

# Factional Model-making in China: Party Elites' Open Political Contention in the Policy Process

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## Abstract

This article introduces the analytical framework of “factional model-making” to describe and explain the open political contention of Chinese Communist Party elites in the policy process. Party elites undertake factional model-making to express policy disagreements and to signal their power to the regime: by flouting the Party line publicly without punishment, they show that they can influence the Party line and therefore pressurize the regime into acknowledging their position in the opaque power structure. This article chronicles the history of factional model-making from the 1960s to 2012 and examines in detail the making of Henan’s Nanjie Village into a re-collectivization model by the Party’s left. The process began in the 1990s and ended soon after Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, which prompted Nanjie’s patrons to recast the village as a Party model trumpeting Xi’s line. The suppression of factional model-making under Xi is discussed in the conclusion.

**Keywords:** faction; Mao Zedong; military; princelings; left; red billionaire villages

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Can members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) express political disagreement with the Party centre in public? Theoretically speaking, the answer is a definite no. As a Leninist party, the CCP resolutely demands every member to toe the Party line, which defines the goals, ideology and policy direction that the Party centre – the highest authority of the regime – has set for the Party in its governance of China. Under democratic centralism, CCP members are entitled to free speech in discussing political matters. Such freedom should be exercised only via limited platforms – internal Party meetings and restricted documents – and in a way that upholds the Party centre’s “centralized and unified leadership” – an overriding political requirement that is left intentionally ambiguous to deter outspokenness.<sup>1</sup> In reality, however, Party elites have repeatedly, self-

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1 Clauses on democratic centralism were first incorporated into the CCP Constitution in 1927. They have since been expanded in the Constitution and are regularly discussed in the Party’s theoretical journals such as *Qiushi*.

righteously and very publicly trampled on these restrictive formal rules and norms. Mao Zedong's 毛泽东 Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 and Deng Xiaoping's 邓小平 southern tour in 1992 were epoch-making examples. Moreover, time and again since the early 1990s until Xi Jinping 习近平 came to power in 2012, some Party members – especially retired senior cadres – circulated in public sharply worded essays and letters penned to criticize the regime's superficial commitment to socialism.<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly, we must look beneath the façade of Party unity to understand the CCP's culture of open political contention. China scholars have done so by producing leaders' biographies or other forms of historical narratives to describe some instances of open political contention.<sup>3</sup> Useful as these are, their emphasis on personal idiosyncrasies and context begs the question of whether the CCP's culture of open political contention can be conceptualized in an analytical framework transcending time and space or is it just a collection of isolated outbursts.

This article advances the research of Chinese elite politics by introducing a generalizable analytical framework – “factional model-making” – to describe and explain the open political contention of CCP elites – Party members recognized as prominent individuals by Chinese citizens – in the policy process. This framework contributes to the factionalism paradigm by illuminating the motivations, process and scope for open political contention surrounding the Party line. In what follows, I first differentiate “model-making,” a Party work method that enforces compliance to the Party line, from “factional model-making,” the co-optation of model-making by Party elites to contend against the Party line and to signal their power to the regime in public. Thereafter, I chronicle the major examples of factional model-making from the late Mao era in the 1960s until Xi took power in 2012. The review demonstrates that even though factional model-making violates Party discipline, the regime tolerated it insofar as the Party elites involved did not use factional models to promote policies prohibited (instead of marginalized) by the Party line or bid for a post in the Party leadership. Since these norms were usually observed, factional model-making often did not threaten regime security.

After explaining how factional model-making works, I apply this analytical framework to examine the causes, process and outcomes of the making of Henan province's Nanjie Village 南街村 into a factional model of rural re-collectivization by the Party's left-leaning elites, including civilian leaders, military generals and officers, Maoists and princelings. The process began in 1990 and gradually subsided towards 2012, when the local leaders and Maoists actively recast the village from a factional model to a Party model toeing Xi's line. Nanjie's patrons are deemed leftists in this article because they championed re-collectivization, which strongly embodies a vision of socialism more

2 For examples from the 1990s to early 2000s, see Dickson 2003, 98–107. For a more recent example, see Hernández 2020.

3 See, e.g., famously, Baum 1994; MacFarquhar 1997.

progressive than that of the Party line.<sup>4</sup> The article concludes with a discussion of Xi's suppression of factional model-making and whether this might backfire.

This article relies on data collected during my week-long fieldwork in Nanjie in 2015 during which I visited the village exhibition hall and conducted semi-structured interviews with six senior propaganda cadres. I learned from my interviewees that Nanjie's redistributive practices – residents were given a small, fixed wage from the collective village enterprises, supplemented by generous welfare provision by the village Party committee – were crucial to attracting support from the Party's heavyweights. Admittedly, the nature of the interviews was such that the information obtained should not be taken at face value. Fortunately, the purpose of this article is not to find out whether or how redistribution was implemented in reality, or whether Nanjie was genuinely socialist, but simply what the village leadership believed attracted the Party's left to back Nanjie. Interviewees claimed that it was mainly owing to Nanjie's redistributive practices, a narrative consistent with those in the village exhibition hall, the *Nanjiecun zhi* 南街村志 (*Nanjie Village Gazetteer*) (2010), which was published by the village Party committee (I obtained a copy from one of the interviewees), and the village newspaper, *Nanjiecun bao* 南街村报 (*NJCB* hereafter), which is available on the village's website.<sup>5</sup> The gazetteer contains speeches and writings by Nanjie's patrons about the village between 1994 and 2005. Besides reading the gazetteer, I have also read every issue of *NJCB*, from 2008 (the year it was first made available online) to 2014, to identify who Nanjie's patrons were, when and how they supported the village, what they said about the village, and whether they had been there. I also used the full-text search function of the online version of *NJCB* to check if issues published in 2015–2020 contain any mention of the Party heavyweights who publicly supported Nanjie between 1994 and 2012. I did so to find out if they or their associates continued to support the village and how they justified doing so. Rather than taking the data from the gazetteer or *NJCB* at face value, I provide a contextualized interpretation of it based on my research of Chinese elite politics for the same time period in order to ascertain, as rigorously as possible, the Party left's motivations for turning Nanjie into a factional model.

