

# XI JINPING: COMRADE AND CORE LEADER

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Chinese President Xi Jinping emerged from the sixth plenum of the 18th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with the leadership designation of “core” (*hexin*, 核心). The 348 most senior members of the Party officially conferred the title to their Secretary General months after the term had sporadically appeared in local-level policy documents. The event left political observers to wonder whether this could mark a new phase in Xi Jinping’s further accretion of executive, legislative, and military power. The political significance of this latest development in the Chinese semantics of power, however, appears to be overstated by many Zhongnanhai-ologists, latter-day Kremlinologists attempting to read the tea leaves of the internal politics of the highly secretive top echelon of the CCP.

The use of the “core leader” title does not come as a novelty for the Chinese Communist Party. This specific leadership designation was first introduced by Deng Xiaoping to refer to Chairman Mao Zedong, himself, and his ultimate successor Jiang Zemin (after the two aborted successions in the tumultuous 1980s), specifically to put Jiang on a par with his predecessors despite his lack of revolutionary and

military credentials. A tangible watershed moment in the dynamics of Chinese domestic politics came when Hu Jintao, Secretary General and President after Jiang, was denied what Alice Miller calls the “trappings of paramount leadership”, being thus labelled as a leader amongst equals – *primus inter pares*. Today, Xi Jinping’s elevation to “core leader” seals his authoritativeness as a *primus inter inferiores*.

While it is difficult to determine at this stage whether the “core leader” title serves the purpose of allowing president Xi to amass even greater power in his own hands in the coming years, or whether this *tifa* 提法 (official wording) is employed to mark the achievement of the empowerment goals Xi had set for himself upon taking office in 2012, it is becoming clear that, with the opening of the 19th CCP Congress in a year’s time, President Xi may seek to use his preponderant leadership position to gain greater control over the appointment of the Party’s ruling élite.

Preponderant leadership rarely goes unopposed, however, as the President no doubt knows well. It is hardly surprising, then, that the recent plenum has also been careful to place renewed emphasis on the notion of “collective leadership”. Mindful, *inter alia*, of the tragic implications of Mao’s disproportionately discretionary exercise of power (esp. 1957-1976),

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The top-level Communist Party conclave gathered in Beijing last week, from Oct. 24th to 27th. (photo cred: [scio.gov.cn](http://scio.gov.cn))



