

FENGQIAO EXPERIENCE

Xi Jinping like Mao: Chinese forced to spy on each other

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On September 20, 2023, Chinese authoritarian leader Xi Jinping **visited** the town of Fengqiao, in China's Zhejiang Province, declaring that China ought to "uphold and develop" the Fengqiao Experience in the new era to "correctly handle internal

contradictions” and “solve problems at the grassroots level.”

The “Fengqiao Experience” alludes to a practice from China’s Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) where citizens would keep tabs on and “reform” those who were considered “class enemies” by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In Fengqiao village, CCP cadres mobilized many to “reform reactionary elements.” As per the CCP media mouthpiece CCTV and **reported** by *Radio Free Asia* (RFA), 2023 signified six decades since CCP dictator Mao Zedong tried to enforce the “Fengqiao Experience” throughout China.

According to the same RFA report, Xi first broached the “Fengqiao Experience” in 2013, alleging that CCP cadres in Fengqiao introduced the practice of “relying on the people to resolve conflicts on the spot.” The Chinese leader then exhorted cadres to apply “rule of law thinking and rule of law methods” in tackling issues impacting the “vital interests of the masses.” RFA then quoted exiled Chinese scholar Chen Pokong, who remarked that Xi’s reintroduction of the “Fengqiao Experience” practice indicates that Xi must be encountering much resistance from within the CCP, and that he is trying to consolidate his grip on power and deploy people to resist his political opponents within the party.

Adding, Chen said that during the Cultural Revolution, Mao could not tackle rival Liu Shaoqi within the top echelons of the party, thus he incited Red Guard rebels to fight against political dissidents within the CCP. The Red Guards eventually denounced Liu as a “renegade, traitor, scab” and a “capitalist roader” bent on undermining the Communist revolution, as per an Al Jazeera **report**. In 1968, Liu was expelled from the party. Likewise, Xi is presently mobilizing people to combat his political opponents within the CCP to tighten his grip on power, Chen contended.

Besides advocating for “Fengqiao Experience” approach towards nationwide surveillance, Xi has also highlighted the theme of “common prosperity” in his vision for China’s future, **declaring** that Zhejiang should take the lead in promoting “common prosperity” and take narrowing the urban-rural gap, regional gap, and income gap as the main strategic direction to boost the mechanism of integrated urban-rural development.

Moreover, Chen believes that Xi's promotion of "common prosperity" is a means to woo people from China's middle and lower income backgrounds and make them resent China's wealthy, RFA added. By combining "common prosperity" with the "Fengqiao Experience", Xi is essentially replicating Mao's Cultural Revolution stance of favoring populism over capitalism, and a planned economy over a market economy.

Likewise, veteran current affairs commentator Hu Ping was quoted by RFA as saying that the notion of constant "struggle" is at the core of the "Fengqiao experience". "In his mind, there are enemies everywhere," Hu opined, referring to Xi. "There isn't enough room in prison for so many people, so they are expanding [the restrictions of prison] into society at large." "These organizations ... are mainly focused on politics [rather than crime]," Hu said of the groups targeted for the "Fengqiao experience" under Xi. "These are powerful controls, and a way to bring back the class struggles of the Mao era," Hu elaborated.

Additionally, RFA reported on November 14 that the CCP aims to ramp up on neighborhood surveillance, transferring local law enforcement from police stations to neighborhood "grids, where volunteers, vigilantes, and residents will be urged to monitor each other. A Public Security Ministry directive in March 2023 urged for an active integration of police stations into "grassroots social governance," through cooperation with local "vigilante" groups and local ruling CCP officials.

To boot, Chinese authorities have begun to retrench auxiliary police officers and combine local police stations in hopes to rely on neighborhood officials and local militias under the "grid management" system, as per state media reports cited by RFA.

The grid management system basically divides neighborhoods up into a grid pattern with 15-20 households per square, and assigns a vigilante to each grid who reports about residents' activities to neighborhood committees, RFA added. A Guangdong resident who gave only the surname Liao out of security concerns revealed to RFA that one reason for the grid management system was to focus on neighborhood policing and "stability maintenance" involving coercion and surveillance to prevent dissidence against the CCP. "Stability maintenance measures are getting stricter and stricter," Liao said. "They will never streamline the stability maintenance forces."

China has had mass law enforcement measures to repress dissent against the CCP, with authorities hitherto deploying huge numbers of residents known locally as "red armbands" or "Chaoyang aunties" to spy on others during key events and high-level

political meetings.

Having said that, the new “grid management system” hopes to make such behavior long-lasting as local officials have been given law enforcement powers and are recruiting “grid officers” nationwide, reports indicated. The recruitment of local personnel under the grid management system is part of Xi ’s “Fengqiao experience”.

In comments to RFA, Ma Ju, a current affairs commentator said: “Such social control will both strengthen the internal stability maintenance system and set up a volunteer police force, extending the use of Chaoyang aunties across the country to safeguard the regime.”