



## VIEWS IN CHINESE

Now more than ever it is important that Australians understand the diverse perspectives within the Australian Chinese community. 'Views in Chinese' translates key articles from a range of Chinese-language media outlets in Australia on issues regarding the Australia-China relationship, and noteworthy articles about the People's Republic of China (PRC). These are not the views of China Matters. Until January 2018, 'What does China say about' pointed out articles from China's state media and sources close to the PRC in both Chinese and English to draw attention to PRC positions on a range of issues.

### XI JINPING AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA

*This article was first published in [The New York Times](#) in Chinese. [SupChina](#) also made mention of it in their daily newsletter.*

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### **Why the theories that the Party is rapidly decaying and that Xi Jinping is incompetent are wrong**

By Deng Yuwen

It is essential for all who are concerned about China's future direction and democratic institutions to discuss these matters in a calm, objective, neutral and serious manner.

But unfortunately, most people start from the extremity of their own stance, values, emotions and individual experiences. They cannot objectively regard, analyse, and judge what they themselves observe or examine. This is a frequent phenomenon strongly affecting Chinese liberals including overseas democracy activists in the time of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and Xi Jinping. This situation is clearly evident in the lead-up to and beginning of the US-China trade war, with pessimism and taunts all around about China and the CPC. It seems that for the Chinese economy to collapse, the CPC vulnerable to attack and for Xi Jinping's position to be untenable, there only needed to be the first shots fired in a trade war. Rumours of a *coup d'état* ran rampant, stunning everyone, particularly during the first phase of the Beidaihe meetings when Xi was missing from the headlines of official journals. It's not that you can't have your own position and feeling when discussing issues, but one must try to avoid preconceptions because it is easy to have a distorted view. In particular, it is necessary to avoid going to extremes in order to attract attention. Democratisation is a serious matter. To make China democratic as quickly as possible, the premise is to understand the objective or



opponent of your consideration, understanding even more clearly their strengths and weaknesses.

However, there are two misconceptions in the observation and study of the CPC and Xi Jinping by the liberal democratic forces at home and abroad. The first is the theory that the CPC is in rapid decay and the other that Xi Jinping is incompetent. Observing the political programs of overseas Chinese, or in the words of critics published on social media such as Twitter, you will see that it is difficult to find anything of consequence on the topic of the CPC and Xi Jinping other than abuse, cursing, ranting, passing along gossip, conspiracy theories and that which runs counter to common sense. Not to put too fine a point on it, this is one of the reasons for the decline of the democracy movement overseas.

This phenomenon also exists inside China. At gatherings such as private parties or dinners, the criticism of the CPC and Xi Jinping is very intense. For some liberal intellectuals the currently perceived political situation is difficult to praise. For example, before the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress some scholars eloquently said that the congress would not be held or that the CPC would certainly fall from power after the congress, or that Xi Jinping would be overthrown at the congress. A few people have even bet with me on this. Why is the theory that the CPC is in rapid decay incorrect? Because it only addresses one point, not the rest. It turns a blind eye to the fact of their antipathy or their inability to prove their point. In the view of "rapid decay theory", the CPC seems to be a paper house which will fall with a single push. But the truth is not so simple.

On the surface, many of China's realities are braced for "rapid decay": internally the CPC has dissatisfaction and resistance among the masses; and externally the West led by the US is strongly containing it. In particular, the US-China trade war has led to economic depression and recession, affecting people's lives and triggering strong dissatisfaction with the CPC's and Xi Jinping's dictatorship. The middle class who supported the CPC in the past has also displayed disloyalty to Xi Jinping. Coupled with the intensification of the high-level power struggle caused by the anti-corruption campaign, it can be said that the conditions for the people's "uprising" are already in place and only a call to action for a peasant uprising is lacking.

This view seems to have been confirmed by the "70-year limit theory" for a one-party autocracy. The theory says that the vast majority of the world's autocratic countries or governments will collapse or step down when they have been in power for 70 years. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party are two examples. So it will also be difficult for the CPC to escape this historical pattern.

