

Reign of King Xi

In another time, the announcement that the Communist Party of China has enshrined President Xi Jinping's political doctrine and his name in its Constitution would have been called a coronation. World leaders have scrambled to hail the move, led by US President Donald Trump who called it an "extraordinary elevation". Few, though, appear to have fully understood what the new development portends for China, and the world.

President Xi's ideology - which will now be taught, alongside that of [Mao Zedong](#), to school-children, like a socialist variation on religious instruction - represents a profound ideological rupture at the heart of China's ruling party. Xi's "Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" may sound a lot like "Socialism with Chinese characteristics", the guiding mantra coined by Deng Xiaoping, leader of China from 1978 to 1989.

But where Deng sought to marry capitalist economics with a socialist state apparatus, Xi voices the concern of neo-Maoists who believe "socialism with Chinese characteristics" was not socialism at all. Even though Deng's policies raised hundreds of millions out of poverty, neo-Maoists believed it bred a decadent society, where income disparities rose to unacceptable levels, workers were exploited, and corruption flourished. Proclaimed "core leader", and thus elevated to the same stature as Mao and Deng, Xi speaks to these concerns, promising to create a society where collective interests will be secured. In this sense, Xi's rise is not dissimilar to that of populist leaders elsewhere in the world who have triumphed on the back of the manifest failures of capitalism.

Ever since Deng's retirement, the Communist Party of China has been seeking to address the problems of legitimacy his policies created. In 2012, then-President Hu Jintao at the 18th Party Congress said the post-Deng party was "bravely promoting the implementation of basic theoretical innovation" to address "new thinking, new views and new arguments closely connected to the support and development of socialism with Chinese characteristics." Xi today pursues this through what he calls the "China dream" - described in The People's Daily as early as 2002 as the pursuit of "spiritual power to realise the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." Xi's spiritual renewal has come in the form of an anti-corruption campaign - adroitly used to remove rivals and consolidate power - and the fuelling of nationalism through military adventure on China's policies.

In essence, Xi promises not just prosperity, but greatness. As the scholar Simone van Nieuwenhuizen has perceptively pointed out, he "is not fostering a cult of personality, but a cult of the Party". For the rest of the world, this could be reason to worry: A Party that does not found its legitimacy on prosperity, after all, is one that is likely to seek it through nationalism-driven geopolitical adventure.

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