

Xi's troubles as the fantasy melts

Written by Jerome Keating

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The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) sixth plenary session has ended and from all appearances, Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) has set the stage to rule for the rest of his life.

Some might be tempted to declare that this calls for Xi to do a victory lap, but all is not well on the other side of the Taiwan Strait.

To parody a line from Ya Got Trouble, a song from Broadway musical The Music Man: "There's trouble in River City, (aka, Beijing). Trouble with a capital T, which rhymes with C for CCP."

Why? Taking control of a nation is always much easier than running it. Most dictators, wannabe emperors, juntas and one-party state governments quickly realize this. Much to their chagrin, the imagined communities of modern-day nations contain much broader beliefs and expectations, and communications among all are much quicker.

A recent example is Afghanistan. The Taliban swept into power because no other group or faction had the conviction, numbers or unity to dominate.

However, while the Taliban had those, its belief that it could then run that modern-day nation with outdated laws is proving disastrous.

Afghanistan's imagined community has developed far beyond the narrow communal roots and perspectives of Shariah, while the outside world that Afghanistan faces, trades and negotiates with has expanded even further. Taking over a country is far easier than running it.

The CCP, although it has ruled China since 1949, faces similar problems from a different and wider framework. The particular alleged communist ideology that the CCP promotes is certainly broader than that of Shariah, but the massive land mass and population of China is also more extensive and contains far more imagined communities.

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Therefore, the cracks in the facade of the CCP's post-1949 rule are becoming evident, especially as the world continues to shift from a global village paradigm to that of a global home.

In short, Xi has no choice. He must keep running for his own and the CCP's survival as they try to balance national paradigmatic perspectives that are so polarized, even the CCP's draconian overreach and continued attempts to rewrite history will not succeed.

Astute Taiwanese see this. They had to painstakingly form a democracy from their troubled past with the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), so it is déjà vu as they look into China's rabbit hole.

Consider how even now the KMT still clings to conflicting paradigms. The KMT lost the Chinese Civil War, but somehow believes that it will come back from exile and rule China. The KMT also pays lip service to Sun Yat-sen's (孫逸仙) democratic ideals, but in reality, it had to be forced to accept democracy after exercising decades of martial law.

Core KMT members still see themselves as "Chinese," not Taiwanese. They cannot even abandon the so-called "1992 consensus." In short, it seems that if many members of the party were offered a high position in the CCP, they would readily sell out democratic Taiwan for the proverbial "mess of pottage."

The CCP's problems with the past are related, but with their own twist. It won the war, but lives nonetheless in other denials. It has economically raised and transformed China, but to maintain its image and power, it must sweep under the rug all of the tremendous collateral damage — including the millions upon millions of deaths.

As it does this, it must also profess to hold the fake banner of Sun's dream of democracy. Such hypocrisy is what the CCP must maintain to support its justification of power.

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Therefore, the real question for Xi is: How big must the rug be to hide all of the CCP's dirt?

As it continues to go to extremes to banish dissenting voices, the cracks in the CCP government's facade are widening.

Malaysian hip-hop singer Namewee (郭富城) was banned for his song Fragile (脆弱).

Tennis star Peng Shuai (彭帅) has disappeared for daring to expose a former top official of the CCP.

Taiwanese politicians are placed on a black list, reminiscent of what the KMT did in Taiwan.

These and many other actions are absurd, yet their pettiness reveals the absurdities of a political party invoking past dynastic power paradigms while trying to live in a modern age.

China is not a banana republic and it should not operate like one. The CCP's efforts to control the media, deny reality and rewrite history are a sign of how desperate it has become as it loses its grip. It can only keep creating new rules that, if broken, give it another excuse to eliminate opposition.

Yes, there is real trouble in "River City."

Xi has made enemies within China with his "reforms." Personal discussions with officials at the Mainland Affairs Council have revealed that there have already been seven assassination attempts on his life.

Assassination attempts are not entirely new in China. Former Chinese vice premier Lin Biao (林彪) was apparently "purged" in this manner later in life. Even former Chinese leader Deng

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Xiaoping (邓小平) faced attempts on his life.

However, while details of the attempts on Xi's life are not yet public, there is reason to believe that it is more than a fear of contracting COVID-19 that has kept him from leaving China in the past two years.

With no heirs, for Xi to step down would place him in a vulnerable position, and Xi is well acquainted with the risks and dangers of the changing vicissitudes of the power politics within the CCP.

A different perspective suggests that Xi remaining in power might also be a realistic compromise in these shifting times. Who from the CCP power bases could replace him without more turmoil? Has he reached a similar position to what Mao Zedong (毛泽东) reached later in life, one in which no one could fill the gap without triggering an internal struggle?

Xi nonetheless cannot use the Cultural Revolution to purge his enemies as Mao did. So far, he has relied on investigations into corruption to purge his rivals, but that weapon is a two-edged sword. How can it be directed at enemies without exposing comrades?

Xi's problems are the CCP's problems, which makes them China's problems as Xi and the CCP struggle to keep a melting economy rolling.

Gone are the glory days of double-digit GDP growth. Even if those figures were inflated, no one dares mention them. The challenge of running China's economic engine is increasing and the CCP's fantasy world is crumbling.

Mao still has to be glorified. The millions of deaths, along with those who suffered under the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, will continue to be swept under the rug.

Even Deng's responsibility for the deaths at Tiananmen Square are being purged. Tiananmen

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Square never happened as far as the CCP is concerned.

All this translates to “the Taiwan question,” which in many ways provides a convenient outside distraction. The fallacy of Xi saying that the Taiwan question cannot be passed on from generation to generation is ironic. The whole question has been a fabrication. It has always been needed to draw the eyes of the Chinese public away from the problems within.

Chinese are frogs in a well that the CCP has built. Unlike Taiwanese, they do not have the ability to look outside and push for democracy. They certainly will not for at least the next decade.

While Xi wants to make his mark in the pantheon of Mao and Deng — whose pasts have been cleansed — he is also driven by the reality of basic survival.

The troubles in the Taiwan Strait continue to come from a stubborn, demanding, child-like China that must no longer be coddled as it tries to rewrite and dictate not only its own history, but that of the world.

Taiwanese already see how the currents of these swelling forces intertwine.

Desperation might cause the CCP to risk it all in a last-ditch effort, so the US, Japan and the world must be prepared to deal with and eliminate it.

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