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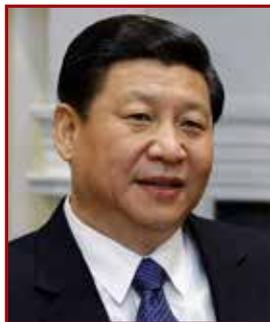
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PROFILE: CHINA'S PRESIDENT XI JINPING



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Xi Jinping became president of China in 2013, ushering in an era of increased assertiveness and authoritarianism. Outshining his immediate predecessors, Xi can be considered as the most powerful leader (paramount leader) since Deng Xiaoping.



He has created a public persona about himself as *an avuncular man of the people*, even though he has maneuvered behind the scenes with a ruthless ambition to dominate China's enigmatic elite politics. He is considered as a

consummate political chess player who has cultivated an enigmatic strongman image. The Chinese government's propaganda machinery regularly projects him as a firm yet adoring patriarch and leader, who fights poverty and corruption at home while building China's image abroad as an emerging super power.

After being declared the country's "core leader" in late 2016, Xi is marching ahead to break two decades old



tradition and stay on after his second term as the President and head of the ruling Communist Party. His sole ambition appears to be to make China a Superpower not only during his lifetime but that too when he is leading the country unless the destiny has something else in store for him and the country.

What is surprising is how very little is known about Xi's biography as a leader? Xi's deliberations and decisions unfold in utmost secrecy. Leaks have all but ended in the Xi's era, a reflection of fear as much as loyalty. Kerry Brown, a professor at King's College London and author of a 2016 biography, "C.E.O., China: The Rise of Xi Jinping" and other experts described the extreme secrecy around China's leader — even where Mr. Xi lives is not broadly known — as symptomatic of an affliction that often hobbles autocratic leaders: living inside a closed bubble of self-affirmation, echoed by yes-men (all men, in his case).

Early Days

Born in Fuping County, Shaanxi Province on 15 June 1953, Xi Jinping is the son of revolutionary veteran Xi Zhongxun, one of the Communist Party's founding fathers and an early comrade-in-arms of Mao Zedong. His father, Xi Zhongxun, was a commander in the war against Japan and then in the civil war that brought the Communists to power. He then became a senior government minister, working in the Propaganda

Ministry when the younger Xi, the third of four children, was born.

Xi grew up as a princeling of the new ruling elite, but in the fractious era that followed, his father fell out of favor, targeted for humiliation in the Cultural Revolution and imprisoned. Xi, at that time was in high school.

The 15-year-old Xi Jinping was sent for "re-education" and hard labor in the remote and poor village of Liangjiahe for seven years. While in Liangjiahe, he lived in a typical cave-like dwelling, fetched water from a well, and subsisted mainly on rice gruel. But instead of recollecting the experience as a punishment, he has done as Mao evidently intended, describing it as a lesson that made him more confident and enlightened. He often describes himself as having been a farmer for those years - an experience that would later figure largely in his official story. While much of rural China has seen breakneck urbanization, the village where he grew up is now a pilgrimage destination for the Communist Party faithful.

Xi says that the ideas and qualities, which define him today were formed in his early cave life. "I'm forever a son of the yellow earth," he likes to say. "I left my heart in Liangjiahe. Liangjiahe made me. "When I arrived at 15, I was anxious and confused. When I left at 22, my life goals were firm and I was filled with confidence."

Before, he arrived in the cave; young Xi had enjoyed a privileged



and cloistered upbringing as a “red princeling” - growing up with families of first-generation Communist Party revolutionaries in Beijing’s exclusive residential compounds. But all of that was shattered in the maelstrom that an increasingly paranoid and vengeful Chairman Mao inflicted on the party elite in the 1960s. Classes across Beijing were suspended so that students could criticize, beat and even murder their teachers. Xi’s father was first purged and then jailed, and his family humiliated. Xi’s family home was ransacked by student militants and one of his sisters, Xi Heping was killed. Later, his mother was forced to publicly denounce him as Xi was paraded before a crowd as an enemy of the revolution. Without parents or friends to protect him from the Red Guards dispensing the summary justice of the Cultural Revolution on the streets, the teenage Xi lived his second Beijing life, dodging death threats and detention. Much later, he recalled an encounter in a conversation with a reporter.

Many of Xi’s generation agree that *when their schooling stopped and they learned to survive on their wits, they developed emotional toughness and independence of thought.*

Back then everyone studied Chairman Mao’s famous little red book. Now the thoughts of Chairman Xi are posted on huge red hoardings and there is a museum in his honor. It extols the good deeds he did for his fellow villagers. Village life in 1960s China was tough.

