

Japanese could bask in the exclusionary uniqueness of the Japanese nation that afforded it to behave imperialistically with its neighbours.

In this context, Sakai argues that post-war area studies in the academy has been thoroughly racist in its production of Pax Americana global knowledge. Most interesting here is the essay co-written with Solomon which features Foucault's encounter with Japanese monks. It is a skillful analysis of translation as a method of subjectification, wherein the entire process of translation pre-supposes the interlocutors as representatives of essentialized cultures.

Yet, perhaps Sakai is much too ahistorical in casting area studies as continuing to be so strongly rooted in early post-war Pax Americana. Area studies has seen transformative challenges since the late 1960s, from Marxism, Saidean post-colonialism, Subaltern Studies, critical cultural studies and the vastly increased connectivity with scholars in the world outside the West. One might say that recent global trends in neo-liberal global academia towards hacking and shrinking the liberal arts, reveal little if any space for the important research performed by critical area studies. Rather than tear it down, we need to fight actively to enhance its value as a weapon for justice.

While this volume contains fascinating insights, it is not free from frustrations. This has perhaps less to do with the argot of critical literature, than the undeveloped and loosely connected nature of the conceptions. There is much repetition, some inconsistencies and scarce referencing. For instance, there are several important references to Paul Valéry, yet the one short footnote refers to a citation from Derrida. *Hikikomori* nationalism is a term that grabs our attention, but the implications for the book are not clarified. How is withdrawal to be understood as outward aggression, as appears to be happening in the military pacts emerging in the Indo-Pacific? Can it be seen, as Polanyi or Arrighi might have, as a cyclical phase of capitalism with complex political responses? As for getting out of the national problematic, Sakai has no special answers to offer. The recent trend towards planetary histories still needs to show us how the politics of identity can be translated into the cause of planetary restoration.

But for readers prepared to overcome the frustrations, Sakai's volume promises to be worth their while to read and contemplate.

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**CHINA'S LEADERS: From Mao to Now.** By *David Shambaugh*. Cambridge; Oxford; Boston; New York: Polity, 2021. xiv, 383 pp. (Tables, graphs, B&W photos.) US\$28.00, cloth. ISBN 9781509546510.

In *China's Leaders: From Mao to Now*, David Shambaugh provides a portrait of each of the five top leaders of the People's Republic of China (PRC):

Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping. The portrait includes their pre-adult experiences, personas, worldviews, major policies, approach to power consolidation, and legacies. In Shambaugh's eyes Mao, who ruled the PRC from its establishment in 1949 until his death in 1976, was a "populist tyrant" who "saw no such division between revolting and ruling" (27), as reflected from his frequent use of extremely violent mass mobilization campaigns. Shambaugh describes Deng, who ruled from 1977 to 1989, as a "pragmatic Leninist" who rebuilt the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and repaired the damage caused by Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) by, respectively, his cadre reforms and "reform and opening up" policy. Shambaugh perceives Jiang Zemin, who was in power from 1989 to 2022, as a "bureaucratic politician" and a skillful political manipulator. He contrasts Jiang with his successor Hu Jintao, China's top leader from 2002 to 2012, who "had *ten full years* to prepare for the job [but] ... largely squandered this time and opportunity by failing to build a diversified institutional power base" (209). This brings us to Xi Jinping, China's top leader since 2012, whom Shambaugh likens to a "modern emperor" positioned to encapsulate his ambition to usher in transformative changes (a vision that only Mao and Deng shared, and Jiang and Hu lacked), his cult of personality, and his centralization of power.

I would largely agree with Shambaugh's assessment and description of the five leaders, which, for the most part, reflect a broadly agreed consensus in the current scholarship. However, it should be pointed out that Deng was only a "Leninist" in a comparative sense—in that he cherished the CCP as an organization much more so than Mao. Strictly speaking, Deng was not truly a Leninist because it was under his leadership that significant power was devolved to the provinces, the role of ideology became marginalized and official corruption became rampant. In other words, his commitment to centralization, ideology, and organizational discipline—the basic ingredients of Leninism—were loose at best. This is in sharp contrast to Xi, who is not only a modern emperor, but also a hardcore Leninist.

By presenting the differences in the five leaders' leadership styles, Shambaugh has made a compelling case that there were significant discontinuities in how the CCP governed in the past 70 years. The analytical rigor of the book would be enhanced if the author had drawn out the wider implications of such discontinuities at a theoretical level. This would have meant addressing what these leaders meant to the authority, legitimacy, and internal power dynamics of the CCP. Traditional Chinese political culture, such as the expectations of a ruler to be benevolent and to "play the long game and keep a clear eye on end goals" (12–13) is mentioned at the beginning of the book. And yet, there is a lack of discussion of how these cultural norms affect each leader's style or how they appropriated such norms for their own use.

Shambaugh is certainly right to point out that each of the five leaders

was faced with different pressing tasks under hugely different internal and external environments. This explains why a fair comparison of their leadership styles and legacies is not a straightforward exercise. It seems to me that Shambaugh uses roughly four questions to build his narrative for each of the leaders: How did they obtain power? How did they consolidate power? What did they want to achieve? Did they achieve what they wanted to achieve and what are the implications for China? These are excellent questions; however, it sometimes feels that the comparison of the five leaders is a bit lost in their detailed descriptions. My suggestion is to perhaps consider organizing the book thematically. This means that rather than writing a chapter for each of the five leaders, which is what the author has done, write a chapter on each of the timeless themes of Chinese politics—for example ideology, the CCP, social transformation, economic reform, foreign policy—to provide anchor points to compare and contrast each leader's style and their implications.

I would also suggest devoting more attention to the influential CCP officials who were in office at the same time as the leaders. To Shambaugh's credit, he has offered fascinating insights in his detailed analysis of Zeng Qinghong, a contemporary of Jiang and Hu. What about figures such as Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi (contemporaries of Mao), Chen Yun and Li Xiannian (contemporaries of Deng), Zhu Rongji (contemporary of Jiang), Wen Jiabao (contemporary of Hu), or Li Keqiang, Li Zhanshu, and Wang Qishan (contemporaries of Xi)? More discussion about figures whose stature was just lower than, and in some cases, even rivaled that of, the top leader, would enhance the originality and significance of the book. Since the late Mao era in the 1960s until the early Xi era, political power in China was exercised not only individually, but also collectively. How individual-based and collective-based power interacted with each other is an important enquiry that Shambaugh most certainly has the expertise to address.

This book is written in a style that is very friendly for a general readership. It is also a valuable reference for an introductory module on Chinese politics, although the Chinese characters that are provided in parentheses in the book are not always accurate.

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**THE GREAT DECOUPLING: China, America and the Struggle for Technological Supremacy.** *By Nigel Inkster.* London: Hurst & Company, 2020. xi, 306 pp. US\$34.00, cloth. ISBN 978-1-78738-383-8.

*The Great Decoupling* is a broadly scoped, ambitious work written for a sophisticated but non-specialist audience. It is essential reading for anyone who wants a tour d'horizon of China's ambitions explained through the lens of its history, and for those who want to know how China and the United