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**China**

## **Hu Jintao and his bitter banquet of injustice**

By Xia Xiangren

Translated by T Augustine Lo

HONG KONG - Sometimes bits of little-known personal history illuminate the character of major figures, in this case reformist Chinese President and Communist Party Chairman Hu Jintao, currently locked in a struggle for power with his predecessor Jiang Zemin. For years Hu has refused to visit his ancestral home in Jiangsu province because party officials there refused to rehabilitate his father, who was unjustly accused and imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution - and who perished.

More than 20 years ago, Hu sought redress from local party officials on behalf of his father, a tea-shop owner condemned and persecuted as a bourgeois capitalist. Hu even ordered a restaurant banquet for local Communist Party officials so they could sort out the case over delicacies and rice wine and agree to rehabilitate his father. They never showed up. Hu waited, and waited. Then he invited the kitchen staff, chef, cooks and dishwashers, to come and share the bounty. That was more than 26 years ago.

There is a story among Taizhou's citizens that when Hu departed Tai county, he swore a solemn oath that he would never return to the place where his father, Hu Ningzhi, was disgraced, and he himself was humiliated.

Hu Jintao has never returned. This spring, when local officials spruced up his birthplace and ancestral home in coastal Jiangsu province - undertakings unknown to Hu at the time - he never showed up, even when he was informed of the elaborate preparations. Here's the story, uncovered by Asia Times Online's Hong Kong staff:

The birthplace of Communist Party Chairman Hu Jintao, the moderate, reform-minded national president, Taizhou city in Jiangsu province, had taken upon itself to repair Hu's ancestral tomb without his prior knowledge. The city even undertook a series of projects in praise of Hu's achievements and in anticipation of a pilgrimage this past spring to pay respects to his ancestors. However, Hu's ancestral trip did not come to pass, and he has not inspected the projects that apparently had been forced upon Taizhou citizens, despite their protests.

Asia Times Online investigated the scene at Taizhou, and discovered that Hu has not returned there for at least 26 years. In fact, his absence is inextricably linked to the tragedy of his father, Hu Ningzhi, who perished during the Cultural Revolution.

### **Hu left home at 18 and ascended the political ladder**

According to all official media records, Hu Jintao is a native of Jixi in Anhui province. In fact, Anhui is Hu's place of ancestral origin, and his own birthplace is in the Taizhou (formerly in Yangzhou) area of Jiangsu province. Hu attended school in Taizhou until age 18 when he left for university in Beijing and slowly ascended to the Chinese political stage.

Hu Jintao rarely resided in Tai county and his actual birthplace was 10 kilometers beyond Taizhou's municipal boundaries. Hu's mother, Li Wenrui, was originally a native of Baimizhen-Hujiadian village (now Yaozhuang village) in Tai county. Even though Hu's father, Hu Jingzhi, was born to natives of Jixi, he was actually born on the periphery of Shangba, the Tai county seat, during the republican period. Hu's father was a Tai county resident of the New China and fluent in the local dialect.

Thus, according to the former policy of residency registration, Hu Jintao is technically a native of

Taizhou, Jiangsu. This situation is similar to that of long-deceased former Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, whose parents were both from Zhejiang. They gave birth to Zhou only after arriving in Wei-an in Jiangsu province.

Why is it then that Hu Jintao, born in Tai county and whose lineage is one-half from Tai county, does not acknowledge that he is a Tai county native?

Observers have long held several views on Hu Jintao's silence on his second home town of Taizhou. According to one view, when Hu joined the Standing Committee of the Politburo in 1992, in accordance with relevant rules of the Communist Party Central Committee, which seeks wide geographic representation, a single locale may not produce two Standing Committee members. At the time, the Standing Committee of the Politburo already included Jiang Zemin, who claimed to be from Yangzhou, Jiangsu province. Jiang preceded Hu as president, still holds the position of chairman of the party's Central Military Commission and is locked in a power struggle with Hu over party reforms, priorities and visions of China.

At that time, in 1992, Taizhou and Yangzhou had not yet been divided into different jurisdictions, and so China's leader Deng Xiaoping decided Hu should be considered a native of Jixi, Anhui province.

