

INSIGHT

Mission impossible?

Kerry Brown says that while Xi Jinping's tough language on tackling corruption has certain parallels to Mao, the party he runs and society today are far more complex, making his task that much harder

Once upon a time there was a leader of a major country who grew so tired with vested interests and self-serving elites who had their hands on the main levers of power that he decided to launch a campaign to bring them down to size.

He talked of their corruption, of their being remote from the people, of their failing in their historic mandate to be the moral, just rulers of a nation being reborn and rejuvenated. He came out with powerful statements at public meetings to mobilise officials to live more simply and return to their core values, as servants of the people, not those being served.

He found, ranged against him, an array of powerful opponents who were ready to aggressively look after their own particular areas of interest. Some years after he had started this attempt, he admitted that, despite his very best efforts, he had failed.

Placing Mao Zedong (毛澤東) next to Xi Jinping (習近平) would no doubt be an unwelcome thing to do publicly in Beijing these days. While Mao's grandson is a member of the Chinese People's Political

Mao was instrumental in launching the epic Cultural Revolution campaign.

This was the campaign that Wen Jiabao (溫家寶), in his remarks prefiguring the fall of Bo Xilai (薄熙來) last year, mentioned during the annual National People's Congress then. He talked of the Cultural Revolution being a disaster for China and its people, and something it could never return to. But there are elements of this epic and complex moment that might not be so simple to brush into historic oblivion.

One of these is the central objective of the campaign then simply to attack the ways in which the party had become an ossified self-serving bureaucracy and the servant of too many vested interests. Mao spoke often of the party being overtaken by mini-barons and overlords who ran particular provinces or ministries as though these were theirs by right.

This notion of some sort of "blood right" to be leaders was the inspiration behind some of the rebellious groups then mobilising and moving in on sections of the elite in order to smash their grip on power locally. Ironically, it was figures such as Bo Yibo (薄一波), Bo Xilai's father, and Xi Zhongxun (習仲勛), Xi Jinping's father, who figured as victims, taking the blame for allowing the party to stray from its historic and moral mandate and become this way.

Almost half a century on, the Communist Party has perhaps become the very thing that Mao most feared – an enormous semi-autonomous economy, a state within a state, where large areas of its activities are now dominated by elite families or networks, existing to serve their own interests.

The security apparatus in particular, under Zhou Yongkang (周永康), became an immense behemoth with a budget of over US\$100 billion. This was approximately the same figure imputed to the 90 richest members of the National People's Congress in a recent report from the Hurun Research Institute. In an odd way, the wealth of this group is equivalent to the funding of China's internal security – at least from public figures. This is one of the telling "parallel tales" that contemporary China gives to us, which helps a little in capturing the complexity of the country now.

Xi Jinping is not about to start anything like a Cultural Revolution. China is a radically different place to how it was in 1966. For one thing, it is much richer. But the structural challenge that Xi has been alluding to through his talk of needing to attack corruption is not dissimilar to that which Mao had in his sights five decades ago.

How do you hold the party to account when it is so dominant in society, and



Almost half a century on, the Communist Party has perhaps become the very thing that Mao most feared

Consultative Conference, handling the chairman's legacy is a tough task.

Still popular as a nationalist and supporter of Chinese dignity among certain sections of the population, more information is coming out inside and outside China about the less palatable aspects of his period of rule. The most impressive of these to date is *Tombstone*, the epic, moving account by Yang Jisheng (楊繼繩) of the famines of the early 1960s.

Placing the good and bad Mao against each other is still a step too far for politicians in Beijing. For them, it is simply best to look back to the 1981 resolution on party history and the assessment of Mao there (majority good, small part bad) and let the issue sleep.

