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CHINA'S COMMUNIST PARTY REVISES ITS HISTORY YET AGAIN IN TIME FOR USE BY XI JINPING

by JAYADEVA RANADE

History and the power of the narrative have always been important to authoritarian regimes. Communist regimes have elevated their importance by using them to indoctrinate entire generations with sanitised versions of events authorised by those in power. Under Chinese President Xi Jinping the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has further refined the impact of the narrative by using propaganda and technology to keep the media and social media in check. Since the last few years, China's security apparatus has also been co-opted to try and prevent western 'liberal thinking' from infiltrating and swaying China's students, academics and intellectuals.

2. Using the media and school history text books, the CCP has not only been able to airbrush out leaders who crossed the line so that they no longer exist, but blank out entire events from public memory. As part of this effort 'revised' versions of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s history have been published every ten years. Editions of the Party History were published in 1999, 2001, 2011 and the latest now in 2021. But this is probably the first time in the history of the Chinese Communist Party that the CCP Central Committee (CC) has simultaneously launched a year-long, nationwide 'Party History Study and Education Campaign'. Interestingly, the important 20th Party Congress, crucial for Xi Jinping, is scheduled to be held next year!

3. The CCP CC's Party History and Literature Research Institute released a new 'Brief History of the Communist Party of China' on April 13, 2021. Its release coincided with the new campaign to study the history of the Party. The study-campaign encompasses the 92-million strong CCP, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and schools and universities across China. It is listed as a mandated teaching resource in schools. Its importance can be gauged from the reports, articles and commentaries that publicise it daily in the Party's official 'People's Daily', the PLA Daily, the State-owned CCTV and other media. The CCP's leading fortnightly theoretical journal Qiu Shi (Seeking Truth) on March 31, reproduced a hitherto unpublished speech on the importance of studying Party History delivered by Xi Jinping on February 20. It specifically listed eight important points identified by CCP CC General Secretary and Chinese President Xi Jinping for study.

4. The 'Brief History of the Communist Party of China' is the latest updated version of the Party's history. Its release has coincided with the hundredth year of the CCP's founding anniversary. The 'Brief History' and the study campaign have political significance. They

promote Xi Jinping's image and elevate him as one of China's three most important communist leaders at par with Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. The Brief History reinforces the narrative pushed since 2013 that China, under Xi Jinping, has embarked on another thirty year era like those of Mao and Deng before him!

5. Among the important differences noticed between the latest version of the 'Brief History of the Communist Party of China' and the older version is the apparently reduced emphasis on Mao's era. While there were three or four chapters on Mao Zedong's 30-year era, the new version encapsulates it in only two chapters. Further, the old edition of "The History of the Party" covered the ten-year period of the Cultural Revolution in one lengthy 11,000-word chapter with at least six sections. It discussed the destruction of the "Lin Biao Group", efforts to correct the "ultra-leftist trend" and smashing of the "Gang of Four". The new version has shrunk this to just one page with a superficial description. References to party rectification, the anti-rightist struggle, 'Great Leap Forward' etc. are absent.

6. An initial comparison of the various editions reveals the difference in treatment of the tumultuous Cultural Revolution decade. The titles of the relevant sections in the different Editions make this self-evident:

1991 Edition:

Chapter: The initiation of the Cultural Revolution

1. The full-scale civil strife that "overthrew everything";
2. The destruction of the Lin Biao Group and the frustration of efforts to correct "Left" errors;
3. Opening up a new situation in diplomatic work;
4. The collapse of the Jiang Qing Group

2001 Edition:

Chapter: Ten Years of Civil strife of the Cultural Revolution

1. The launch of the "Cultural Revolution"; and total civil strife
2. The destruction of the Lin Biao Group and the efforts to correct the ultra-leftist trend
3. The struggle against the "Gang of Four"; and the overall rectification in 1975
4. The victory of crushing the Jiang Qing Group

2011 Edition:

Chapter: The 10-year civil strife of the Cultural Revolution

1. The launch of the Cultural Revolution.
2. From the "full seizure of power" to the Party's Ninth Congress and the Third Party. The destruction of the Lin Biao Group and the efforts to correct the ultra-leftism.
4. The new situation in diplomatic work.
5. The overall rectification in 1975.
6. The smashing of the "Gang of Four". The victory of the counter-revolutionary group