## The Analytical Framework of Factional Model-making

*Factional model-making co-opts the Party's model-making in the policy process*

In the Chinese political discourse, “models” are commonly referred to as *moshi* 模式, *jingyan* 经验, *mofan* 模范 or *dianxing* 典型. These terms all suggest that models are templates that should be copied (*mofang* 模仿) by everyone aspiring to excellence. Model-making, or the designation of models – model workers,

4 For a discussion of the left/right ideological division in Chinese politics, see Nathan and Shi 1996.

5 *NJCB* can be accessed at <http://www.nanjiecun.cn/cunbao.asp?bid=16>.

model cadres or model communities – for mass emulation, has long been one of the Party’s chief didactic vehicles for enforcing conformity with the Party line. Since the Mao era, the Party’s propaganda apparatus at all levels has actively upheld models to draw attention to particular courses of action, frame situations and problems in particular ways, and give clear signals about preferred solutions and consequences.<sup>6</sup> Model-making can be understood as a manifestation of the mass line, a Maoist work method that requires cadres to go to the masses to persuade them to accept the Party’s ideas as their own. In essence, this is exemplified by those in the community who have distinguished themselves in the eyes of the authorities and have thus earned the honour of being upheld as “models.” Cadres become familiarized with the pedagogy underpinning model-making, which stresses continuous self-improvement through imitation, as they proceed through the highly systematized process of policy learning that is largely controlled by the Party school system.<sup>7</sup>

Factional model-making originated from model-making. The process begins with Party elites handpicking a local area that implements policies marginalized by the Party line. The elites then cultivate the local area as a factional model through assisting the local government to access ordinarily hard-to-obtain resources, such as grants or concessional loans, to facilitate the local area to achieve successful policy outcomes. This serves to make the local area more attractive as a platform for contesting the Party line. In tandem to cultivation, factional Party elites also help the local area garner publicity, for example by visiting the area themselves, in order to promote the controversial policies in question. In practice, promotion can serve cultivational purposes because it, too, can enable the local area to acquire resources from the upper-level authorities, who may feel compelled to give in order to avoid offending the factional Party elites, if not out of a desire to benefit from the successful promotion of the model.

The outcome of factional model-making upon the policy process varies. If the model gains momentum, the regime will be compelled to reconsider the merits of the policies adopted by the model that are marginalized by the Party line. This can result in the Party line being revised in the model’s favour, followed by a state-orchestrated campaign to diffuse the model’s policies nationwide. By contrast, if the regime intends to defend the Party line, it can punish the model and its patrons, hence forcing them to abandon the controversial policies and deterring potential emulators. If, however, the regime intends to affirm the central-level policy status quo without overtly offending the factional Party elites, it can recognize the model’s accomplishments but for reasons other than its deviant policies.

6 See Bakken 2000.

7 Pieke 2009.

*Factional model-making from the 1960s to 2012*

From the 1960s, if not earlier, until 2012, Party elites repeatedly resorted to factional model-making to advance policies marginalized by the Party line. Wang Guangmei 王光美, wife of state chairman Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇, cultivated the Taoyuan Brigade 桃园大队 in Hebei as a model of the socialist education campaign between 1963 and 1964. This served to legitimize Liu's approach to the campaign, which relied on upper-level work teams to eliminate official corruption at the grassroots level, as distinguished from Mao's preference for mobilizing poor peasants to denounce cadres harbouring bourgeois thoughts. In September 1964, Liu made use of the findings gathered by Wang from Taoyuan to justify his revision of the Second Ten Points, a document drafted under Mao a year previously and which served as the campaign's manual.<sup>8</sup> In December 1964, Mao instructed Premier Zhou Enlai 周恩来 to uphold Shanxi's Dazhai Brigade (*Dazhai dadui* 大寨大队) as a national agricultural model. Zhou described Dazhai mainly as a model of the spirit of self-reliance. However, shortly after the Cultural Revolution began in 1966, Mao's factional allies upheld the Dazhai model (*Dazhai jingyan* 大寨经验) as an alternative to the Taoyuan model (*Taoyuan jingyan* 桃园经验). They also reframed Dazhai as a model of the centralized People's Commune institutions that were initially endorsed by Mao but then abandoned in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward.<sup>9</sup>

In an attempt to reinvigorate the radicalism of the Cultural Revolution, which had been muted following the death of Lin Biao 林彪 in September 1971, Jiang Qing 江青 transformed Tianjin's Xiaojin Zhuang Brigade (*Xiaojin Zhuang dadui* 小靳庄大队) into her model of "learning from Dazhai" by waging a "revolution in the superstructure" in 1974. Three years later, the Party centre purged Xiaojin Zhuang from the policy process. Around that time, Mao's heir-apparent, Hua Guofeng 华国锋, tried to moderate the Party's rural line by promoting Hunan's Xiangxiang Brigade (*Xiangxiang dadui* 湘乡大队), which emulated mainly the spirit of Dazhai, but less of its actual policies, as the model of learning from Dazhai.<sup>10</sup>

Following the decentralization of the post-Mao period, factional model-making became more pluralistic. Factional models no longer purported to be satellite models of a national model but stood in their own right. In the early 1980s, Wan Li 万里, who was newly appointed vice-premier after serving as Anhui's Party secretary, promoted the province's Xiaogang Production Team (*Xiaogang shengchan dui* 小岗生产队) as a counter-model to Dazhai, the poster-child of collective agriculture. The farmers of Xiaogang implemented the

8 MacFarquhar 1997, 399–430.

9 Cheung 2018, 45–79.

10 Ibid., 79–88.

household responsibility system (HRS), which decollectivized agricultural production in all but name.<sup>11</sup>