But Xi's language about fighting corruption and closing the gap between the rulers and the ruled has odd parallels with some periods of Maoism. In 1966,

where it remains this infuriating mixture of opaque but also ubiquitous? The party needs to reform itself, has needed to reform itself for decades. Since 1978, it has allowed the economy, and in many ways society, to undergo profound processes of modernisation. But it remains at the centre of all of this, perhaps the one significant structure in the country that has changed very little since 1949.

Xi would never invoke Mao, but in his battle with the various self-interested groups who are controlling areas of the party's interests, from the military, to the security services, the state tobacco monopoly, the state-owned enterprises, and so on, perhaps the one lesson he can take from Mao is that his greatest weapon in this struggle is moral pressure.

Like Mao, he has to appeal to a mission which the party is fulfilling, of national

greatness, which unites all the disparate communities in China. And, like Mao, he has to appeal to a positive narrative of where all this is going, and how devastating the effect will be if China and the party shift off target in their collaboration to return the country to its historic status as a great and powerful nation.

There is one big disadvantage that Xi has over Mao. The Chinese society he lives in, and the party he runs, are vastly more complex even than the time of Mao.

And so Mao's failure to achieve his aim in the end, to return the party to its roots and the purity of its founding purpose, must give Xi, and the rest of us, pause for thought.

Kerry Brown is executive director of the China Studies Centre and professor of Chinese politics at the University of Sydney

Stuck in middle

Louisa Mitchell says women in their 40s and 50s have been overlooked in the workforce as part of the solution to an ageing population problem

The government appears to be taking the issue of our ageing population seriously, with Financial Secretary John Tsang Chun-wah making it a focus of his latest budget report. Policy debate seems to concentrate on two areas – reversing the low fertility rate of young women and addressing the burden of the elderly currently living in poverty. Both are critical problems that need fixing, fast.

However, there appears to be a whole swathe of people missing in the middle of these two groups. These are our middle-aged women. They do not seem to be adequately considered as part of the solution to our burgeoning ageing problem and rising dependency ratio – two workers for every elderly person in 20 years, down from 10 to one in the 1980s, according to Tsang.

Women now in their 40s and 50s are expected to live until their late 80s. So those in their 40s still have around half their life to go, and those in their 50s, a good 30 years or more. Life expectancy is increasing so that women in their 40s and 50s in 2031 can expect to live until an average of 90 years old.

But a study for Civic Exchange and The Women's Foundation, titled "The Changing Faces of Hong Kong", shows that although today's women in their 40s particularly, but also their 50s, benefited from the education reforms of the 1970s, their labour force participation rate still collapses through middle-age.

For women aged 40 to 44, it was 72 per cent in 2011 but for women aged 55 to 59, it was 43 per cent – and that gap has widened over the past 20 years. The comparable rates for men were 96 per cent for those aged 40 to 44 and 78 per cent for the 55-59 age group.

Sustaining women in the workforce requires change at home and in the workplace. Flexible employment practices help women remain in the workplace while fulfilling commitments to children or elderly relatives. Gradual improvements are being made in this area, such as the introduction of three days' paternity leave, which although often criticised for being too little too late, is a positive development.

But wider opportunities for career development and appropriate salary increases are the key to keeping women working for longer. As the middle-aged woman is increasingly educated, so her expectations rise.

Women in their 40s and 50s still significantly lag behind men in terms of average monthly earnings. Only 29 per cent of working women in their 40s and 50s were in top-status jobs, such as managers/administrators, professionals and associate professionals, in 2011, compared to 43 per cent of such men.

The corporate sector is particularly weak in this area and that is why The Women's Foundation last night launched the 30 per cent Club, a voluntary group committed to bringing more women onto corporate boards. Mentoring will be required to help achieve their goal. But women also need to be appropriately rewarded through pay. And this needs to happen across all sectors.

Middle-aged women, and strategies for developing and sustaining their careers, need to be integrated into the overall policy agenda to address the challenges posed by our ageing population.

