



BOOK REVIEW

THE XI JINPING EFFECT

HSIN-HSUAN LIN AND JUDE COCODIA

This book adopts a Critical Analytical approach as it examines the impact of Xi Jinping on institutions and life in China and beyond. While this is explicit as I browsed through the chapters, I realised too that in conjuring a larger-than-life status, President Xi Jinping is, of himself, an institution, and one that compels changes to people's lives and ideologies. In these chapters, we find the book taking a social constructivist view of Xi Jinping's leadership and legacy that are linked to Han-centrism. Through these approaches, I agree with the editors, that no book yet analyses President Xi Jinping's person, leadership and influence as comprehensively as this book does.

Two compelling issues arise from this book and these are; President Xi and China's hegemonic status in South-East Asia, and Xi's pervasive influence on social life in China.

Chapter 8 of this book avers that; "through his centralisation of power. Xi Jinping has the dominant voice in shaping 'China – Taiwan' relationship... compelling closer economic and political relations, with military force if necessary (207 & 209)" This claim aligns with the Hegemonic Stability theory that states that the actions of a hegemon (regional or global) determine the stability of the system. This statement resonates with realities around the world. The benign roles of Nigeria, West Africa's (erstwhile?) hegemon, and South Africa as Southern Africa's hegemon have ensured cordial interstate relations and regional stability in these areas. The same applies to the United States among the committee of North American nations and Germany in Western





Europe. Their leadership style of encouraging cooperation in their regions, rather than assimilation and occupation, has encouraged inter-state integration, co-existence and regional stability.

XI's Strategies for Solidifying Power and Spreading His Influence in China and Beyond

On incorporation of Domestic and Extraterritorial Surveillance in China, Xi's regime has ensured high legal barriers to the free flow of personal data using regulatory supervision as a policy tool. Utilising the power of monopoly in the field of science and technology information, Xi has established social control and political stability. As is noted across several chapters, the Communist Party of China's (CPC) regime that forcibly monitors cyberspace could be called Network Authoritarianism and Digital Authoritarianism. This is obvious in the areas of Tibet where Xi's authority has intensified digital surveillance of Tibetans, including forcing them to install unknown apps in their cell phones and using big data policing systems powered by technologies developed by US firms.

Since 2021, Tibetans have been required to install the "National Anti-fraud Center App" on their cell phones, which may allow the government to access their data or control their phones. These measures have changed the way of communication among Tibetan communities and caused a chilling effect. Similar measures have also been implemented in Uyghur communities. Xi's CPC regime has taken AI surveillance to new heights in China. Hikvision developed an integrated security management software that can identify monitored objects and ethnic categories (e.g. Uyghurs). This technology has been tested in the Hainan provincial authority and has been in use since 2022. Similarly, Hikvision obtained a nearly US\$300 million contract through a public-private partnership to develop the "Safe City" system for monitoring that has an automated tool that can transcribe and translate Uyghur messages to enable the regime to analyse Uyghur individuals' crime risks among other functions. Sense Time and its subsidiary Sense Net have





implemented facial surveillance technologies to track the whereabouts and movements of more than 2.5 million residents in the Uyghur Autonomous Region. Yitu Technology launched the Dragonfly Eyes Project, that uses a database that consists of more than 1.5 billion facial data to automatically detect Uighurs.

The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission reports that rigorous censorship systems are enforced to maintain the CPC’s monopoly on politics, shape the behaviour of Chinese citizens, and control overseas information. This censorship is expanded in terms of scope and strictness, with a particular focus on strengthening control over Internet content. In making this approach effective, Chinese authorities hold ISPs accountable, which causes them to self-regulate and censor online content. Through these approaches and policies, President Xi Jinping has succeeded in solidifying his control over China using complex AI and algorithms. These tools allow the Chinese authorities to monitor public sentiment, identify potential sources of dissatisfaction, and take preventive measures to stabilize society

In addition to applying AI to keep stability in restive areas of the country, China has also adapted the skill to glean information externally. As Russia invades Ukraine and other international conflicts escalate, sensitive data may be transmitted to Russia and the PRC through backdoors. Cameras connected to the Internet were transmitting data to servers controlled by Chinese manufacturers, raising concerns about whether Beijing could access the real-time imaging data on Ukrainian cities, critical infrastructure and frontline areas. Hundreds of thousands of these cameras are in operation in Ukraine alone, underscoring the widespread infiltration of Chinese surveillance technologies in Europe.

President Xi’s aggressive promotion of Han-centrism that resonates in several chapters which include Chapter 7 and Chapter 3 among others is noteworthy. The insensitivity and setbacks of

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such a policy that robs people of the right to their way of life is also brought to the fore. The book vividly captures how these changes are effected through state machinery with mixed results as seen in the fight against corruption amid growing vertical inequalities.

While Han-centrism may not be on the cards in Xi’s promotion of Sino goodwill abroad, his approach has also changed attitudes toward foreign relations in places such as Africa. The book which is so well crafted as adduced in the Overview that is precise, conveys the arguments in easy-to-understand terms, and compels every reader to keep turning the page.

Conclusion:

The Xi Jinping Effect boldly captures the strategy of President Xi Jinping, in what could be termed China’s most progressive and aggressive era in modern times, in keeping stability at home, spreading his influence abroad, and evolving into an institution himself. This book broken into four sections and ten chapters that examine President Xi from different perspectives is indeed an essential read if the aim is to understand modern China.

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