü succeeds in creating a highly readable narrative of the administrative challenges of the postrevolutionary party in power. He demonstrates persuasively that the wide variety of bureaucratic malpractices he describes are the unanticipated responses of local cadres to policies originally drafted by central leaders with a very different set of goals in mind. Widespread corrupt practices ranging from embezzlement of public funds (*nuoyong gongkuan*) to official profiteering (*guandao*) are convincingly linked to the party’s periodic politicization and depoliticization of party/state organizations.

Most current work on political corruption is shaped by either a rational-choice or political economy perspective; Lü’s approach is influenced instead by post-Weberian organizational theory and is a most welcome contribution to the field.

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**The Roots of Rhetoric: Politics of Nuclear Weapons in India and Pakistan** by Haider K. Nizamani. Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 2000. 176 pp. \$59.95.

South Asia is becoming a nuclearized subcontinent. Both India and Pakistan are crafting nuclear doctrines, testing new delivery systems, and almost certainly deploying nuclear forces and command and control structures. *The Roots of Rhetoric* applies “discourse analysis” to gain new insights into the development and direction of domestic debate over nuclear issues in South Asia. It provides a useful historical overview and valuable bibliographic reference to internal debates in India and Pakistan. Its larger points, however, are obscured by methodological limitations.