There was no electricity, no motorized transport and no mechanical tools. The teenage Xi learned to carry manure, build dams and repair roads. He shared the flea-ridden brick bed in his cave with three others. One of them was farmer Lü Housheng, who told in 2015 that at night Xi would retreat to his cave to read by the light of a kerosene lamp. Lü remembers him as “a voracious reader and heavy smoker. He read the Selected Works of Mao Zedong, famous quotes from Mao, and the newspaper. There wasn’t anything else.” Xi had no sense of humor according to Lü. He didn’t play poker, hang out with other young people or look for a girlfriend.

Building up Political Career

At 18, Xi was ready to embark on his political career. He joined the Communist Youth League, and at 21, despite multiple rejections (10 times) due to his father’s imprisonment and his family’s disgrace, he finally succeeded in joining the Party itself. Thus far from turning against the Communist Party, Mr Xi embraced it. In 1974 Xi became an official party member, serving as a branch secretary, and the following year he began attending Beijing’s Tsinghua University, where he studied chemical engineering. After graduating in 1979, he worked for three years (1979 – 1982) as personal secretary to Geng Biao (an old friend of his father), who was then the vice premier and minister of national defense in the central Chinese government. He uses his brief service



in uniform to claim a military pedigree, though he was more of a staff officer than a foot soldier. It was around this time that he married his first wife, Ke Lingling, the daughter of the Chinese ambassador to Great Britain. The marriage ended in divorce within a few years.

Supremely pragmatic, a realist, with his “eyes on the prize” from early adulthood. This was how Xi’s friend described him in the 2009 diplomatic cable. Unlike many youths who “made up for lost time by having fun”, Xi was exceptionally ambitious and focused. After the Cultural Revolution, he “chose to survive by becoming redder than the red”.

By the time Xi was 25, his father had been politically rehabilitated and sent to run Guangdong, the vast province next door to Hong Kong, which would become the powerhouse of China’s economic rise. The elder Xi advanced his son’s career through his patronage network, and according to his friend, Xi quickly learned to build his own.

“He carefully laid out a career plan that would maximize his opportunities to rise to the top levels of the Party hierarchy, first becoming a PLA [army] officer in the late 1970s (being a PLA officer and PS to Geng Biao, Minister of national defense would have been a dual appointment) and then serving in a variety of provincial leadership

positions, progressively rising through the ranks. He had promotion... in mind from day one.”

Xi took the traumas of his early life and the solitude of the cave with him. His friend said his reserve, a certain distant quality, contributed to the failure of his first marriage. But it clearly contributed to the success of his political career. Until he reached the very top, his defining achievement was to have risen with barely a trace.

Steady Ascent

From 1983 to 2007, Xi Jinping served in leadership positions in four provinces, beginning with

- Local party secretary in Hebei province. During his tenure in Hebei, Xi Jinping traveled to the United States and spent time in Iowa, with an American family, learning the finer points of agriculture and tourism [Iowa governor Terry Branstad, who met Xi on his 1985 trip, was named as Trump’s pick for ambassador to China].
- After his return, he served as vice mayor of Xiamen in Fujian, where he proposed several infrastructure improvements, all of which were rejected by the provincial authorities. In 1987 he married folk singer Peng Liyuan, who also holds the rank of army general in the PLA.

- That was the only time he drew attention to himself on marrying his current wife. For many years the public joked: “Who is Xi Jinping? He is Peng Liyuan’s husband.” The couple has a daughter, Xi Mingze, who studied at Harvard University under a pseudonym.
- In 1987, Xi was transferred to Ningde, where he served as a district party chief. He launched a conservation campaign that beautified the major artery connecting Ningde to the greater Fujian province.
- He was the party leader in Fuzhou, the provincial capital, from 1998 to 2000. Credited with stimulating foreign investment, Xi revitalized the historical ‘Three Lanes and Seven Alleys’ section.
- His reputation as an honest and efficient politician rose steadily during his time in Fujian province. In 2000, he was named Fujian’s provincial governor. Among his concerns as Fujian’s head were environmental conservation and cooperation with nearby Taiwan. He held both the deputy secretarial and governing posts until 2002. From his time in Fujian, Xi gained first-hand experience of China’s export boom. A Hong Kong businessman, Sze Chi-ching told the South China Morning Post that Mr Xi lived in a public dormitory and washed his own clothes even when he was deputy mayor of Xiamen. He also dined at a public canteen and never visited fancy restaurants.
- In 2003, Xi moved to the neighboring Zhejiang province, where he served as Governor and Party Secretary. During his tenure, private industry quadrupled its research and development investment in the province. Xi turned his tenure in Zhejiang province into a major advantage, building a power base that sustains him to this day. According to Willy Lam, an adjunct professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong’s Center for China Studies, “Xi has promoted large number of his former colleagues, associates from Zhejiang province. This so-called Zhejiang faction is a major component of the Xi Jinping faction and is now the largest faction in the party.”
- In 2007, his career got a further boost when a pension fund scandal rocked the leadership of Shanghai and he was named as its party secretary, following dismissal of Chen Liangyu. He spent his tenure promoting stability and restoring the city’s financial image.