2021 Edition:

Chapter: The Exploration and Tortuous Development of Socialist Construction

1. The Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China and a good start for China's socialist construction.
2. The arduous exploration of the socialist road.
3. The development of socialist construction amid twists and turns

7. In its analysis of the 'Brief History of the Communist Party of China', the Hongkong-based Apple Daily (April 13) said this version has put a "more hawkish and nationalistic touch on major events, including foreign sanctions and Hong Kong's handover, compared with an older version". The authors, it added, "have concentrated on how the party stepped up efforts to deal with sanctions imposed on China by Western countries following the bloody Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989" and noted that the U.S. and Europe imposed an arms embargo on China for its bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Beijing on June 4, 1989.

8. The Apple Daily observed that while not negating Deng Xiaoping's assessment of Mao Zedong, "The new book has also significantly downsized coverage of the Cultural Revolution, a decade of national turmoil starting 1966, to one page of sketchy descriptions instead of an entire 11,000-word chapter in the old edition". While the older version held Mao Zedong responsible for initiating the Cultural Revolution, which became a "serious disaster" for the Chinese people, the latest edition does not blame Mao. Instead, it credits Mao with "exploring ways in his incessant fight against corruption, special privileges and bureaucratism within the party and government ... Many of his correct ideas for building socialism were not thoroughly implemented, leading to internal turmoil."

9. Predictably the new version endorses the aggressive foreign policy being pursued by Xi Jinping. Apple Daily pointed out that "instead of focusing on former leader Deng Xiaoping's low-profile diplomacy approach, as in the older edition, the latest version recalled Deng's hawkish remarks during a meeting with former U.S. President Richard Nixon in November 1989". At that time Deng Xiaoping told Nixon that the Chinese people would "never beg for the cancellation of the sanctions" even if they dragged on for 100 years.

10. Owned by Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai, who has just this fortnight been awarded a one-year prison sentence under the National Security Law for supporting pro-Hong Kong independence demonstrators, the Apple Daily naturally has a particular focus on Hong Kong. It observed that unlike the 2011 edition, which said Hong Kong enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and kept its previous social and economic systems unchanged under the "one country, two systems" principle, the new version of Party History describes the handover as a "brilliant and great achievement in the history of the Chinese race," and as an event that placed Hong Kong under "China's national governing machine to share an inseparable path of development".

11. The latest version of the CCP's history endorses Xi Jinping's policies. This week the People's Daily publicised that a leading group under the CCP CC Propaganda Department has been tasked with disseminating the contents of the latest 'Brief History of the Communist Party of China' nationwide. It said the Leading Group has made over 30 reports in various localities, organized more than 70 interactive exchange activities, and delivered more than 110 reports to government organs and universities. It had reached more than 22 million people through television and online broadcasting. This campaign reinforces the other efforts to enhance Xi Jinping's image.

12. Xi Jinping has also flashed the steel of the security apparatus to mobilise nationalism and buttress the History campaign and rein in dissenters. The National Security Education Campaign appears more robust this year with some Provincial Party Secretaries noticed

writing articles emphasising its importance. A Global Times (April 15) article highlighted: 'West-backed colour revolution a 'top threat' to China's national, political security'. Separately, in a rare editorial in the People's Daily (April 15), the Ministry of State Security (MoSS) publicised China's security concerns. It warned: "We must be soberly aware that various hostile forces have not stopped...subversion and sabotage of the Party leadership...and are always planning 'colour revolutions' in our country." The MoSS assured it is standing firm against: "All kinds of risks and challenges to the Party leadership and the socialist system"; "All kinds of risks and challenges to sovereignty, security, and development interests"; and "All kinds of risks and challenges that endanger China's core interests and major principles".

These campaigns are especially important this year as Xi Jinping prepares to secure a third term -- unprecedented since 1980 -- at the next Party Congress in 2022!

(The author is a former Additional Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, and is presently President of the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy.)