However, it is very problematic to regard the people's complaints and the strong dissatisfaction of various classes and levels against Xi Jinping as a prelude to the CPC's collapse. It may lead to overall social unrest only if the economic situation deteriorates to the point of being out of



control, with large-scale unemployment and hyperinflation. But even so, it is difficult to assert that the CPC will collapse tomorrow or anytime soon.

The reason is that the complexities of China itself and the changes in the international community are not entirely unfavourable to the CPC. China is a country with great internal differences, which makes it extremely problematic and magnifies the seriousness of problems. However, it also means that China has a strong tolerance for problems and has a lot of room for manoeuvre.

It should also be noted that although the CPC's ability to adjust and adapt was weakened with the strengthening of Xi Jinping's totalitarian rule, the speed of this weakening has not caused the CPC to be completely indifferent to changes in the outside world. Overall, the CPC's resilience is still very strong and a relatively effective governance mechanism has been developed. In order to alleviate the dissatisfaction of the masses, Xi Jinping is also strengthening the accountability of officials. In addition, although Xi Jinping's "China Dream" has been widely ridiculed, its nationalist sentiment and value of strengthening China is still attractive to Chinese society; his "precise poverty alleviation" to improve the welfare of the lowest levels of the masses has also been useful as a cohesive force in bringing them closer to the party. At the same time, the CPC's strengthening of social regulation and the opportunistic attitudes and behavioural strategies of the people in the face of political pressure are also extending its rule.

From the economic point of view, although China has suffered a lot of pressure and difficulties this year, it must also be noted that the opening up to the outside world is the biggest in recent years. There are many examples, such as the Central Government's Hainan Freeport, expanding the opening of the financial services industry, allowing banks and securities companies among others to hold more than half of the foreign-owned shares, and the expansion of opening up measures in Shanghai, Guangzhou and other places.

This of course is not to say that the impact of the trade war on the Chinese economy does not exist, but it is very likely that after the next tariffs on Chinese goods of US\$200 billion or even more than US\$500 billion, the impact is not as serious as expected when the trade war began. Foreign capital continues to flow into China. Elon Musk's Tesla not long ago registered a wholly-owned company in Shanghai, and recently increased its registered capital from 100 million yuan to 4.67 billion yuan. As some economists in China have said, the US-China trade war mainly affects market sentiment and does not necessarily have a big impact on the real economy. Although market sentiment will also exacerbate economic recession, we must also see that the Chinese government is working hard to resolve it, although the effect has not yet become apparent. From the perspective of international politics and geostrategy, in view of the rise of global populism, the emergence of strongman politics, crises and internal contradictions within the West and an emphasis on the Chinese market, the degree of acceptance of the CPC



in non-Western countries has increased. The overall environment around China has improved significantly from last year, especially with India, North Korea and Myanmar. China's containment by the West (excluding the United States) is difficult to maintain over a long period of time.

In fact, the "rapid decay theory" is just a replica of the already existing "China collapse theory", which has been popular for 20 or 30 years. The difference is that the "rapid decay theory" is mainly supported by the antagonistic anti-communist Chinese people at home and abroad, and the "collapse theory" is principally supported by research by overseas experts and scholars who analyse China, including some ethnic Chinese scholars. But the two are remarkably similar in their view of the rapid collapse of China and the Communist Party of China. Both believe that political infighting, corruption and economic recession will lead to the fall of the CPC and collapse of China.

If the judgement on the CPC's "rapid decay" is wrong, then the judgement on Xi Jinping's "incompetence" is not accurate because the two are closely related. Since he came to power nearly six years ago, when considering Xi Jinping as a person and his thoughts and policy lines, a view that seems to be universally recognised by the liberals is that Xi is a leader who is grandiose, head-strong, ambitious but lacking talent, and opinionated. Unable to bear responsibility, the CPC pushed him to the highest position and chose the wrong person.