Another view holds that although Hu's dossier had always registered him as a native of Yangzhou, Jiangsu province, since his departure from home at age 18, he changed his residency registration to Anhui in order to mourn his father's death in 1978 during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

#### **Hu's father and grandfather ran a tea shop**

The story of Hu's kinsfolk began a long time ago. Hu's grandparents moved from Jixi to Shangba, Tai county, during the late Qing period to sell tea leaves. Hu Jintao's father, Hu Jingzhi (genealogical name, Hu Zengyu), continued running his own father's tea shop.

After Hu Jintao was born, his mother Li Wenrui never felt well and could not supply milk. So Hu was sent to the care of his maternal aunt, Liu Bingxia. Thus Hu's aunt became his nurse. (Liu Bingxia, a nonagenarian, continues to maintain a frugal lifestyle.) At the time, Liu Bingxia was a little over 30, older than Hu's mother by only 10 years, yet was considered her elder.

In 1949, his mother died from illness, when Hu was only seven, and his two younger sisters (elder sister Hu Jinrong and younger sister Hu Jinlai) were only three and five. Left without options, Hu Jingzhi sent his three children to the care of his younger aunt and his wife's aunt-in-law in Taizhou. He never remarried.

Hu Jintao's maternal grandfather, Lao Lijia, also had a large family at the time. Lao not only had a business in Jiangyan (originally in Tai county) but also had what was considered at the time a palatial Ming-Qing-style family compound on Benefactor's Lane within the walls of Taizhou. Hu Jintao was born in this compound, and lived there for more than 10 years.

When he was seven, he was sent to Dapu Elementary School on Xiqiang Road in Taizhou. When he was 12, he entered the Jiangsu Provincial Taizhou Middle School on Xilingyuan Road for both junior- and senior-high education. When he was 18, he left Taizhou for Tsinghua University in Beijing. His old classrooms are still standing.

When Hu Jintao was in his teens, communist authorities appropriated his father's tea shop as a public and private joint enterprise. His father, Hu Jingzhi, thus became an employee of the Tai County Distribution Center. Because Hu Jingzhi had offended some local people during the 1966-78 Cultural Revolution, the pro-Mao Zedong rebels declared that Hu Jingzhi had embezzled public funds. They dragged him on to a stage for public denunciation and struggle sessions. He was then imprisoned.

#### **Hu's father tortured and imprisoned**

Hu Jingzhi suffered cruel physical punishment during his imprisonment and his body withered away.

When the Cultural Revolution ended in 1978, he died at the relatively early age of 50. Hu Jintao, then 36, was assigned to the Qinghai region in the far west, and was already a deputy-level cadre (*fuchuji ganbu*).

Upon hearing of his father's passing, Hu immediately rushed back to Tai county - he was in Gansu province at the time. Before laying his father to rest, Hu found the Taizhou authorities linked to his father's case, county executive Lu Mo, as well as the leaders of his father's work detail (*danwei*). He pleaded with them to rectify his father's case, and offered proof of his father's good character and patriotism.

At the time a number of deputies in the bureau had already agreed to support Hu's case for redress and rehabilitation of his father. Moreover, they even introduced Hu to the best restaurant in Tai county and suggested that Hu and the local leaders discuss the case over wine.

On the following day at noon, Hu spent 50 yuan (equivalent to 1,500 yuan or US\$181 today) to hire two tables at the Tai county restaurant. He waited until 2pm without anyone appearing. At 3pm, a county committee chief rushed over and apologized, saying that the county executive and distribution-center officials were in conference all day, and that he had been sent to relay their greeting and apologies.

Hu, joined by his relatives, sat at the tables and sighed. Finally, he invited the restaurant chefs, cooks and dishwashers to join his group to finish the feast. Seeing those unrelated persons enjoying the feast, Hu's relatives could do little more than sit in stoic silence.

The Taizhou restaurant chef at the time still recalls his meal with Hu as vividly as if it had been yesterday. He contentedly smiled to the Asia Times Online journalist, saying: Don't think of me as a useless old man. Twenty years ago, Chairman Hu not only invited me to his table, but also toasted with me!

Today there are some who say the case of Hu's father was not rectified until the late 1980s. There are others who claim that his father has never been vindicated. Later Hu Jintao returned to Qinghai and continued working. In the 26 years since then, Hu Jintao has never visited Tai county.

***Translator T Augustine Lo***, a 2004 graduate of Harvard University, will be a graduate student in Chinese Studies at Cambridge University.

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