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China

Reaction, not Revolution

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In late August a local blogger Li Guangman in China posted an article which would earn him national fame the overnight. His “Every One can Sense that a Profound Transformation is Under Way” was reposted online by multiple Party media from the *People’s Daily* to the *PLA Daily*. [1]

He argued that Xi’s recent attack on the private big business from digital giants to movie stars and his calls for narrowing the gap between rich and poor in order to realise “common prosperity” “marks a return from ‘capitalist cliques’ to the People, a shift from ‘capital-centered’ to ‘people-centered.’This profound transformation also marks a return tothe essence of socialism”, he said.

It is obvious that Xi has tried to imitate Chairman Mao in many aspects, first and foremost to emulate his personal cult to the extent that even movie star fans and kids playing online games are now treated as harming the state religion of “Xi’s Thought”. But the resemblance of the two invoked as infallible leaders does not go beyond this point.

Mao’s China never advanced to “socialism” or “communism”. It was definitely anti-capitalist, or even anti-market to the extent that even small and sole proprietors were banned. What has Xi said and done about capitalism? What does he mean by “common prosperity”? Xi means “three distributions”, a concept about the distribution of national income. Taken from the neo-liberal economist Li Yining, “the first distribution is the market based on the principle of efficiency; the second is the government’s emphasis on the principle of fairness, through taxation and social security expenditures.... The third time is the distribution through voluntary donations under the influence of moral force.” It is the third redistribution that is foremost in Xi’s mind, only flavored with a Chinese characteristic – forcing the giant corporations to donate monies to philanthropic projects. Xi’s message sent a shiver down the tycoons’ spines. Despite this seemingly radical act this is not socialism but capitalism.

Xi believes in the typically capitalist idea of market distribution of income into profit, rent, and wages. Although Xi also proclaims an updated and philanthropic version philanthropy is the privileges of the rich. It is the first distribution of income between employers and employees that makes the owners wealthy in the first place. Xi is a capitalist roader who might make Chairman Mao turns in his grave.

As an article at the business media Bloomberg has this to say about Xi’s supposed crack down on the capitalist class:

The evidence.... suggests that on economic matters Xi is not Mao, in the sense that he wants to redirect the energies of entrepreneurs, not eliminate them as a class..... Nor does Xi fully embrace Mao’s egalitarianism. On welfare, his top lieutenants are closer to neo-liberals than socialists; in their view, handouts to the poor only promote indolence. [2]

People like Li Guangman may argue that the benefit of having a top leader making the final decision is a wise leader unrestrained by anyone, including his own previously pronounced values and programs. He makes changes as he see fit. Chairman Mao was a good example. Therefore one cannot exclude the possibility that President Xi could march towards more “socialist” measures in the future. The crux of the matter, however, is that while Mao was a charisma, Xi is only a dwarf.

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Mao's idea and praxis of "revolution" contained strong doses of the classical Chinese idea of *Yixing geming*, or "a revolution whose sole purpose is to replace an old dynasty with a new one". This was why he was obsessed with grasping absolute personal power. Still he was a revolutionary with great vision and talent, and he enjoyed great popularity because of his achievement. Xi, on the other hand, is merely a head of the state bureaucracy, and one who is unimaginative. Reading his works is torturously boring. This huge difference in talent and temperament also reveals a wide gap in their respective actions. While Mao was confident that when he called upon the young people to make a "revolution" on his own Party in the second half of the 1960s, the latter would not turn on him. Xi would never dare to even try such a maneuver. The state apparatus is the only force which Xi feels comfortable with. Demonstrations in the street is the last thing he wants. With this stark contrast, any comparison between Xi's policy with Mao's Cultural Revolution seems absurd.

Fundamentally, the two have very different historical roles in relation to the Party. While Xi was as keen to preserve the Party's monopoly on power and his own personal power, there is a different agenda at work. The supposed economic "egalitarianism" of Mao's era is a half-truth, as the middle and top ranking officials enjoyed enormous privileges. In term of political egalitarianism it is entirely false. Still Mao's China was anti-capitalist. It was Deng who reversed Mao's program. It is Xi who happily succeeds Deng's policy. These capitalist roaders have enriched the Party officials. The more so the more they live in constant fear of losing control, especially so after their crackdown on the 1989 democratic movement. Hence the Party under Xi are always in a preemptive strike mode to kill off any movement for democracy and equality in its infancy. This, is a conservative reaction to the potential danger of a plebian revolt from below. It is reactionary through and through, sometimes quite comical.

This reminds me of what Marx had once said, that "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce."

Source [Borderless Movement](#).

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[1] *China Digital Times*, 31 August 2021 "[Translation: Everyone Can Sense That a Profound Transformation is Underway!](#)".

[2] Bloomberg, 4 September 2021 "[Could China's Crackdown Be a Second Cultural Revolution?](#)".