Many of the liberals ridiculed Xi Jinping as an incompetent person. The common example is that although Xi is a doctor of law from Tsinghua University, his true level is only that of a junior high school student. After he took office, he was left by Hu Jintao with a good hand (not referring to China's reform process, but that the national strength continued to improve and the international environment rose correspondingly in a vacuum) which he squandered. Domestic affairs and international diplomacy are in a mess, domestic grievances have raged, and in the international arena we have fallen into unprecedented isolation. Particularly, by making an enemy of the United States, which will eventually lead to a US-China trade war and a comprehensive stifling by the US.

Xi created confusion in domestic and international affairs after coming to power, releasing many contradictory signals. In particular, he did not continue Deng Xiaoping's reform line. On the contrary, he modelled himself after Mao Zedong and turned in a completely leftward direction, returning to orthodox socialism, superstitious spiritual power, promoting high-handed rule, and economically strengthening the state-owned system. This led to extreme disappointment by Party reformers and socially moderate forces. This seems to prove that he is not good enough to accomplish anything, but more than good enough at creating a mess.

However, this view cannot explain how Xi took control of power shortly after he took office and changed the leadership system of "Nine Dragons Controlling the Water" during the Hu Jintao



period. For a person who had no military power and political achievements before coming to power, it is a miracle that he achieved such power and authority. It is important to realize that the strongman status of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping was achieved under heavy fire and through long-term leadership positions. How did Xi Jinping alone get the whole party to be obedient? Is it because the leading cadres of this party are no good, or is it the result of the intentional choice of the CPC's top leadership? Many people mention anti-corruption. But the problem is that Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin also pursued anti-corruption. Why did it not work?

Judging from the governance situation of Xi Jinping's six years in office, the haphazard view that Xi Jinping is a fool, that he only had a junior high school level education, that he had no governing principles, is absolutely wrong. It underestimates him. Xi Jinping has a set of designs for China's future. They are collected in the report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress. Although it does not satisfy the appetite of liberals, Trump's former chief adviser Steve Bannon extracted the "hidden meaning". In a December 2017 speech in Tokyo, Bannon warned the free world to be wary of China's power. Before the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress, Li Weidong, the former president of *China Reform* magazine, referred to the strategy of the powerful country as the "Red Empire" strategy, and summarised its main points. This shows that there are some people who can anticipate or read Xi Jinping. In short, Xi not only has a set of methods in the struggle for power with which he can defeat political enemies, he also has a whole set of ideas and strategies for governing the nation and the party. Not only that, but in comparison to Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, Xi also has very strong executive powers. He wants to turn this set of things that he thinks are "right" into reality.

One of the biggest mistakes made by the liberal democratic forces to date is to belittle Xi Jinping's ability and regard him as rash. It should be noted that Xi is a dictator with finesse, ideas, a mission and a will. He may be the last leader of true communism. Maoist communist education and its intellectual structure and the seven years of youth education in Liangjiahe village have determined his mode of thinking, making him superstitious, full of antipathy toward corruption, and sympathetic with the people. He believes that in the open environment of globalisation, the CPC and China can be transformed into a purely political party and state, but the cruel political struggle has also made him ruthless. He adopted a two-handed strategy of governing the Party and the rule of democracy with the purpose of practising his ideas in China and returning to orthodox socialism. In this regard, Xi is also an idealist. Of course, under the one-person leadership system, his idealism and sense of mission, without sufficient opposition, are bound to bring China to a dead end.

I am not here to sing the praises of Xi Jinping and the CPC, to extend the prestige of the political dictatorship, to end the ambition for freedom and democracy, but to call attention to the fact that the liberal democratic forces at home and abroad think that they are standing on the moral high ground by being dismissive of Xi Jinping and the CPC. By just staring at the



shortcomings and weaknesses of others they will make irreparable historical mistakes. For the free democratic forces, we should always remember that to defeat the opponents, we must, as the CPC itself said, strategically despise our enemies, but tactically take them seriously, learn more about opponents, and learn the strengths of opponents. Only in this way can we formulate realistic strategies. Otherwise, when historical opportunities come, they will be wasted.

Read the original article in Chinese at: <https://cn.nytimes.com/opinion/20180919/why-the-liberals-get-it-wrong/>

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