Factional model-making from the 1980s to 1990s disputed the scope and legitimacy of the post-Mao economic reform. Deng's aide, Zhao Ziyang 赵紫阳, openly backed the Wenzhou model (*Wenzhou moshi* 温州模式) of private business as an alternative to collective township and village enterprises (TVEs). The latter was favoured by the Party centre and was symbolized by the “Sunan model” (*Sunan moshi* 苏南模式), an expression famously coined by sociologist Fei Xiaotong 费孝通 in 1983.<sup>12</sup> Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦, then CCP general secretary, backed the Shekou model (*Shekou moshi* 蛇口模式) to demonstrate that economic reforms must be supported by political reforms that genuinely liberalize the political process, including robust protection of free speech and the most competitive intra-party elections the Party has seen to date. These ideas were rejected by the Shenzhen model (*Shenzhen moshi* 深圳模式) cultivated by Deng. Unlike Shekou, Shenzhen embodied Deng's technocratic vision of economic reform and equated political reform with administrative streamlining.<sup>13</sup>

In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square crackdown in June 1989, the Party centre was determined to prevent the bourgeois thoughts of the cities from infiltrating the countryside. It was in this context that some Party elites created “red model villages,” which had re-collectivized on the basis of abolishing the HRS over the course of the post-Mao reforms. Among the most well-known of these villages were Henan's Nanjie and Liuzhuang 刘庄村, Jiangsu's Huaxi 华西村 and Tianjin's Daqiuzhuang 大邱庄村.<sup>14</sup> In the early 2000s, with Hu Jintao's 胡锦涛 tacit approval, Zhang Xuezhong 张学忠 (Sichuan's Party secretary) and Li Yuanchao 李源潮 (Jiangsu's Party secretary) backed the local cadres in their provinces to cultivate, respectively, Buyun township 步云乡 and Suqian prefecture 宿迁市 as models of intra-party democracy. Intra-party elections in these local areas were significantly more competitive than those held elsewhere in China and generated considerable political controversy.<sup>15</sup>

The most prominent examples of factional model-making in the run-up to the 18th Party Congress in November 2012 included Wang Yang's 汪洋 Guangdong model (*Guangdong moshi* 广东模式) and Bo Xilai's 薄熙来 Chongqing model (*Chongqing moshi* 重庆模式), which were developed in a dialogic relationship with each other between 2008 and 2012. The Guangdong model advocated structural reforms to scale back the state and instead advance society as a service provider and government watchdog. By contrast, the Chongqing model expanded the reach of the party-state in society to increase economic redistribution and strengthen the CCP's clientelist relationship with the masses.<sup>16</sup>

11 Ibid., 89–129.

12 Parris 1993.

13 Cheung 2018, 171–204.

14 Hou 2013; Lam 1995, 66–70.

15 Cai 2011.

16 Cheung 2018, 205–249.

The major examples of factional model-making surveyed above indicate that there were two informal norms regulating the process. The first is that no policies prohibited (instead of marginalized) by the Party line are the subjects of factional model-making. Some may consider the making of the Xiaogang model (*Xiaogang moshi* 小岗模式) to be a violation of this norm because the HRS was commonly thought to have been prohibited by the Party line when Wan Li upheld Xiaogang as a model.<sup>17</sup> However, in reality, the Party centre actually permitted “isolated households deep in the mountains or in remote and sparsely populated regions” to implement the HRS in April 1979, months before Wan began cultivating the Xiaogang model. This unprecedented decision altered the status of the HRS from being a taboo policy to being marginalized by the Party line.<sup>18</sup>

The second norm bars Party elites from using factional model-making to bid for a post in the Party leadership or to seize power in other ways. During the Cultural Revolution, when political purges were violent and frequent, Jiang Qing made no secret of her desire to exploit the Xiaojinhuang model (*Xiaojinhuang dianxing* 小靳庄典型) to bring down “the revisionists in authority.”<sup>19</sup> Several decades later, Bo Xilai exploited the Chongqing model to cultivate a cult of personality around himself ahead of the 18th Party Congress, where a once-in-a-decade leadership transition was due to take place. He was eventually expelled from the Party shortly before the Congress on 28 September 2012, allegedly for reasons unrelated to the Chongqing model. However, *Guangming ribao* 光明日报, a Party newspaper under the auspices of the CCP Central Committee, linked his downfall to the model, accusing him of creating a “political model” or a “model of the Cultural Revolution” in order to “personalize politics” to his advantage.<sup>20</sup> Aside from Jiang and Bo, Party elites have been careful to operate within the boundaries of the second norm. These include those on the left of the Party who supported the Nanjie model (*Nanjie moshi* 南街模式).

The observance of these norms by most Party elites engaging in factional model-making ensured that the practice did not, in most cases, threaten the authority of the Party’s leadership. This partially explains the regime’s long-standing toleration of the practice. To complete the explanation, we must also consider the fundamental changes in top-level power dynamics in the 1960s, where Mao’s absolute dominance was replaced by a balance of power among the main factions. As has been well studied elsewhere, the shift from hegemonic to factional politics was consolidated under Deng and institutionalized in the post-Deng period.<sup>21</sup> In the five decades from Mao through to Hu, the top

17 See, e.g., Zhou 1996, 53–69.

18 See Sun and Teiwes 2016.

19 See Cheung 2018, 79–82.

20 “Bo Xilai xiachang zai zheng wenge moshi shi yitiao silu” (The ending of Bo Xilai reconfirms that the cultural revolution model is a dead-end road). *Ifeng.com*, 29 September 2012, [http://news.ifeng.com/history/shixueyuan/detail\\_2012\\_09/29/18004760\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/history/shixueyuan/detail_2012_09/29/18004760_0.shtml). Accessed 20 May 2017.

21 See Huang 2002, 350–410.



Party leaders could not dispense with factions. It was such that although factional model-making was a nuisance, they could at most regulate, but not eradicate, the practice.

