

Great Father Xi and feudal thinking

Written by Paul Lin 林

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The second stanza of the Chinese-language version of The Internationale, the anthem of international communism, contains the following four lines:

“There has never been any savior of the world,

Nor deities, nor emperors on which to depend.

To create humankind’s happiness,

We must entirely depend on ourselves.”

It is the greatest of ironies that the leaders of every communist nation have been “deities and emperors” in their own right.

Communist dictatorships have for the most part taken root in the agrarian societies of Asia. Even pre-revolutionary Russian society was similar to that of its Asian neighbors. The West had already gone through the industrial revolution, but serfdom still existed in Russia and the nation became a breeding ground for communist demigods.

After the death of China’s own communist demigod, Mao Zedong (毛泽东), his successor, former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping (邓小平), ended criticism of Mao’s shortcomings as a leader.

Because Deng also enjoyed divine status within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the practice lived on, Mao’s calamitous legacy remains unquestioned and the ignorant public continue to pay their respects to the “Great Helmsman.”

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This is why, 40 years on, China has another divine leader: Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) is modeling himself in the exact image of Mao. Last week at the party's 19th National Congress, Xi was officially enshrined in the CCP pantheon.

Flattered and fawned upon by government mandarins up and down the nation, Xi has crowned himself a "paramount leader" and surpassed his predecessors by synthesizing the thinking of Mao, Deng and former Chinese president Jiang Zemin (江泽民) into "Xi Jinping Thought."

In doing so, Xi has elevated himself to the level of Mao: the only other leader in the party's history — along with Deng — to have had their philosophy written into the party's constitution.

In addition, Xi has also been called the "great architect" and "core leader," titles previously bestowed upon Deng.

Despite all this, there is much to admire in Xi. Within his first five-year term, he has managed to achieve total unification of his party.

After Mao assumed military command of the CCP at the Zunyi Conference in January 1935, it took him another 10 years to gain complete control over the party with the establishment of Mao Zedong Thought at the CCP's seventh National Congress. Twenty years later, after a series of setbacks, Mao had to initiate the Cultural Revolution before he was able to achieve immortal status within the party.

It has taken Xi just five years to achieve the same status, and his methods have been much simpler, relying on the secret police of the party's disciplinary committee to strengthen his authority.

It is rumored that the protege of former Chinese president Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) — Guangdong Province Party Secretary Hu Chunhua (胡春华) — declined a position on the Politburo Standing Committee out of fear, which helped Xi's plans to stuff more lackeys into the politburo.

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The problem for Xi is how long he will be able to prop up his hastily constructed personality cult. The people he has entrusted to run his government are not trusted officials from his days as governor of Fujian Province and party secretary of Zhejiang Province, but are boot-licking local warlords such as Tianjin Party Secretary Li Hongzhong (李洪忠) and Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Chen Quanguo (陈全国).

Are these politicians honest and upright? Do they possess real ability? Xi's right hands are former politburo members Wang Qishan (王岐山) and Li Zhanshu (李湛书), but how long can a control apparatus built upon fear and rapid promotion last?

Such a personality cult can be established because of a culture of idol worship within the Chinese peasantry and an education system that re-enforces the subjugation of the population — a cultural trait that stretches back several thousands of years and has created a remarkably strong feudal structure.

The speed with which Xi has been able to establish a cult around his leadership is perhaps a reflection on the poor character of modern Chinese society. Is this blind idol worship any better than the Boxer Rebellion? The only way China can eradicate this cancer is to adopt universal values.

The 19th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was the last congress attended by Joseph Stalin before his death. At the 20th congress, former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev delivered a “secret speech” in which he denounced the personality cult of Stalin, which to this day has been difficult to reverse.

At the time, Mao condemned Khrushchev as a revisionist, leaving himself space to create his own god-like personality cult. There is a reason an alternative name for China used to be “the Divine Land.”

The shape that China takes in the Xi era will be a test of Chinese character.

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