National Prominence

Having watched as his outspoken father was victimized by Mao, Xi deferred to



power and was careful to avoid making enemies. Even in his 40s and 50s as a very senior Party leader, he was always competent, never showy. One astute insider described him as “a needle concealed in silk floss”.

In 2007, he was chosen for the Politburo Standing Committee and Central Secretariat. In early 2008, Xi’s visibility became even greater when he was elected Vice president of the PRC and placed in charge of preparations for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. He became Vice Chairman CMC (2010 – 2012).

Elected Leader of the PRC

Everyone was taken in, when he became Communist Party leader in 2012, Xi Jinping was the compromise choice.

In his first five years in office, Xi Jinping has built a personality cult. At its core is the image of a man of the people. He has talked in earthy prose, telling students that *life is like a shirt with buttons where you have to get the first few right or all the rest will be wrong*. He has queued in a down market steamed-bun shop and paid for his own lunch.

Xi reflected on his ability to listen to other points of view without necessarily bowing to them. “I had to learn to enjoy having my errors pointed out to me, but not to be swayed too much by that. Just because so-and-so says something, I’m not going to start

weighing every cost and benefit. I’m not going to lose my appetite over it.”

In early 2012, Xi Jinping traveled to the US to meet with President Barack Obama and members of his cabinet. He also made a nostalgic trip to Iowa and then visited Los Angeles.

Later that year, on 15 November, Xi Jinping was elected General Secretary of the Communist Party and Chairman of the Central Military Commission. In his first speech as General Secretary, Xi broke from tradition and sounded more like a Western politician, speaking about the aspirations of the average person and calling for better education, stable jobs, higher income, a more reliable safety net of retirement and health care, better living conditions and a better environment. He also vowed to take on corruption within the government at the highest levels. He referred to his vision for the nation as the “Chinese Dream”.

On 14 March 2013, Xi completed his ascent when he was elected President of the PRC, a ceremonial position as head of the state. In his first speech as president, he vowed to fight for a great renaissance of the Chinese nation and a more prominent international standing.

Achievements and Controversies

When Xi Jinping came to power, he had promised the public to eradicate corruption, *caging tigers as well as trapping flies*. He arrested some of the country’s most powerful figures:

- One of the biggest tigers of all - 72-year-old, Zhou Yongkang was the most senior Party official ever to stand trial for corruption in the history of communist China. His trial came halfway through Xi's first term around 11 June 2015.
- Another tiger was Bo Xilai. He and Zhou were accused of plotting together and, with two top military figures and another senior politician, of "wrecking Party unity".
- Zhou Yongkang had been a Party member for half a century. After graduating as an oil engineer, he had risen to run China's biggest oil company and then a province of 80 million people. He'd crowned his career with a seat at the Party's top table and control of the security system. Together it made for a formidable patronage network. By the time Zhou appeared in court, Xi had painstakingly torn that network apart - his investigators interrogating everyone from office staff to drivers and cooks. Only months before Zhou's court appearance, one of his business cronies had been executed for running

a mafia. But the Party rarely executes its own. Zhou was sentenced to life in prison.

- It's winner-takes-all in politics here. Winner-takes-all is a dangerous game. Zhou was not just corrupt - he belonged to a rival Party faction whose power challenged Xi's own. Everyone now sees that in the Xi era, if you lose, you lose everything.

To supplement the image of a newly disciplined and frugal political culture, Xi tried to avoid banquets and sometimes travelled in a van with colleagues instead of a fleet of limousines.