*Factional model-making as a means of power signalling to the regime*

Although factional model-making is embedded in the policy process, it is not only or even mainly a tool of policymaking. It is mainly a means for factional Party elites to signal their power to the regime. This is the most crucial distinction between factional model-making and what others have described as “local policy experimentation.” In addition, factional model-making is top-down and disputes the goals of central policies, while local policy experimentation is a bottom-up process and focuses almost exclusively on finding the most effective means for policy implementation.<sup>22</sup> By flouting the Party line openly without punishment, factional Party elites demonstrate that they can influence the Party line rather than be controlled by it. Hence, unlike for local policy experimentation, whether state policies will be revised following the local model is only of secondary importance to factional model-making; what is of primary concern is for Party elites to signal their power to the regime. Since the political and social costs for renegeing on steps taken in public are considerably higher than those for renegeing on moves made in private,<sup>23</sup> the public nature of factional model-making confers more credibility to Party elites’ claims to power compared to those made in private.

The structural opacity of authoritarian regimes creates political pressures for Party elites to signal their power in public. Andreas Schedler and Bert Hoffmann explain this well: systematic information suppression in autocracies is such that “subjects cannot observe many things the dictator does not want them to observe – but neither can they observe many things the dictator *needs* them to observe ... More than anything else, this concerns the dictator’s power.”<sup>24</sup> They argue that this information dilemma is a real problem for the dictator because it can invite “rash inferences” being made about the dictator’s grip on power, which may result in political challenges. It should be stressed that such an information dilemma exists not only in the relationship between the dictator and subjects but also among regime insiders. In the case of China, it is mainly the information dilemma among Party elites that motivates them to signal their power to the regime in public. The lack of political institutionalization in China is such that obtaining leadership positions in the CCP does not automatically guarantee power; only “opportunities” for the position holders to “work” to establish their legitimacy so as to gain “real power.”<sup>25</sup> What this also means is

22 Heilmann 2009; Teets and Hurst 2017.

23 See Shih 2008.

24 Schedler and Hoffmann 2015, 93–94.

25 Guo 2019, 30, 36.



that the power of Party elites depends more on their relations with other Party elites than the formal political office they hold.<sup>26</sup> The desire to overcome political insecurities pressurizes Party elites into signalling their power in public: by “delivering [sic.] observable evidence of power,” they reveal their ordinarily hidden power foundation, and thus deter potential political challenges by creating reasons for their rivals to believe that they truly are in power.<sup>27</sup>

The Hai Rui 海瑞 affair in 1965, which presaged the Cultural Revolution, demonstrates the centrality of power signalling in power struggles. Peng Zhen 彭真, Beijing’s Party secretary and the second most senior leader in the Central Committee secretariat, blocked the publication of the article, “Criticism against ‘Hai Rui Dismissed from Office,’” despite significant pressure from Mao and his allies not to do so. Peng’s refusal to publish the article transmitted robust signals of his personal power, the power of his patron Liu Shaoqi, and the institutional power of the Central Committee to the regime – in order to fend off the power challenge by Mao, who sponsored the article as part of his intricate power ploy to purge Liu and the Party establishment.<sup>28</sup> Factional models are reminiscent of the “Criticism” article in that they, too, are platforms for Party elites to assert their authority openly – hence, making highly visible yet oblique claims to power – thus preserving the façade of elite cohesion. The Taoyuan model discussed above, which occurred before the Hai Rui affair, was a prime example of this signalling logic. Liu Shaoqi used Taoyuan as a platform to communicate the message that he was in charge. This indirect challenge to Mao’s authority was certainly understood by regime insiders, including Mao.<sup>29</sup> As detailed in the case study below, the Party’s left backed the Nanjie model in order to signal their and their patron’s power to the regime publicly.

## Case Study: The Making of Nanjie into a Factional Model

### *The rise of Nanjie from the policy margins in the early 1990s*

The HRS, which instituted a two-tier system of rural land rights, has defined the rural Party line since the centre approved the Xiaogang model in September 1980. The village, as represented by the village committee, maintains collective land ownership and leases out land management rights to individual farmer households on a long-term basis. The HRS was popular among farmers and contributed to bumper harvests across the countryside in its early years of implementation. However, since the mid-to-late 1980s, the weaknesses of the HRS, especially the lack of economy of scale in production, became an issue of national concern.<sup>30</sup>

26 Huang 2002, 41.

27 Schedler and Hoffmann 2015, 94.

28 MacFarquhar 1997, 439–460; Huang 2002, 268–280.

29 MacFarquhar 1997, 399–430.

30 See Chen, An 2014, 30–57.

A decree to replace the HRS with the re-collectivization of rural land management rights nationwide was drafted under Premier Li Peng 李鹏 by late 1990. Its release was obstructed by the CCP general secretary, Jiang Zemin 江泽民, and the vice-premier, Tian Jiyun 田纪云, who were concerned that it could trigger rural unrest since the farmers were overwhelmingly in favour of the HRS.<sup>31</sup> Against this background, Qiao Shi 乔石, then secretary of the CCP Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and a PBSC member, cultivated Nanjie village as a model for re-collectivization.

In 1982, Nanjie followed the-then newly revised Party line to implement the HRS. In the same spirit, the village's only two factories were contracted out to individual operators from elsewhere. Decollectivization failed in Nanjie even in its initial years of implementation. Most of the village residents let their farmland lay fallow as they migrated to cities for employment, leading to a sharp decline in agricultural output.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, the outside contractors repeatedly defaulted on the payment of wages to workers. The local Party branch led by Wang Hongbin 王宏斌 sought to re-collectivize as the situation continued to deteriorate.<sup>33</sup> In 1984, the two factories were confiscated from the contractors and returned to collective management. The campaign to “Learn from Lei Feng 雷锋, study Mao's works, and sing revolutionary songs” was launched to reinvigorate the collective spirit in the same year. This served to justify the subsequent abolition of the HRS beginning in March 1986, when Nanjie's residents were pressurized into returning their land rights to the collective in exchange for food supplies.<sup>34</sup>

Qiao Shi raised the village out of obscurity by visiting it on 25 August 1990. While there, he publicly endorsed re-collectivization, hailing it for “disciplining the masses with Mao Zedong Thought” in particular.<sup>35</sup> The timing of his visit to Nanjie suggested that it served to lend credence to Li Peng's decree, which was pending release at that time, and thus signalled his loyalty to the powerful Li, which was in the interest of his political security. Qiao had at least one major on-the-record disagreement with Li, which could be used against him. At a PBSC meeting in May 1989, Qiao supported Zhao Ziyang's proposal for pacifying the Tiananmen Square protestors, which was opposed by Li. Although Qiao later switched sides to join Li in calling for martial law to be imposed (against Zhao's will), his earlier support for Zhao, who Li played a major role in ousting in June 1989, could have been a political liability. When Qiao visited Nanjie, it was less than two months after he had presided over a Party rectification campaign. His support for this orthodox socialist village served to distance himself further from Zhao, who was repudiated for having failed to “resist bourgeois thinking,” and thus affirm his loyalty to Li.<sup>36</sup>

31 Lam 1995, 69–70.

32 One *mu* equals 0.067 hectares.

33 *Nanjie cun zhi* 2010, 249.