Louisa Mitchell is an independent social policy researcher. This article is part of a series on women and gender issues, developed in collaboration with The Women's Foundation

Arms treaty could allay 'robot' fears as drones become ever more sophisticated

Trefor Moss says unmanned planes shouldn't be deployed without a human controller involved

For a species that loves new technology – that lives and dies by it – it's strange how we sometimes demonise our own creations. Last time, it was genetically modified foods. They might just save the world, except that there's something "sciencey" and unnatural about them. Hard to understand foods? No, thank you.

Drones, or unmanned military systems, are GM's heirs. Everywhere we're encouraged to fear and detest these newfangled planes without pilots. We read about China and Japan embarking on a "drone arms race", or about the US developing a new "killer drone", or about autonomous "killer robots" that will snuff out human lives with all the moral uncertainty of a vending machine delivering cups of tea.

A lot of this is hysterical and alarmist. But there are also genuine concerns. Much like GM foods, drones lead us into a maze of legal and ethical questions that require serious debate – not facile conclusions one way or the other.

So first, the benefits. Most unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are harmless, unarmed systems for surveillance and reconnaissance. Many countries already operate them. They're cheaper than manned aircraft, they can stay in the air for longer, and no one dies when they crash. They're masters of the three Ds: "dull, dirty and dangerous" jobs that humans don't want to do, or can't do. They save money, time, effort and lives. Tick!

The controversy arises when

you start strapping bombs onto them. Weaponised UAVs like the US' notorious Predators and Reapers have given drones a bad rep because of the way Washington has been using them to attack enemy targets, mainly in Pakistan.

This policy isn't as outrageous as it seems. It's an open secret that the Pakistani government has given the US permission to conduct its drone missions there – it's just that neither side openly admits it. This denial sends a garbled

There is a sense it's inherently ghoulish to use a glorified flying PC to kill human beings

message to other countries acquiring an armed UAV capability that drones are somehow a weapon apart, exempt from the rules of war and sovereignty. They are not.

It's true that America's use of drone strikes has risen exponentially. An estimated 4,700 people have now died in these strikes but, like it or not, this is the way of the future.

The apparent impunity of these things upsets people most of all. There's an impression that UAVs wipe out a lot of innocent people as they hunt their targets – and that no one ever has to

answer for that. The drones' operators are typified as being unable – or too lazy and distracted – to differentiate between a target and innocent bystander as they stare, far away, at their monochrome screen. And there's a sense that it's inherently ghoulish to use a glorified flying PC to kill human beings.

But this portrayal isn't real. The idea that a UAV operator has scant regard for human life simply because he pulls the trigger remotely is unfair. UAV pilots have balked at firing on those little black blobs precisely because they were unconvinced about the validity of the targets. Then there's the footage – leaked by whistleblower Bradley Manning – of US Apache helicopter pilots casually blitzing a crowd of children and journalists in Iraq. Immediacy is no guarantor of humanity, just as remoteness does not necessarily invite recklessness.

As for our discomfort about the use of robots to kill humans, it's important to remember what we're really dealing with here. Predators might come across as chilling, brutal even, but in the end they're not so different from a piloted fighter plane: they're still weapons operated by a man. The burden of responsibility still rests squarely on the human operator, and with the politicians who give the orders.

The biggest controversy of all comes when UAVs become truly autonomous, and the only human in the "kill chain" is the poor bloke at the end of it. We aren't there yet, but UAV technology is advancing at an

extraordinary rate. Aeroplanes always had to be designed around a human pilot: now the aircraft has been liberated. Soon there will be UAVs smaller than a bee, and bigger than a 747. Some will be able to stay airborne perpetually. The possibilities are incredibly exciting.

But they are also disturbing, at least if we allow governments to replace our air force pilots with autonomous combat UAVs. Right now, we seem to be drifting much too casually towards this risky outcome. After all, if a human operator can't tell the difference between a gunman and a child, or a jihadi training camp and a wedding, then how are these flying hard-drives supposed to know?

