

Book Reviews of China in Xi Jinping Era

China's Two Great Modern Leaders

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Xi Jinping and Mao Zedong are the two great modern leaders of China. Both have gained leader for life status. Both wield enormous power. And both face or faced enormous challenges. For Mao uniting China under communism and making it a player on the world stage were great accomplishments, while the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap forward are deemed huge mistakes. But by continuing Deng Xiaoping's opening of China to the world and adopting "socialism with Chinese attributes," Xi is lifting a quarter of the world's population out of poverty. He has established the Belt and Road initiative which he promises will do the same for what is now the less affluent world. But as globalization retreats a bit in the wake of the COVID pandemic and as Russia attacks Ukraine, China looks out on what appears New Cold War. This time however, China, along with India is the emerging world powers which can have much to say about the outcome of this struggle between the declining world powers of the US and the former USSR. It is a tricky political game with huge consequences.

Internally, Xi faces additional challenges, especially as seen as in the eyes and press of the West. Foremost among them are human rights, the rule of law, treatment of minorities like the Muslim Uyghurs of Xinjiang, and the surveillance state that is monitoring and censoring Chinese people both at home and abroad. Internally too the economy must keep growing rapidly to continue to provide jobs and middle-class rising expectations. It must also deal with discord in China and the desires of Taiwan to remain independent. China wants to have prominent global brands but has far to go. It wants to have world-class universities and it has a few, especially in the sciences. And it wants to be a world leader in fighting global climate change and has made major strides. These are among the challenges that Xi faces today.

This book goes far in probing some of the initiatives and obstacles that form challenges and opportunities for Xi Jinping. It describes the importance of Chinese social media and the dominance of WeChat. It describes the Chinese move to bring prosperity to the inland West, even if it runs rough shod over local cultures in an effort to bring harmony through integration with Han Chinese. And it emphasizes the role of foreign and especially domestic tourism to rural areas of China as a key method to bring about prosperity in the West. Using the techniques of business anthropology, this collaborative book casts an interesting light on its two great modern leaders without bowing to hagiography. I think you will find it intriguing reading.

New Theories and New Practice for Building a Great Nation

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Recently, Dr. Shu Xiaohui, a professor at the Business School of Huaihua University in China, and his colleagues published a new book entitled *China in Xi Jinping Era*. It is an informative volume about major policy guidelines from China's leadership with Mr. Xi Jinping at the core. This volume is part of an English-language publication series (*Modern China Series*) that started releasing books on China's socio-economic development has been published by North America Business Press since 2011. The co-authors of this volume have tried to explain some key-respects economic policy, environmental and land-use policy, tourism in rural areas, consumption patterns and lifestyle, internet technology and social media in China's current development process.

This book contains eight chapters. The first chapter is a brief excursus of modern China's political history, from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping. The chapter highlights the evolution of China's development thinking in the Twentieth century and the first two decades of the early Twenty-First Century. The authors offered Mao Zedong's vision of establishing the People's Republic of China as an independent, developing socialist country, and Zhou Enlai's theory of the "four modernizations," namely, the modernization of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology. It appraised Deng Xiaoping's reform policy, opening up, and rapid development. The authors also discussed Jiang Zemin's "Three Represents," i.e., the primary role of the CPC in advancing economic, cultural, and fundamental interests of the people, and Xi Jinping's "national rejuvenation" and "New economy of socialism with Chinese characteristics." On the external (international) front, the authors consider Xi Jinping's "Belt & Road Initiative" part of Xi Jinping's new international relations to build common humanity and shared prosperity.

The second chapter is all about Xi Jinping's thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics that aims to complete modernization and build a prosperous, ecologically sound and beautiful country at home. And, at the international front, to foster a global community with a shared future of humanity through long-term international cooperation projects such as Belt & Road Initiative, Silk Road Fund and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. This chapter provides sufficient light on Chinese leadership's priorities and policies in the international arena. The authors do not present any empirical evaluation of the results obtained so far by the policies and the lessons learned after their implementation. Overall, this chapter does provide some insights into the policy-thinking by China's current leadership.

Again, the third chapter deals with Xi Jinping's socialist economic thoughts characterized by specific Chinese cultural attributes. It discusses the critical issues of China's economic policy, such as supply-side structural reform, dual cycle and environment-friendly high-quality development. The author first puts forward that China's economic policy thinkers and scholars unanimously agree with Xi Jinping's economic thought and the value of the latest reform plan. Some of the later thoughts of Xi Jinping seem to have been developed following the USA-China trade and tariff dispute (since 2017), the Covid-19 pandemic (since 2020) and the international concern for environment/climate crisis. This chapter is a prolongation of the previous chapter. It contains numerous repetitions and a hagiographic sketch of China's top leader. It would be better to merge the two chapters (2 and 3) in one chapter by eliminating repetition, streamlining the discourse, and making the chapter shorter. An international reader would read easily, understand better and appreciate more if these chapters had more concise prose, streamlined discourse, maps, graphic charts to show the timeline of economic development through fundamental macro-economic indicators regarding wealth creation and purchasing power (GDP, PPP), saving, debt, inflation, employment, trade etc. as well as human development index (HDI) in China from Mao period to XI's new era