34 *Ibid.*, 178, 257, 329.

35 Feng and Su 2013, 41.

36 For the meeting in May 1989, see Zhao, Ziyang 2009, 38, 47–49. For the rectification campaign, see Lam 1995, 155; MacFarquhar 1997, 466–68.

Shortly after Qiao Shi praised Nanjie, Wang Hongbin stepped up pressure against those Nanjie residents who had refused to transfer their land management rights to the village collective. In addition to mobilizing the majority of compliant residents to castigate them, Wang threatened to confiscate their land management rights forcibly and expel them from the village. These coercive tactics succeeded: by October 1990, the collective had regained control over the entirety of the village's land, most of which was converted to industrial usage.<sup>37</sup>

On 17 September 1990, about a fortnight after Qiao's visit, Wang said at an internal meeting:

It is not difficult for Nanjie to obtain loans now. Several days ago, deputy Party secretary Guo Quanzhong 郭全忠 and manager Huang were in Beijing, where they made a loan agreement with the Central Bank ... The provincial and municipal water resources departments want to start an irrigation sprinkler project in Nanjie. The funds needed are supplied by the state. The funds [provided] are several million yuan each.<sup>38</sup>

Nanjie's total agricultural and industrial production value exceeded 100 million yuan in 1991, making it the first "red billionaire village" in Henan and probably in the whole country.<sup>39</sup> It could be argued that the engineered rise of Nanjie paid off for Qiao, who remained on the PBSC until retiring peacefully in 1997. However, it did not help towards the release of Li's decree. Owing to rumours of re-collectivization causing anxiety among farmers, the Party centre decided firmly in 1991 to continue the HRS for the long term. In an attempt to address the weaknesses of the HRS, it also required villages to manage rural communal facilities collectively. Although this fell short of the re-collectivization of land management rights, it nonetheless brought the rural Party line a little closer towards Nanjie by bolstering centralized village governance.<sup>40</sup> After this decision was made, Song Ping 宋平, a former PBSC member (1989–1992) and director of the CCP Organizational Department (1987–1989), visited Nanjie to express his support of re-collectivization on 20 September 1995. Similar to Qiao, he commended Nanjie for being a "spiritual treasure and a good Party school" that "puts ideology in command," "politics in the priority" and "cultivates a correct worldview."<sup>41</sup> Song's high-profile visit sent a strong message that the conservative faction – whose power was seriously undermined by Deng's southern tour in 1992, which led to the acceleration of the market reforms despite its opposition – had not been defeated and would not hesitate to fight back if necessary.<sup>42</sup>

37 *Nanjieciun zhi* 2010, 2; Feng and Su 2013, 42.

38 "Nanjie zhenxiang" (The truth of Nanjie). *Nanfang dushi bao*, 26 February 2008.

39 *Nanjieciun zhi* 2010, 2.

40 Lam 1995, 69–70.

41 He 2006.

42 See Baum 1994, 341–368, especially 344–48.

*Military generals: Nanjie's patrons in the mid-to-late 1990s*

General Zhang Aiping 张爱萍, a former defence minister (1982–1988), was the first military leader to back Nanjie. On 11 July 1994, at his request, *Renmin ribao* 人民日报, the Party centre's mouthpiece, published his plea to Chinese Central Television (CCTV) to broadcast a documentary on Nanjie produced by Henan Television, a request which CCTV declined.<sup>43</sup> He visited Nanjie on 10 September 1994, at the age of 84. There, he lauded the village for persevering in socialism and described re-collectivization as the sole path towards “common prosperity” (*gongtong fuyu* 共同富裕).<sup>44</sup> The periodical *Zhongliu* 中流 reprinted an excerpt of his speech with the note: “Although the international Communist movement has descended into a valley, it is not a dead end. The future of communism is prosperous.”<sup>45</sup>

Likewise, General Yang Dezhong 杨德中, director of the Central Security Bureau (1978–1994), claimed that he backed Nanjie also out of his loyalty to socialism. On 23 May 1994, the 71-year-old Yang arranged for Wang Hongbin to present the Nanjie model to a hundred or so central cadres in Zhongnanhai 中南海. In a video broadcast on loop in Nanjie's theatre, Wang recounts Yang's instructions for him:

You should be resolute in your belief that Nanjie village is on the correct path. It must persevere in what it has been doing and achieve success. What makes people think that we should not talk about communism? What made us, the older generation, risk our lives in battles? We did not fight for money, but for the grand goal of communism. It is mistaken to believe that we should not talk about communism. We have talked too little about communism in recent years.<sup>46</sup>

Whether Zhang and Yang were true socialists did not really matter. Like Qiao Shi, they were using their support for Nanjie to signal to the regime that the conservative faction, although marginalized by Deng, was still strong enough to sway the Party line. Wang was quick to embrace the agenda of the generals. He launched the “building a small community of communism” campaign from March 1994 to May 1995 to criticize the market reform, which defined the post-Mao Party line, as a “savage attack on collective ownership” that “has bred capitalism, individualism and moneyism, and resulted in class oppression.” Wang claimed that owing to the market reform, “the Party's leadership role has been undermined; socialism has lost direction; the dictatorship of the proletariat no longer has a target; Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought has to be re-discussed.” Echoing the remarks of Zhang and Yang, Wang added that “as long as the communist party has not been renamed the ‘free party’ or ‘private party,’ it should be resolute in promoting communism. If not, how can we qualify as a communist party?”<sup>47</sup>

43 Zhang, Aiping 1994.

44 *Nanjieciun zhi* 2010, 19.

