More than halfway through his five-year term as president of China and general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party—expected to be the first of at least two—Xi Jinping’s widening crackdown on civil society and promotion of a cult of personality have disappointed many observers, both Chinese and foreign, who saw him as destined by family heritage and life experience to be a liberal reformer. Many thought Xi must have come to understand the dangers of Party dictatorship from the experiences of his family under Mao’s rule. His father, Xi Zhongxun (1913–2002), was almost executed in an inner-party conflict in 1935, was purged in another struggle in 1962, was “dragged out” and tortured during the Cultural Revolution, and was eased into retirement after another Party confrontation in 1987. During the Cultural Revolution, one of Xi Jinping’s half-sisters was tormented to the point that she committed suicide. Jinping himself, as the offspring of a “capitalist roader,” was “sent down to the countryside” to labor alongside the peasants. The hardships were so daunting that he reportedly tried to escape, but was caught and sent back.

No wonder, then, that both father and son showed a commitment to reformist causes throughout their careers. Under Deng Xiaoping, the elder Xi pioneered the open-door reforms in the southern province of Guangdong and played an important part in founding the Special Economic Zone of Shenzhen. In 1987 he stood alone among Politburo members in refusing to vote for the purge of the liberal Party leader Hu Yaobang. The younger Xi made his career as an unpretentious, pragmatic, pro-growth manager at first in the countryside and later in Fujian, Zhejiang, and Shanghai, three of China’s provincial units that were most open to the outside world. In the final leg of his climb to power he was chosen in preference to a rival leader, Bo Xilai, who had promoted Cultural Revolution-style policies in the megacity of Chongqing.

For all these reasons, once Xi acceded to top office he was widely expected to pursue political liberalization and market reform. Instead he has reinstated many of the most dangerous features of Mao’s rule: personal dictatorship, enforced ideological conformity, and arbitrary persecution.

The key to this paradox is Xi’s seemingly incongruous veneration of Mao. Xi’s view of Mao emerges in the official biography of his father compiled by Party scholars, whose first volume was published when Xi was close to achieving supreme power and whose second came out after he had become Party general secretary and state president. Describing the elder Xi’s near execution in 1935, the book says that Mao saved his life, ordering his release with the remark that heads are not like scalions: if you cut them off they will not grow back. Mao then promoted Xi’s career as an official in Yan’an and as a top bureaucrat in Beijing after 1949. With respect to Xi’s purge in 1962, the biography blames Mao’s secret police chief, Kang Sheng, rather than Mao himself, and claims that Mao protected Xi by sending him to a job in a provincial factory safely away from the political storms in Beijing. When the Cultural Revolution broke out a few years later and Red Guards “dragged out” Xi from this factory job to subject him to the physical abuse and denunciation called “struggle,” the biography says that Mao’s premier Zhou Enlai had Xi imprisoned in a military barracks near Beijing as a way of protecting him. These stories have doubtless been massaged to show Mao as Xi wants him to be shown. But they are grounded in historical reality and help to explain the complexity of Xi’s relationship to Mao’s legacy. As Xi said years later, “If Mao had not saved my father’s life, I would not be here today.”

Xi’s respect for Mao is not a personal eccentricity. It is shared by many of the hereditary Communist aristocrats who, as Agnès Andrésy points out in her book on Xi, form most of China’s top leadership today as well as a large section of its business elite. Deng Xiaoping in 1981 declared that Mao’s contributions outweighed his errors by (in a Chinese cliché) “a ratio of 7 to 3.” But in practice Deng abandoned just about every one of Mao’s policies. Contrary to the Western consensus that Deng saved the system after Mao nearly wrecked it, Xi and many other red aristocrats feel that it was Deng who came close to destroying Mao’s legacy.

Their reverence for Mao is different from the simple nostalgia of former Red Guards and sent-down youth who happily remember a period of adolescent idealism. Rather, as the pro-democracy thinker Li Weidong writes in a much-discussed online essay, “The ‘Road of Red Empire’ That Cannot Be Transversed,” the children of the founding elite see themselves as the inheritors of an “all-under-heaven,” a vast world that their ancestors conquered. Xi Jinping’s legacy, his leadership of a country that has “stood up” and is globally respected and feared, they do not propose to be the generation that “loses the empire.”