For the past five years, Xi's blunt message has been: "Don't join the Party if you want to make money." But his problem was, and still is, that it is precisely the reason why some of the Party's nearly 90 million members did join up. Communist Party politics functions through money and patronage. Cleaning it up means removing not just individuals but whole networks of influence and a culture.

He issued edicts on the appropriate number of dishes for lunching public officials and even decreed office measurements for each rank in the hierarchy. Xi returned to his roots in the cave village to rub shoulders with ordinary farmers and make an unspoken point about the contrast between his



own life-story and corrupt elite.

But Xi has always belonged to the elite. In the years before he took power, some of his relatives had become enormously wealthy, though there is no evidence that he sought to promote the business interests of his family. Interestingly, according to an unofficial account, Xi's Net Worth is \$1.53 Billion (as of Jan, 2017).

According to his friend's account, in the American diplomatic cable published by Wikileaks: "Xi knows how very corrupt China isand such 'moral evils' as drugs and prostitution."

By caging hundreds of powerful tigers at the top of the Party and army, Xi has torn up the rulebook, which kept a fragile peace between the red elite after the death of Chairman Mao. Any of them might be making a speech in the Great Hall of the People one minute and dragged off to a cell the next.

Sun Zhengcai – who was tipped to rise to the very top leadership in the coming Congress reshuffle was purged. The charge sheet was familiar – Bribes, abuse of power, exchange of money for sex and leaking party secrets. But five years into Xi's rule, it reinforces the impression that the Party's corruption problem is systemic and enduring.

In recent months, from the safety of a Manhattan penthouse, Guo Wengui has made regular You Tube broadcasts alleging that the anti-corruption chief

Wang Qishan – effectively Xi's right-hand man - is himself corrupt. The only person Guo has been careful not to target is Xi himself.

Beijing has denied his allegations and Guo himself is now the target of multiple lawsuits. But many Chinese are gripped by his sensational account of the links between politics and business (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkOsgH5kcgQ)

Some of his allegations seem far-fetched, but the picture he paints is one of pervasive moral bankruptcy. In the absence of transparency, it has tarnished Xi's narrative of a Party, which has rediscovered its moral compass.

The Chinese Communist Party remains an opaque organization, and while pledging to clean up wrongdoing, Xi has shown no inclination to allow the whole truth to emerge in court or any other public domain.

Again and again, the Party has discovered that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. But Xi is determined that he alone will command the cleanup of comrades and the caging of tigers.

The Control of Cyberspace

The trouble started when wags on Chinese social media spotted a similarity between a photo of Xi Jinping strolling with Barack Obama and a classic image of Winnie the Pooh and Tiger.



From then on, China's Internet censors have waged war and the Party-controlled media has warned, "The Internet has grown into an ideological battlefield, and whoever controls the tool will win the war".

China has more than 750 million Internet users and Xi is keen that China should be a cyber-superpower when it comes to innovation and commerce, but not at the expense of political discipline. Xi has waged two wars at home, one for control of his Party comrades and the other for control of the Internet.

He has enormously strengthened the so-called *Great Firewall of China*, the combination of legislation and technologies, supported by legions of professional and volunteer censors, which together enable the Party to control Chinese cyberspace.

Cyber security is now central to Xi's definition of national security. Internet service providers and social media sites are forced to censor users, while users are encouraged to censor each other. All are denied online anonymity and those who overstep red lines are jailed.

It is reminiscent of the Mao era, when the Party expected citizens to spy on each other, and kept detailed files on them to instill fear. But Xi's surveillance network may already be more powerful. China has no meaningful privacy protection and every mobile phone is now a potential listening device and censorship tool.

Xi took office in 2012, a year after the Internet had played a key role in sparking the Arab Spring. He resolved it would never be allowed to spread protest in China, fearing a repeat of 1989, when the Party sent troops into Tiananmen Square to crush a student democracy movement.

Even when travelling abroad, many Chinese citizens now remain behind the Great Firewall as their service providers enforce Party censorship.

Until now the firewall has had small cracks, with those determined to access alternative sources of information able to do so via a virtual private network (VPN), a tunneling device to the world beyond the reach of China's censors. In his second term, Xi intends to take full control of the VPN tools.

Relying on mobile phone data and facial recognition, all enhanced by a massive investment in artificial intelligence and big data management, Xi hopes to command an internal security system unimaginable to his revolutionary or imperial forebears.

Both fear and greed are powerful motivators in the context of a rising China, and Xi has been bold in exploiting them, globalizing a control *strategy of carrots and sticks* that works well at home.

