



Xi Jinping and Contemporary China: Book Review of China in Xi Jinping Era

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The North American Business Press, located in Miami, Florida, USA, recently published a book entitled “China in Xi Jinping Era,” authored by Dr. Shu Xiaohui and his colleagues. As a reader from the United States, I must say that I gained a better understanding of current China by reading this book, just like my reading of the other books in the Modern China Series published by the same press.

Since the days of Deng Xiaoping, China has made profound progress in the economic realm. As a seminal leader, he transformed a country that was stagnating after the Cultural Revolution that, in its excesses, proved to be counterproductive. By doing so, Deng Xiaoping introduced reforms to economic life in China that created lucrative opportunities that benefited a wide array of stakeholders, including ambitious individuals. Due to these initiatives, China quickly made profound progress; this success has satisfied many millions of Chinese people who rose above poverty for the first time.

Today, Xi Jinping is the leader of China; he and his top colleagues are responsible for maintaining the ongoing quest for growth and prosperity. He is an attractive international figure for several reasons. Significantly, he was the first leader of China to be born after creating the Peoples Republic of China. Secondly, during the Cultural Revolution (when he was a child), Xi Jinping and his family were exiled to the provinces for political reasons.

Many readers from the West are interested in how China, a communist country, deals with private and profit-making opportunities. Although such options might appear to be inconsistent, Xi Jinping is attempting to reconcile them with socialist priorities in ways that maintain the benefits of a market-driven and somewhat decentralized economy. Throughout the book, these issues appear, giving the reader a perspective of these dilemmas from a Chinese point of view.

A current catch-phrase in China is the “Big Dream.” While this slogan points to aspirations, its vagueness creates an inability to define what it means precisely. Does the Big dream envision a more significant opportunity for individuals? Or does it look forward to a more prominent and more influential international role for China? Or is it for both? Perhaps this book will help the readers answer such questions.

The book is a monograph by experts who write on various issues. The connecting link between them focuses on the current leader of China, who is currently responsible for developing Chinese policies and strategies. As a result, this book will be of great interest.

The first three chapters provide the foundation for the volume, with additional chapters providing examples and fleshing out what is discussed early on. Chapter 1 deals with the period from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping as perceived from a Chinese perspective. It is a coherent rendering of the era; the Western reader will gain a degree of understanding regarding how the people of China view the cultural and economic transformation that has taken place.

However, as a Westerner, I tend to disagree with the conclusion when we are told, "The theoretical structure of Xi Jinping's thought on socialism with Chinese Attributes is a continuation and development of Mao Zedong's thought." In my mind, Mao Zedong was a skilled visionary who focused on the power of the hinterland peasants and ultimately made some strategic errors late in his life because he continued to act upon this orientation. I did not see much continuation of these policies in China's current economic strategies. Having said this, it is insightful to see how native Chinese envision the same events and thoughts.

In Chapter 2, the quest is toward merging "socialism with Chinese attributes." The chapter's basic premise is that a growing and powerful China will be able to continue to transform itself. This point, of course, is another goal of contemporary China and a famous slogan. Discussions point to extended-range plans for achieving these goals. As a result, the reader is given a vision of what might occur if events continue according to plan.

However, we are warned against trusting plans that extend more than five years into the future in business. Thus, this chapter provides insights into what China aspires to achieve in 15 or 20 years. Although these are goals, any number of setbacks and revisions potentially awaits. Nevertheless, the chapter provides insights regarding China and its Big Dream. We are told that "Xi Jinping's approach to governance has a strong contemporary flavor and practical relevance." Let's hope that that remains in the future.

Chapter 3 moves from history and current events to deal with how Xi Jinping's thinking evolves and transforms socialistic economic theory and practice. We are given a detailed outline of how many policies and strategies have evolved and Xi Jinping's contributions to an evolutionary process. Reading the chapter provides a valuable overview that helps understand the contemporary Chinese perspectives.

We are told, "Scholars in China believe that Xi Jinping's Socialist Economic Thought is a theoretical crystallization of Marxist political economy combined with the concrete reality of Chinese economic development." Again, these perspectives are at odds with how many Westerners view the same situations. As a Westerner, I recall that Karl Marx believed that urban workers would be the agents of change and that the hinterland folk would not rebel because they were not alienated to the same degree.

Mao Zedong, on the other hand, focused on the rural peasants. At least from a day-to-day perspective, furthermore, Xi Jinping does not appear to be overly preoccupied with the world revolution. Instead, his primary focus appears to be building a stronger and more prosperous

China that better serves its people. Although evangelical socialist plans do not appear to be his top priority (at least in the short term), he is actively competing to make China “Number 1” globally.

After providing these three keystone chapters, the other chapters deal with various topics ranging from rural tourism to internet communities. Written by an array of noted Chinese Scholars, this volume provides insights to those who seek to understand the current leader of China. Xi Jinping is a talented trailblazer on the world stage. As a result, the more we know about him, the better.

In short, I will recommend this book, along with other books in Modern China Series published by the North American Business Press to all those interested in knowing more about contemporary China.

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