



China's Maoists Mark Death of Great Helmsman With Tributes, Street Events

Those who revere Chairman Mao are often the most marginalized in Chinese society.

By Qiao Long

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A journalist takes a photo of pictures depicting late Communist leader Mao Zedong, during a visit to the Museum of the Communist Party of China, in Beijing, June 25, 2021,

State-run mainstream media in China appeared to have ignored the 45th anniversary of the death of late supreme leader Mao Zedong this week, although leftist websites ran tributes to the "Great Helmsman."

The Red Song Network posted an article listing rousing tributes to Mao, as well as reports of "spontaneous" events marking his death, on its front page.

"On Sept. 2, 2021, residents of Xiangyang community ... in Heihe city, Heilongjiang held a an event to mark the 45th anniversary of Chairman Mao's death," the article said.

The party was titled "Watching Red Movies and Recalling the Years of Prosperity," and moved many participants to tears, the article said.

"They thought of Chairman Mao's great achievements, thought that without Chairman Mao, there would be no [ruling Chinese] Communist Party [CCP], and we wouldn't have the happy lives we have today," it said.

Meanwhile, residents of Shexian county in northern Hebei province "spontaneously gathered to express their infinite love for Chairman Mao" on Sept. 3, the article said.

"Today, there are thousands of hearts facing Beijing and [Mao's birthplace] Shaoshan; there are also thousands of smiling faces turned towards the red sun and the great savior of the people," it said.

'Longing for the Mao era'

It also quoted poems and tributes to Mao made by the website's readers, ending with the words:

"Chairman Mao, we will always follow you!"

Hunan current affairs commentator Guo Min said crowds of visitors make the pilgrimage annually to Mao's birthplace in Shaoshan around this time of year.

"The fact that they are doing this sends a message, I think," Guo said. "A lot of things that are happening right now are similar to the past."

"Our leaders in particular seem to feel some kind of longing for the Mao era."

Writer Tan Zuoren said that while many people in China still revere Mao, Maoism in today's China also forms the political basis for some very concrete demands.

"People who truly worship and mourn Chairman Mao are often those with the least education, the lowest incomes and the lowest social status," Tan said.

"These people are often far away from the centers of power, wealth and even culture," he said. "They are the marginalized part of the population."

Workers and farmers

He said the stronger China appears to become, the more leftist, Maoist tendencies are emerging, with far more such groups now visible than during the 1980s and 1990s.

"Back then hundreds of millions of people who once loved Mao started to hate and condemn him," Tan said. "It seemed that all of their misfortunes were his fault."

"But then, economic development came, and workers were laid off in huge numbers and farmers started losing their land, and their material interests were harmed," he said. "People had no way to stand up for their rights, and so they naturally started to miss the good old days."

He said workers and farmers had better social standing during the political violence and social turmoil of the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution.

"At least during the Cultural Revolution, workers, laborers and farmers had some kind of nominal social status," Tan said. "Nobody dared to bully them."

A petitioner from Wuhan surnamed Gao said many petitioners -- ordinary Chinese who try to use existing complaints channels to fight for their rights in the face of official harassment and abuse -- weren't simply engaging in idealistic, blind worship when they revered Mao, however.

"After many years of petitioning, I have managed to learn a little bit of the truth, but it's hard," Gao said. "Internet controls are so tight now, so it's very difficult to do."

Translated and edited by Luisetta Mudie.

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