

Global China Seminar Series

Leader Cults: Propaganda or Ritual?



Personality cults in authoritarian regimes can be conceptualized in two different ways: as leader-focused positive propaganda or as rituals of leader worship. The first focuses on the forms of communication that make possible the transformation of bureaucratic state power into charismatic (extra-bureaucratic) authority, while the second focuses on the forms of participation that make possible the reverse transformation of charismatic authority into state power. These two conceptualizations are not mutually exclusive in specific cases, since leader-focused propaganda and rituals of leader worship can interact and amplify each other in complex ways, but particular leader cults do tend towards one or another pole of this dichotomy and each of these ideal types has distinctive origins and political consequences. Dr Marquez argues in this paper that rituals of leader worship have much more wide-ranging political

consequences than centralized forms of leader propaganda; whereas increases in leader propaganda often portend little more than the consolidation of a leader's power, the widespread emergence of rituals of leader worship is associated with more revolutionary upheavals. Dr Marquez will illustrate the argument with examples from the cult of Mao during the Cultural Revolution, the recent increase in propaganda focused on Xi Jinping, and other leader cults from the last century.

About the speaker

Xavier Marquez is a Senior Lecturer in the Political Science and International Relations Programme at Victoria University of Wellington. His current research focuses on rituals in non-democratic regimes. He is the author, most recently, of *Non-democratic Politics: Authoritarianism, Dictatorship, and Democratization* (Palgrave, 2017).

Date: Thursday, 15 June

Time: 4.00-5.00pm

Venue: Lecture Theatre 105 (AMLT 105), Alan MacDiarmid Building,
Kelburn Campus, Victoria University ([map](#))

If you are interested to attend this seminar, please email Lai Ching at laiching.tan@vuw.ac.nz or call 04 463 9549 to register.