And money talks. When Xi visited Seattle in 2015, America's technology giants allowed themselves to be summoned. The bosses of Apple, Microsoft, Cisco, IBM and Amazon all



stood alongside Xi in the front row of a group photograph. All have since embarked on multiple partnerships with China despite its commitment to perfecting Internet censorship.

Facebook's messaging tool Whatsapp is increasingly blocked in China and Apple has now removed from its China App Store the VPNs which once gave Chinese users access to social media tools in the West, including the YouTube channel which gave the gleeful Guo Wengui such a devastating platform to discredit Xi's rule.

Weaving Nation's Conscience in to his "China's Dream"

It is now a matter of history that Mao's policies led to famine and the deaths of more than 30 million Chinese, or that Xi's own family had been persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. Under Xi Jinping, dwelling on inconvenient facts of history or insulting revolutionary heroes and martyrs is now a punishable offence called "*historical nihilism*".

Xi has promised the public that China will be rich and strong. He believes *unity and discipline under one-party rule* are crucial in achieving that.

Xi's elite early education, followed by the terrors of the Cultural Revolution, taught him to fear a politicized citizenry.

Another formative chapter for Xi came with the collapse of communism in the Soviet bloc. His assessment was that Moscow had lost its sense

of purpose when it renounced its revolutionary history. In a speech to his own Party comrades shortly after taking office, he warned: "Proportionally, the Soviet Communist Party had more members than we do, but nobody was man enough to stand up and resist."

Xi's resistance to the seductive power of liberal values has been ferocious. He said, "If our people cannot uphold the moral values that have been formed and developed on our own soil, and instead indiscriminately and blindly parrot Western moral values, then it will be necessary to genuinely question whether we will lose our independent ethos as a country and a people".

A nation of active citizens is Xi's nightmare. Christians, Muslims, labor activists, bloggers, reporters, feminists, and lawyers have been jailed for speaking or acting on their convictions. In some cases, they have also been paraded in televised confessions - that they allowed themselves to become pawns of China's enemies in the West. He wants his citizens to identify with "the motherland, the Chinese nation or race, Chinese culture, and the Chinese socialist road". He calls these the "*four identifications*" and has distilled them into two key slogans - *the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the Chinese dream*.

From banners hung above roads and stations, to TV documentaries, online animations and mobile apps,

these slogans are everywhere.

In celebrating China's communist history, Xi has been careful to balance reverence for Chairman Mao with equal deference to the economic reformer who succeeded him, Deng Xiaoping. Xi talks about Marxism and he talks about markets. But the essence of his "Chinese dream" slogan is clear - "the dream of a strong nation".

The Challenge Ahead

On becoming leader in 2012, Xi set the goals for China:

- By the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party - 2021 - China would become "moderately prosperous".
- By the 100th anniversary of the communists coming to power - 2049 - it would be a "fully developed, rich, and powerful" nation.

China's economy may soon be 40 percent larger than that of the US, measured in "purchasing power parity". By 2049, it may be three times as large. From island building in the contested South China Sea to new multilateral banks and the infrastructure blueprint of the Belt and Road, he has cast off the old maxim that China should hide its strength and bide its time.

Xi has also nimbly exploited President Donald Trump's withdrawal from a major trade agreement and the

Paris climate accord to present himself as the statesman of the hour and increase China's influence in the world.

But if Xi is to achieve his centennial goals, the real challenge still lies ahead. Surface strength hides deep economic problems. Overall growth is slowing and debt mounting. Many economists warn that time is running out for the reforms which might fix China's problems without a crisis. And behind the firewall's façade of ideological unity are many competing ideas about China's future.

There is a resurgence in patriotic nationalism whipped up by state media, with a particular focus on Mr Xi as China's strongman leader, leading some to accuse him of developing a personality cult like that of former leader Mao Zedong and calling him as "the most authoritarian leader since Chairman Mao". Some observers believe that his ruthless war on corruption is in fact aimed at rooting out opponents, and is part of a series of political maneuvers by Mr Xi aimed at consolidating his power.

Despite this, Mr Xi is still thought to enjoy reasonably widespread support among ordinary Chinese citizens - and is expected to keep shaping the country for the next few years. In a clear sign of Mr Xi's influence, the Communist Party voted, in 2017, to write his philosophy, called "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era", in its constitution. Only founder Mao and Deng Xiaoping, who



introduced economic reforms in the 1980s, have made it into the all-important fundamental law of the land

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