So, it's time to propose a new arms treaty: the Convention on the Use of Autonomous UAVs. It will stipulate that no machine can kill without there being a human controller somewhere in the loop. Arms conventions have been successful in curbing cluster bombs, anti-personnel mines, and other nasty military creations. Let's forestall the "killer robot" before drones, for all their benefits, really become something to panic about.

Trefor Moss is an independent journalist based in Hong Kong and former Asia-Pacific editor for Jane's Defence Weekly. Follow him on Twitter @Trefor1

> CONTACT US
Agree or disagree with the opinions on this page? Write to us at letters@scmp.com. If you have an idea for an opinion article, email it to oped@scmp.com

Dissidents with nothing else to occupy their small minds

Lau Nai-keung says anti-Beijing fixation is a sign of political immaturity

To Hong Kong's parochial mainstream media, whatever is happening on the mainland is irrelevant unless it is directly related to Hong Kong or some Hongkongers, or it has attracted international attention. The annual National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference meetings in Beijing fit both categories, yet so far reports have focused on the pronouncements from top Chinese leaders about Hong Kong and the fact that some Hong Kong reporters were beaten up.

Some people are finding the messages from the two meetings this year rather confusing. Premier Wen Jiabao's (溫家寶) last work report was peculiarly terse about Hong Kong, perhaps the shortest and emptiest that anyone can remember.

The new CPPCC chairman, Yu Zhengsheng (俞正聲), made a statement considered to be headline, but that was balanced by a more conciliatory one by the incoming NPC president Zhang Dejiang (張德江).

The speech by Zhang Xiaoming (張曉明), the newly appointed head of the central government's liaison office in Hong Kong, didn't mention anything political at all. This is bewildering, and subsequently sent many pundits into a frenzy of conjecture and speculation: the whispers in the mainstream media and on the political grapevine are that the central government has changed its policy on Hong Kong in reaction to recent events such as the phantom independence

movement and the war-cry of Occupy Central.

Such overreactions are but manifestations of political immaturity in Hong Kong. Many people choose to bury their heads in the sand but claim they know everything. The truth is that China's Hong Kong policy has been "one country, two systems; Hong Kong people fit both categories, yet so far reports have focused on the pronouncements from top Chinese leaders about Hong Kong and the fact that some Hong Kong reporters were beaten up.

After a few days of meetings in Beijing, I tend to forget that there is a place called Hong Kong

changed and is not likely to change until 2047, as China has a good reputation of honouring its international commitments.

Despite what mainstream media and dissident politicians try to have us believe, years of American and British reports persistently indicate that these powerful main stakeholders are, on the whole, quite happy about the implementation of this policy. And that is exactly why some people here are getting so restless and trying to provoke Beijing into taking drastic action.

The objective is to precipitate another incident comparable to

Tiananmen in 1989; this is the essence of the Occupy Central master plan now being publicly discussed and organised.

But to the worry of the dissidents, it seems the central and Hong Kong governments are not falling into their trap or reacting according to script. The message from Beijing is clear: we don't want any trouble, but if you want to create some, let's see what happens. New leader Xi Jinping (習近平) is all smiles, whereas our dissidents expect him to be angry.

There is a saying that "the tail cannot wag the dog". Our dissidents are so full of themselves they think Hong Kong is the centre of the universe and everything revolves around it. From my own experience, after a few days of meetings in Beijing, I tend to forget that there is a place called Hong Kong.

If you think people in the capital of the most populous nation on earth, with the world's second-largest gross domestic product, will focus all their attention on a few obnoxious "small gestures" from a bunch of people here, you'd be mistaken.

What worries me is that proper snubs from Beijing will trigger more desperate attention-seeking action here. There is a Spanish-derived word for it: desperados. I just wonder, what will they think of next, Occupy Central Nakid?

Lau Nai-keung is a member of the Basic Law Committee of the NPC Standing Committee, and also a member of the Commission on Strategic Development