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters are about China's policy to strike a balance between the process of economic development and the state of resources and environment. The authors explain China State Council's diversified land-use policy for different territories within China with various degrees of economic growth, future development potential (new industrial clusters), resource-base, landscape and environmental carrying capacity. This policy is supposed to differentiate and specify all investment and development efforts according to the scientific criteria of functional zones: the optimum development zone (first-tier urban-industrial contexts with high intensity of economic activities at global competitive level), the prioritized development zone (developing areas with further potential for urban and industrial expansion and economic growth), the limited development zone (primarily, food production areas where ecological balance is needed), and the restrictive development zone (areas with a prevalence of natural ecosystems that need to be preserved). This chapter is different from the previous ones. It is more technical and straightforward, more professional and academic. It deals with some specific issues concerned by China, such as land use, environment, and urbanization, understandable even without any political-ideological slogan. These issues, such as the much-repeated "new socialist economy with Chinese attributes," are systematically discussed. In this chapter, the authors do not repeat admiring phrases and adjectives to exalt the policymakers. Instead, they concentrate on the policy itself and its practical implications for the economy and the environment.

The seventh chapter highlights the issues and challenges faced by China's higher education and research system. The authors point out that the core issue in Chinese universities is the imbalance between politico-administrative decision-making apparatus and the academic-scientific community. It is unclear the meaning and attributes of the adjective "double first-class" applied to university. Anyway, this chapter provides some insights into China's academic world. It recommends more space for academic-scientific decision-making and less bureaucratically hurdles.

The eighth chapter is about China's consumption patterns, consumer behavior and lifestyle related to tourism and specifically rural tourism. This chapter looks like a paper based on empirical surveys and quantitative info/data regression analysis. The interpretation of the findings, conclusion and recommendations are missed.

The last chapter is a fascinating study about the social behavior of WeChat users. WeChat is a globally renowned social media and exchange platform created by Tencent, a high-tech (info-telecom) corporation in China. This chapter is an excellent introductory piece on social relationships, and group formations in virtual reality supported and augmented by mobile technology. This chapter has further scope for an empirical survey, case studies, and more in-depth analysis.

Carefully reading this book for a formal academic review, I have learned a lot about China's recent policymaking process. Of course, there is no perfection of any published book in the world. For the next edition of this book, I would strongly recommend the authors to use shorter and simpler sentences, lesser adjectives, no repetition of the same terms and expressions (for example, "socialism with Chinese characteristics", "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," etc.) too many times, maps and charts wherever appropriate.

The reading has stimulated some reflections too. Many of China's excellent and successful social, environmental and economic policies have not been sufficiently explained and publicized in international academic circles and general media. Many misunderstandings about China, created by adversarial foreign governments and media, can be successfully countered by skilled social scientists who can explain China's views more effectively to the world public. Social scientist networks and channels are better at doing this than official government and corporate channels. Educated people everywhere in the world tend to trust social scientists more than journalists, politicians and businesspersons. China's well-trained social scientists can (and should) strengthen China's "soft" power, which is crucial in the battle for the hearts and minds of humanity and China's international standing. It is an excellent plan by the North America Business Press to publish the Modern China Series that will help the global world understand more about China and Chinese people and their culture. The Chinese government and the Chinese people should appreciate what they are doing to connect China and the world.

Within any society, social scientists are the most reliable antennas for noticing and understanding what is happening in the average citizen's daily life and public opinion, the impact of specific policies or programs on the ground, and what deep trends are probable scenarios of the future. Social scientists can assist in policymaking, planning and implementation in an appropriate scientific and pragmatic way.

China is a great country. There are nearly 200 nation-states, but only three are civilization-states: China, India, and Russia. China can (and deserves to be) a world leader in overall sustainable development, not only in quantitative growth and technological progress but also in science, arts, cultural activities and environmental care. China's social scientists try to make concrete contributions for that. However, their hard work and accomplishments are not fully reflected in international academia and global media. Chinese social scientists' international standing is far below China's industrial, technological, economic, and political position in the world. It is time to address this imbalance.

China's leadership should encourage and provide the necessary resources for social scientists to improve their research and communication skills and translate their work into English for international publications through academic, professional, and general outlets. Contributions of social scientists should be based not only on their appearance in the journals of the SSCI index but also on their publications in other academic journals and general media and on their experiments and outreach to a broader audience.

More encouragement and resources are needed for the social scientists to interact and collaborate with international scholars in research and publishing, visit foreign institutions and invitations to foreign scholars. More financial resources and less bureaucracy are needed for this. All genuine social scientists always make research efforts to teach, write and publish. Social science research usually requires less input and resources than science, technology, engineering & mathematics (STEM) analysis, is much cheaper, and can be done individually and in teams or networks. Social scientists' reports and publications should be rewarded for what they have already done on their own and with the help of their small initial fund available on their own. Many STEM research projects, especially the applied ones, are also funded by private industries and foundations around the world besides the government. Social and fiscal incentives to the private corporations and foundations that provide resources for social science research of public and national interest can be helpful.

In short, I would recommend this book to any student, scholar or practitioner interested in the history of economic policy and social change in China in the early Twenty-Fist Century. In addition, I would say that the Modern China Series published by the North America Business Press in the United States has contributed significantly to introducing Chinese social science research to a broader global audience. Actually, in the field of international dialogue on social sciences, the Modern China Series has done a ground-breaking job.