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*Haunted by Chaos: China's Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping* by Sulmaan Wasif Khan (review)

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- NOTE 1. See Stephen Bokenkamp, "Sisters of the Blood: The Lives behind the Xie Ziran Biography," *Daoism: Religion, History, and Society*, no. 8 (2016): 7–33.



Sulmaan Wasif Khan. *Haunted by Chaos: China's Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018. xi, 320 pp. Hardcover \$29.95, ISBN 978-0-674-97709-9.

This is an ambitious book by an author who knows his subject matter well, having in addition a knack for animating diplomatic minutia with much verve and vitality. The aim here is quite explicitly to harness whatever one can glean from archival sources on China's diverse international relations so as to offer fresh insights into the thinking patterns informing decision-making by the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The book structure and arguments are very straightforward, and are therefore likely to appeal to specialists and popular audiences alike.

In his introduction, Khan suggests that while economic policy shifted over time, and even though personalities at the helm varied, the CCP's "overarching goal remained the same" (p. 3). Certainly, the notion of acute Party insecurity comes across time and again in the chapters to come. One assumes it had informed the title choice too. However, beyond the Mao era (1949–1976), that insecurity seems to be largely inferred from the very same Party documentary compilations that, in Khan's own judgment, can turn "mendacious" at times (p. 5).

In chapter 1, Khan ably highlights how Mao's peasant-like shrewdness helped pave his way to the top of the CCP in the face of USSR misgivings. His assessment here is quite complimentary, especially when depicting Chiang Kai-shek's contending nation-building project as tainted by "fascism" (p. 12) and corruption. Nevertheless, he accepts Rana Mitter's view that the CCP contribution to the war effort against Japan during 1931–1945 was small.

In his words, Mao ". . . sought to fight the Japanese as he had fought the Nationalists: in a patient, elaborate dance across China, which would end with Japan exhausted" (p. 17). Mao would remain ineffably grateful to the Japanese aggressors for helping debilitate the KMT (p. 23). But Mao's pitch to Muslim and Mongol minorities in the Northeast to join the fray against the Japanese, and later on against the KMT, did not prove very effective.

In view of Stalin's ambivalence toward China, Mao comes across as pragmatic in engaging with American emissaries before the Korean War. Unlike Frank Dikötter, Khan otherwise seems to believe that after liberation, Mao strove to minimize the execution of so-called KMT sympathizers in the countryside. He shrugs off Mao's reckless voluntarism with a characteristically terse understatement; after all, Mao was ". . . no economic genius" (p. 32).

Chapter 2 covers the later Mao era. There is enlightening new information here, gleaned from the Chinese Foreign Office archives. The evidence in Khan's judgement goes against the grain of conventional wisdom. Namely, in 1950, far from being set up by Stalin, Mao is deemed to have been galvanized by Peng Dehuai to attack the UN expeditionary force in Korea with only very limited assurances of logistical back-up from Moscow (p. 59).

By contrast, Khan's treatment of the Sino-Soviet split, the souring of relations with Delhi, and the American war in Vietnam recalls earlier studies. His contribution here seems to boil down to highlighting the Kazakh exodus from Xinjiang into Soviet central Asia in 1962. The Chinese saw this as loss of face ". . . implying that they had failed to provide their people" (p. 93), and demanded that the USSR send the Kazakhs back. One might perhaps find the Chinese reaction surprising, given policy trends in Xinjiang at present. Part of the explanation surely derives from the CCP enduring preoccupation with ethnic harmony. This is hinted at in the book when, for example, discussing Mao's complex attitude to the Genghis Khan historical legacy (p. 98).

Khan's provocative argument at the end of the chapter is that Mao had in fact laid the groundwork for Deng Xiaoping's economic miracle despite having decried the former's economic incompetence earlier on. Chapter 3 is then broadly devoted to the Deng era (1976–1997). It reminds us that Deng's famous mantra, "seek truth from facts," had been coined by Mao. In this vein, Khan traces Deng's adroit policy innovations, and the ways he struck a balance between orthodox ideological jargon and entrepreneurial thrust in the 1980s. Deng's eagerness to learn from the experience of the "little dragons" is rightly stressed (pp. 134–135). Deng did admire Japan's technological prowess, yet Singapore's authoritarian credentials were crucial to the CCP policy-borrowing process.

The Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras are dealt with in a single chapter (chap. 4) presumably because both were "colourless men" who pursued a "conservative grand strategy" (p. 171). Yet Jiang presided over important societal turnaround: the joining of wealthy entrepreneurs to Party ranks, the revival of religion (pp. 173–177), as well as the downsizing of state-owned enterprises. This is discussed but somewhat played down in the larger scheme of things perhaps. So too are the tentative steps toward laying out a social-security net and the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the Hu era.

Chapter 5 on Xi Jinping makes for very useful synthesis of the limited sources available. The “core leader” might perhaps come across here as more insecure than his predecessors. But it is not entirely clear what the strategic implications of that may turn out to be. Xi allegedly compensates for insecurity by reintroducing a personality cult, militarizing the South China Sea, unprecedentedly going after corrupt “tigers” and, one might add, closing in on the norms of collective Party leadership.

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Ling Hon Lam. *The Spatiality of Emotion in Early Modern China: From Dreamscapes to Theatricality*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. xiii, 339 pp. Hardcover \$60.00, ISBN 978-0-231-18794-7.

Over the past several decades, the growing recognition of the emotions as a vitally important aspect of human life has been evident in disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. In recent years, this interest has truly gone global, with scholars exploring the distinct norms and practices of emotions that emerged in regions and cultures around the world, from ancient times to the present. This development has made it possible to envision the sheer range and diversity of the phenomena that fall under what we conventionally refer to as “emotions,” but has also raised new conceptual and methodological issues: far from referring to a natural fact, the very term “emotions” turns out to be a moving target, referring to an entire spectrum of possible norms and values, conceptual frameworks, and ontological commitments. Envisioning the emotions from different cultural vantage points has thus opened possible avenues for interrogating the very terms of the investigation, offering new ways of conceptualizing what the emotions are, and at what level we should be thinking about them.

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In his provocative and ambitious book, Ling Hon Lam takes up such an enterprise, proposing an alternative account of the very phenomenon of emotions by way of an excursus through what he calls early modern