45 See Zhang, Sheng 2012, 570.

46 Transcribed by author in Nanjie on 26 June 2015.

47 Zhao, Guoliang, and Cui 1998, 216; “Lixiang zhiguang” (The glow of ideals). *Nanjieciun.cn*, 1995, [http://www.nanjieciun.cn/web\\_old/book/lixiangzhiguang1.asp](http://www.nanjieciun.cn/web_old/book/lixiangzhiguang1.asp). Accessed 4 April 2019.

Nanjie hosted streams of central-level military personnel from 1994 to the early 2000s. Whereas Zhang and Yang used Nanjie to assert the power of the conservative faction, the military personnel seized the model to signal the military's loyalty to the Party. This was the case especially in the early to mid-1990s, when the military was under intense pressure to demonstrate its loyalty to the Party. The Tiananmen Square protests in June 1989 and the failed Soviet coup in August 1991 reinforced the Party's long-standing belief that it must always maintain absolute control over the military. This was why, in the aftermath of the protests, the Party instituted a thoroughgoing ideological indoctrination programme to cow the military into submission. Supporting Nanjie, a model synonymous with strong Party leadership and orthodox socialist ideology, enabled the military to demonstrate that it had no other vested interests. Obviously, the irony could not be missed: upholding a model championing re-collectivization, a policy discouraged by the Party line, could be interpreted as evidence of weak political discipline. Although this did not seem to bother Zhang and Yang whose political stature emboldened them to use Nanjie to criticize the Party's dwindling socialist commitment pointedly, it was most certainly a concern for their subordinates. This explained why the 220 plus military personnel who visited Nanjie only ever praised re-collectivization in generic terms, often along the lines that it "illuminates the future of the countryside."<sup>48</sup>

### *Maoists adopt Nanjie in the late 1990s*

In the late 1990s, the factional coalition around the Nanjie model expanded to encompass the descendants and former aides of Mao and other Party elites who were Mao loyalists. The Maoists justified their support for re-collectivization simply on account that Mao was a great leader and collectivization was his idea. On 27 May 1998, Major General Mao Xinyu 毛新宇, Mao Zedong's only grandson, joined with famous writer Wei Wei 魏巍 to launch the "China gave rise to Mao Zedong" (*Zhongguo chule ge Mao Zedong* 中国出了个毛泽东) book series in Nanjie.<sup>49</sup> Maoists have returned to the village at various points in time since. One of their most publicized visits took place on 16 May 2011. To celebrate the 90th anniversary of the CCP's establishment in July that year, Mao Xiaoqing 毛小青, Mao Zedong's niece, led a delegation of over 40 members of the China Red Culture Association (*Zhongguo hongse wenhua lianhehui* 中国红色文化联合会), an organization she founded with the mission of promoting red culture, to participate in Nanjie's gala performance. The politically astute Wang Hongbin awarded the status of "lifetime honorary resident of Nanjie" to a dozen of the retired military officers and former personal assistants of Mao Zedong who visited the village with Mao Xiaoqing.<sup>50</sup>

48 See *Nanjiēcun zhi* 2010, 19–49.

49 *Ibid.*, 21.

50 Lei, Duan and Li 2011.

The Maoists were considered by Chinese citizens to be public figures even though most of them lacked any formal status in the political system in the post-Mao period. Nanjie provided them with an accessible platform to cultivate their desired image as a special class of political celebrities, thus signalling to the regime that they were legitimate stakeholders in the political process. Their endorsement of Nanjie attracted Mao enthusiasts at the grassroots to visit the village. These grassroots followers usually came in tours organized by groups such as the China Association for the Development of Old Bases (*Zhongguo laoqu jianshe cujinhui* 中国老区建设促进会), Mao Zedong Thought associations and pro-Mao websites such as “Mao Zedong flag” (*Mao Zedong qizhi wang* 毛泽东旗帜网) and “Utopia” (*Wuyou zhi xiang* 乌有之乡).<sup>51</sup>

### *Counteractions against Nanjie in 2008*

A major reason why Nanjie was not challenged by any counter-models was because the privatization of rural land management rights – being the direct opposite of the re-collectivization of rural land management rights – was, and is, prohibited by the Party line. Zhang Guangyou 张广友 and Du Runsheng 杜润生, veteran Party elites who assisted Wan Li in promoting Xiaogang back in the early 1980s, voiced occasional public support for rural land privatization in the 2000s. However, neither attempted to create a privatization model of any village.<sup>52</sup> Xiaogang, the birthplace of the HRS, came closest to being Nanjie’s counter-model. But it was not. Wan, Zhang and Du all distanced themselves from Xiaogang by the early 1990s, when it became infamous for its poverty.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the lack of a counter-model, Nanjie was met with some damaging counteractions in 2008. *Nanfang dushi bao* 南方都市报, a nationally popular Guangzhou newspaper, published an article purporting to debunk the myth of the Nanjie model on 26 February 2008. It presented a paper trail revealing that the local leadership had secretly distributed among themselves the net worth of the village’s collective holdings in 2004. In other words, Nanjie’s supposedly collectively owned factories were in fact private. The article explicitly questioned if the Nanjie model still had a place in China when Deng’s reform and opening up policy had already been in place for three decades.<sup>54</sup> Bombarded by queries from the press, Wang insisted that the collective assets were distributed “on paper” only to fulfil new business registration requirements.<sup>55</sup> This explanation failed to convince the pundits. While the Maoists continued to back Nanjie,<sup>56</sup> it has become a subject of mockery in the PRC public discourse.<sup>57</sup>

51 See, e.g., Ma 2010.

52 For Zhang, see Anderlini 2008; for Du, see Su 2011.

53 Chen, Guidi, and Chun 2009, 243–49.

54 *Nanfang dushi bao*, 26 February.

