

Xi's 'moral' crusade will give rise to turbulence

Written by Lin Shiou-jeng 林錫榮

Sunday, 22 April 2018 05:04

Former Chongqing party secretary Sun Zhengcai's (孫政才) political career came crashing down last year when the Chinese Communist Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection announced that it had opened an investigation into Sun.

Sun, who was once seen as the heir apparent to Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平), was charged with bribery in February and on April 12 pleaded guilty to corruption charges during his trial at the Tianjin First Intermediate People's Court.

DURESS

A court statement said that Sun had kept a string of mistresses and was the father of a number of illegitimate children. However, aside from confirming that Sun is now utterly powerless and his political career is in tatters, his final statement was devoid of any substance.

It is impossible not to conclude that his guilty plea was made under duress.

Former Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's political enemies ended up confessing to their "crimes," but only later did it become apparent that their families were usually threatened and that evidence was extracted by drugging people.

SUSPECT

Does anyone really believe that Sun, now in his mid-50s, was in such rude health, so virile, that he needed a small army of mistresses and was able to father a succession of children? Will these mysterious children ever be revealed?

His "crimes" bear a striking resemblance to those of his predecessor, former Chongqing party secretary Bo Xilai (薄熙來).

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The corruption problem among China's political elite is political, as well as structural. A large number of high-level party cadres have been arrested on charges of corruption during Xi's reign. All were people in positions of power, rivals who needed to be eliminated.

PROTEGES

Both Bo and Sun were proteges of former Chinese president Hu Jintao (胡錦濤): dogs in the manger who might launch a challenge to Xi's leadership if they were allowed to remain in their positions.

Instead of using politics to gain the upper hand over his adversaries, Xi resorted to a moral crusade centered around corruption and sex to destroy the reputations of his rivals.

Bo was accused of bribery in connection with illicit sexual exploits and the same playbook was dusted off and reused for Sun's trial.

RICHES

However, many of China's leaders, including former president Jiang Zemin (江澤民), former premiers Li Peng (李鵬) and Wen Jiabao (溫家寶), and Xi himself, all rose to the top on the back of family riches, the origins of which cannot be explained. If this is how the people at the top behave, lower-ranking officials will naturally follow their lead.

Xi's avaricious accumulation of power will bring him political stability in the short term, but his excessive power will make any future transition of power more turbulent. This is a common feature of authoritarian regimes and communist countries.

Xi's centralization of political power will also bring about corresponding changes to the

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economy. A good example of this is how the ranking of China's billionaires has changed as the political situation in China has altered. This is neither good for individuals or for China's economy as a whole.

Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing (李嘉誠) has withdrawn his business from the Chinese market in response to the economic risks created by Xi's politics.

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Translated by Edward Jones

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2018/04/22](#)