It is this logic that drives Liu Yuan, the son of former president Liu Shaoqi, whom Mao purged and sent to a miserable death, to support Xi in reviving Maoist ideas and symbolism; and the same logic has moved the offspring of many of Mao’s other prominent victims to form groups that celebrate Mao’s legacy, like the Beijing Association of the Sons and Daughters of Yan’an and the Beijing Association to Promote the Culture of the Founders of the Nation. The princelings seem to invest literal biological meaning in the “bloodline theory” of political purity that was popular among elite offspring Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. “If the father was a hero the son is a real man. If the father was a counterrevolutionary the son is a bad egg” (laozi yingxiong erzi hushan, laozi fan-dong erzi hushan). They see no irony in cheering Xi Jinping’s attack on corrupt bureaucrats although Mao purged his own fathers as “capitalist roaders in power.” Mao’s purges they excuse as a mistake. But they see today’s bureaucrats as flocking to serve the Party because it is powerful and not because they inherited a spirit of revolutionary sacrifice from their forebears. Such opportunists are worms eating away at the legacy of revolution.

The legacy is threatened by other forces as well. Xi holds office at a time when the regime has to confront a series of daunting challenges that have all reached critical stages at once. It must manage a slowing economy; mol- lify millions of laid-off workers; shift demand from export markets to domestic consumption; ameliorate climate change and environmental devastation that are irritating the new middle class; and downsize and upgrade the military. Internationally, Chinese policymakers see themselves as forced to respond assertively to growing pressure from the United States, Japan, and various Southeast Asian regimes that are trying to resist China’s legitimate defense of its interests in such places as Taiwan, the Senkaku islands, and the South China Sea.

Any leader who confronts so many big problems needs a lot of power, and Mao provides a model of how such power can be wielded. Xi Jinping leads the Party, state, and military hierarchies by virtue of his chairmanship of each. But his two immediate predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, exercised these roles within a system of collective leadership, in which each member of the Politburo Standing Committee took charge of a particular policy or institution and guided it...
earlier phases of his career, such as Li遵展示了他们的个人忠诚，在管理经济方面的表现足够有力，以满足习的要求。他向中央和地方官员传达了党“静默而不动”的信息，并且使用他为1929年党在江西的宣言，即“党内生活”提出了“党性”观念，并成为了中央政治局的委员。其中，习有关“中央军委”、军委的信息以及他控制的中央警卫局。这些信息使得他有能力在一定程度上影响某些领导人的行为。

以下是一些习接触过的人士对他的描述。

1. **Chen Li, “Xi Jinping’s Inner Circle (Part 4: The Mubu Cluster II),” China Leadership Monitor, No. 7 (Spring 2015).**

2. **James Mulvenon, “The Yuan Stops Here: Xi Jinping and the ‘CJC Chairman Responsibility System,’” in William G. Schafft and Chad C. Devereux, China Leadership Monitor, No. 9 (Winter 2015).**

3. **The term Xi Dada uses the character “big” as in “big-bang Xi.” In various dialects it means father, grandfather, or uncle Xi.**


5. **Xi has made himself in some ways more powerful than Deng or even Mao. Deng had the final word on all policy issues, but he strove to avoid involvement in day-to-day policy, and when forced to make big decisions he first sought consensus among a small group of senior leaders. Mao was able to take any decision he deemed necessary, and he would veto the will of his senior colleagues, but he paid attention to only a few issues at a time. Xi appears to be running the whole span of important policy decisions on a daily basis, without needing to consult senior colleagues or retired elders.**

**After WTO:**

Mao (Facing Forward), 1986; from the exhibition Andy Warhol/At Warwel, which originated at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, and will be at the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, June 4–August 28, 2016. The catalog is edited by Max Delany and Eric Shiner and published by Yale University Press.
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NEAR THE NEW WHITNEY

In the Meatpacking District, Not far from the new Whitney, In a charming restaurant, I showed how charming I can be, I showed how blue my eyes can be, I showed I can be Dante first catching sight of Beatrice.

The maître d’ was new to me. The sudden sight of her, so gently lovely. Throw me at the pressed-tin ceiling, where I stuck. I asked her where I was, her name was Emily. I don’t know who the ceiling was. I doubt pressed-tin was what it was.

I was moonstruck. Now I could only look up. American art used to be risky. American art used to be frisky. And drink a lot of whiskey. I looked up at Emily, not far from the new Whitney.

Seventy years ago, There were violently drunken painters downtown who, Many of them, painted violently In the Hamptons also. Now they were in the splendid new Whitney, dead Instead.

I wished I had a sled dog’s beautiful eyes, One blue, one brown, To mush across the blizzard whitout Of sexy chirping chicks and well-trimmed Bearded white young men. You see how blue my old eyes aren’t.

I drank an after-dinner tumbler of whiskey Not far from the new Whitney. A present from the maître d’. Sweet Lagavulin single malt filled me with infinity Sixteen years old, while the girl Smiled softly. —Frederick Seidel

The New York Review