

Book Review

The China Renaissance: The Rise of Xi Jinping and the 18th Communist Party Congress by the writers, artists and editors of the South China Morning Post, edited by Jonathan Sharp

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Reading through *The China Renaissance* published by SCMP Books and World Scientific, one can study the leadership transitions of two political administrations (previous and current, Hu-Wen and Xi-Li) through the lens of the liberal media based in Hong Kong. Three points stand out in the narratives of this volume. First, there is a consistent thread about economic development and stability amongst the authors and this is counterbalanced by a constant narrative about challenges that the contemporary Chinese state faces. Second, there is a consistent mystique about top Chinese leaders as commentators try to second-guess their policy intentions, directions and worldviews and this is supplemented by journalistic reporting and editorials that try to match words with actions, policies with outlook, and opinions with empirical evidence. Third, commentators and journalists in the volume's articles try to paint a personal picture of the leaders—their personalities, their dealings with the private sector, and their family outlook. In

other words, this is a focused and well-informed China-watching crowd.

The volume probably serves as a useful reference for scholars in the policy circles, think tanks, political science and international relations teaching staff, graduate students, and China watchers. Its advantage lies in the fact that the volume is a compilation of media reports, therefore the opinions are from practitioners, commentators, as well as scholars. There is a gritty side to it as personal lives, lifestyles, preferences, career frustrations, and behind-the-scenes maneuvers are exposed journalistically. This is a double-edged sword. The grittier details also lend the contents to editorializing and speculation. Regardless of value-added analysis or editorialization, the volume's contents are valuable because they highlight the element of perceptions. Through the volume, readers understand how leadership changes, its individual personalities, and how the institutions involved are perceived by the journalistic crowd, commentators, and members

of the public who consume such media products. Perceptions are eminently important in observing politics and international relations because they can alter collective thinking and public opinions on important social issues that in turn affects the course of nationhood and state affairs.

Historically, the volume serves three purposes. First, it is a diachronic portrayal of Chinese politics. Very often, scholars adopt a long-term view of policies, international relations, and domestic politics; and neglect the day-to-day occurrences of political events, which, when accumulated, results in the long-term changes that can be found in academic studies. Second, it indicates how political decisions and changes are effected by individual actions and thoughts rather than a hegemonic institutional process bereft of the decision-makers and public opinions of the person in the streets. It is a social historical process. Third, the volume captures a slice of fragmented histories of individuals and institutions. These historical fragments, when pieced together, make up a complex tapestry of contemporary Chinese political developments seldom observed in monographic writings.

There are a number of minor suggestions that I wish to provide to the producers and creators of this volume. First, it is helpful for the readers to

have a topical index so that one can refer to the topic of interest without having to flip through the entire volume. Second, perhaps the contents page can explain how the articles are categorized (according to chronological order, topical matter or biographical indexing, etc). Third, it would be useful to invite the journalists featured to include their bio details in the volume to enable readers to have an idea of their experience and expertise in journalistic works. Readers may also wait in anticipation for future volumes in the series that incorporates analytical graphs, diagrams, and graphical representations of important and relevant issues for easy and fast references in attention to the journalistic texts and reporting.

Overall, this is a useful reference material for scholarly and policy works, with interesting anecdotes that can lead to important ideas about public perceptions of leadership transitions. Most importantly, it leads readers to develop their own opinions about leadership politics in China after reading other journalists' opinions.

REFERENCE:

Sharp, J. (Ed.). (2013). *The China renaissance*. Singapore: SCMP Books and World Scientific.