55 Wang, Yanming 2009.

56 See, e.g., Lei, Duan and Li 2011.

57 See, e.g., Tong 2008.

*Princelings side with Nanjie in 2009*

In the months following the publication of the *Nanfang dushi bao* article, two exclusive associations made up of Party princelings organized trips to Nanjie: the CCP Central Committee's Yu Ying School Alumni Association (*Zhongzhi yuying tongxue hui* 中直育英同学会) and the Beijing Friendship Association of the Sons and Daughters of Yan'an (*Beijing Yan'an ernu lianyi hui* 北京延安儿女联谊会). The list of visitors included Chen Weihua 陈伟华, daughter of Chen Yun 陈云, one of the Party's "eight elders"; Dong Liangcui 董良翠, whose father was former PRC vice-chairman, Dong Biwu 董必武; Yu Dajiang 虞大江, son-in-law of former vice-premier Tan Zhenlin 谭震林; Sun Xiaolin 孙小林, daughter of long-time propaganda leader Lin Mohan 林默涵; Zheng Jingsheng 郑京生, son of Zheng Tianxiang 郑天翔, former president of the Supreme People's Court; and Guo Shuying 郭庶英, daughter of Guo Morou 郭沫若, founding president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Added to this list were Party elites from the families of senior military leaders, including Chen Kunyu 陈焜玉, son-in-law of Fu Qiutao 傅秋涛, Su Tiesan 苏铁山, son of Su Jin 苏进, Yang Xiaoping 杨小平, son of Yang Yong 杨勇 and Zhu Erjin 朱尔谨, son-in-law of Ren Bishi 任弼时.<sup>58</sup>

These princelings praised Wang Hongbin for defending Nanjie from the "unfounded scandals" in the news article.<sup>59</sup> Their support for Nanjie served to evince that their commitment to the Party was not out of a desire for self-enrichment, but rather was ingrained in their self-professed identity as legitimate heirs of the communist revolution. At an annual gathering of the princelings in 2012, they agreed that they should actively protect the Party from being brought into disrepute. They would do this by distinguishing themselves – the descendants of the Party's founding generation or, as they put it, the "red second generation" (*hongerdai* 红二代) – from the "rich second generation" (*fuerdai* 富二代), the derisory term given to the adult descendants of incumbent ranking Party leaders who live a lavish lifestyle incongruent with the Party's commitment to frugality. When asked to comment on the meeting, princeling Chen Xiaolu 陈小鲁, son of former foreign minister Chen Yi 陈毅, said: "most belonging to the red second generation have neither power nor wealth ... we resent the arrogance of the rich second generation ... we cannot let them ruin the Party."<sup>60</sup> The princelings were siding with Nanjie in an attempt to signal the extent of their power to the regime, which should not be assumed since their role in China's political process has never been formalized. This was at a time of widespread public resentment against the princelings, as a class, for leveraging their political connections for commercial gains.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the power of ranking Party leaders who were princelings was checked by other factions, especially Hu Jintao's

58 Lei and Li 2009; Lei 2009.

59 Ibid.

60 See, e.g., Du and Lin 2013.

61 See Guo 2019, 237–38.



Chinese Communist Youth League faction, which was dominant at the time the princelings rallied around Nanjie.<sup>62</sup>

*Nanjie becomes a de facto Party model in 2012*

The promotion of the Nanjie model by factional Party elites gradually ceased after Xi Jinping rose to power in late 2012. Henan eagerly transformed Nanjie into a model of Xi's Party line. It designated Nanjie as a provincial "training base" for Party education and poverty alleviation, two of Xi's policy priorities, in March and December 2016, respectively.<sup>63</sup> Mao's descendants are the only Party elites who continue to make high-profile visits to the village. However, rather than upholding Nanjie's re-collectivization agenda, they now praise the village for being "on track to accomplish the China Dream and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation under the guidance of Mao Zedong Thought and Xi Jinping Thought," as reiterated by Mao Xinyu on a visit to the village on 1 October 2018. The nod to Xi's thought suggests that he was reframing Nanjie as a model conforming to the Party line.<sup>64</sup>

In fact, well before the local leadership and Maoists began recasting Nanjie as a Party rather than factional model, the Party centre had already been doing so, as reflected in the content of the 79 articles on Nanjie in *Renmin ribao* from 25 August 1990, the date when Qiao Shi visited the village, to 31 January 2021,

Table 1: Themes of *Renmin ribao* Articles on Nanjie, 25/08/1990–31/01/2021

Themes	Number of articles (N = 79)	Per cent (%)
Nanjie has developed successful factories	23	29.11
Nanjie has an excellent drama school	10	12.66
Wang Hongbin is a competent cadre	11	13.92
Nanjie has a strong Party committee	9	11.39
Nanjie has attained a moderately well-off ( <i>xiaokang</i> 小康) level of development	8	10.13
Nanjie has made progress in material and spiritual civilizations simultaneously	8	10.13
Nanjie's residents are of high quality	3	3.80
The Agricultural Bank of China funded Nanjie's factories	2	2.53
Nanjie cherishes the military	2	2.53
Nanjie is a site for red tourism	2	2.53
Nanjie has invested in environmental protection	1	1.27

Source:

Author's analysis of the online searchable database of *Renmin ribao*.

62 See *ibid.*, 207–80.

63 See Lei 2016; Li, Lanying 2016.

64 "Mao zhuxi di sun Mao Xinyu di san ci lai wo cun" (Chairman Mao's grandson Mao Xinyu visited our village for the third time). *Nanjiecn.cn*, 5 October 2018, [http://www.nanjiecn.cn/news\\_detail.asp?id=495](http://www.nanjiecn.cn/news_detail.asp?id=495). Accessed 25 August 2020.

the last date of analysis. No article makes any mention of the abolition of the HRS or re-collectivization. Rather, as listed in Table 1, *Renmin ribao* credits Nanjie mainly for its successful factories, excellent drama school and competent leadership, none of which are described in a way evoking its leftist agenda.

## Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that despite its Leninist ethos, the CCP was not a closed party sharing one vision or speaking with one voice. The open political contention of Party elites was embedded in the policy process. Whereas the Party centre employs model-making to encourage conformity to the Party line, factional Party elites co-opted the practice in order to signal their power to the regime. The lack of institutionalization of China's political process is such that no Party elites can be certain of the power they and their rivals actually hold. Hence, they must regularly deliver credible appearances of power to confirm their desired political status and deter potential challenges. Factional model-making provided an ideal platform for Party elites to signal their power to the regime openly. It served to enhance the credibility of their claims to power in a norm-bound manner that did not threaten regime security. It was not until Xi took power that decades of factional model-making ceased operation.

Within the first six months of taking office in late 2012, Xi issued an injunction against “questioning the reform and opening up and the socialist nature of Chinese socialism.”<sup>65</sup> Since these subjects define the Party line, the ban protects the Party line from contention. This alone is tantamount to a de facto prohibition of factional model-making, not to mention Xi's hostility towards any signs of factionalism or, in his words, “engaging in cliques and cabals” (*gao tuantuan huohuo* 搞团团伙伙).<sup>66</sup> In fact, Deng's famous “no debate” principle, which censures challenges to the legitimacy of the reform and opening up, could be seen as a de facto ban on factional model-making, too.<sup>67</sup> However, throughout the post-Mao period and until the Xi era, growing norms of collective Party leadership were such that factionalism could only be regulated but not eliminated.<sup>68</sup> As the survey of factional model-making from the 1960s to 2012 and the identity of Nanjie's early patrons reveal, incumbent Party leaders not only tolerated but even participated in factional model-making to openly signal their power to the regime. Xi's firm belief that the whole Party must act in unison in order to accomplish the “China dream” of national rejuvenation leaves no room for political disagreement.<sup>69</sup>

65 “Document 9: a ChinaFile translation.” *ChinaFile*, 8 November 2013, <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>. Accessed 24 August 2020.

66 “Xi Jinping zai shiba jie zhongyang jiwei wu ci quanwei shang fabiao zhongyao jianghua” (Xi Jinping delivered an important speech at the fifth plenum of the 18th central commission for discipline inspection). *Xinhua*, 14 January 2015, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2015/0114/c64094-26380006.html>. Accessed 5 September 2020.

67 For a discussion of the “no debate” principle, see Chen, Feng 1999.

68 See Li, Cheng 2012; 2016; Miller 2008; Wang, Zhengxu, and Vangeli 2016.

69 See “Xi Jinping: guanche luoshi hao xin shidai dang de zuzhi luxian” (Xi Jinping: thoroughly implement

Compared to Deng's de facto ban on factional model-making, Xi's crackdown is credible because it is enforceable in practice. Xi sent shockwaves across the Party by prosecuting and convicting Zhou Yongkang 周永康, a former PBSC member, notwithstanding the hitherto unbroken Party norms of immunity from prosecution for PBSC members, current or retired.<sup>70</sup> There is no doubt that the institutional and personal powers Xi has amassed are second only to those acquired by Mao in his prime.<sup>71</sup> Xi has repeatedly demanded that every Party member, especially Party elites, demonstrate absolute loyalty to the Party centre, with him as the "core." In 2015, a new clause was added to the CCP Discipline Punishment Ordinance to make "disparaging the politics and principles of the Party centre" (*wangyi dang zhongyang dazheng fangzhen* 妄议党中央大政方针) an offence. Xi has also leveraged the Party's disciplinary institutions to monitor Party members' compliance with strict "political discipline" (*zhengzhi jilu* 政治纪律) and "political protocols" (*zhengzhi guiju* 政治规矩).<sup>72</sup> Unsurprisingly, there are no factional models in Xi's China and the country's most celebrated model today is Jingjinji 京津冀 (Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei), a city-cluster that the regime hails as a testament to Xi Jinping Thought.<sup>73</sup>

Xi's suppression of factional model-making might eventually backfire on the regime. The recurrence of the practice prior to Xi suggested that Party elites believed that they had a right to carry out the practice as long as they did so within the norms. Decades of largely norm-bound factional model-making showed that the practice had its place in regulating elite conflicts and keeping the Party line in check. It performed the function of a safety valve by providing a regulated and low-risk outlet through which Party elites could express political disagreement, thus preventing the culmination of political tension in regime-threatening dissent. Xi's eradication of the practice has strengthened Party discipline at the expense of alienating many Party elites. If the political climate loosens sufficiently in the future, be it owing to Xi's mishandling of a crisis or other reasons, it is plausible that his rivals, especially those who disagree with the way he implements his visions for the Party and the country, might seize the opportunity to retaliate by sharply revising the Party line, leading to the type of destabilizing political disruption that the norms of factional model-making were designed to prevent.

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*footnote continued*

the Party's new organizational line for the new era). *Xinhua*, 31 July 2020, <http://jhsjk.people.cn/article/31805844>. Accessed 2 September 2020.

70 See Lam 2015, 101–03.

71 See *ibid.*; Li, Cheng 2016.

72 Li, Ling 2019.

73 "China's regional development strategies set example for world." *Xinhua*, 6 October 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/06/c\\_138451908.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/06/c_138451908.htm). Accessed 24 August 2020.

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## Conflicts of interest

None.

## Biographical note

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**摘要:** 论文介绍“派系模式制造”理论框架, 描述及解释中国共产党菁英在政策过程中的公开政治争端。党的菁英利用“派系模式制造”向政权表达对政策分歧的看法, 并藉此宣示权势: 他们公开蔑视党的路线而免受处分, 从而突显他们能影响党的路线, 迫使政权确认他们在党的不透明的权力架构中的地位。本文探讨从 1960 年代到 2012 年间的“派系模式制造”的历史, 详述党的左派菁英把河南的南街村塑成再集体化模式的过程。整个过程始于 1990 年代, 于习近平在 2012 年上任后不久结束。他上任后, 党的左派菁英把南街村重塑成党的模式, 吹捧习近平路线。论文的结论, 讨论的是“派系模式制造”被习近平遏制的现象。

**关键词:** 派系; 毛泽东; 军队; 太子党; 左派; 红色亿元村

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