

1 Cultural Governance in Contemporary China: “Re-Orienting” Party Propaganda

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In explaining the surprising staying power of the Chinese communist regime, analysts point to a number of critical factors: the party-state’s ability to recruit, monitor, and hold accountable government officials; to grow and guide the economy via flexible policy levers; to invest in valued public goods; to enlist the active support of entrepreneurs and other key social groups; and to keep the lid on popular protest through a clever combination of coercion, censorship, cooptation, and conciliation.¹ There is, however, a more elusive, yet no less critical, element of regime endurance: the facility of the party-state to justify its rule in terms that resonate both at home and abroad. For this task, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) leans heavily upon *cultural governance*, or the deployment of symbolic resources as an instrument of political authority. It does so, moreover, in a manner that underscores the distinctively “Chinese” character of the political system. A state whose ideology and institutions were imported almost wholesale from the Soviet Union is represented in party propaganda as part and parcel of a glorious “Chinese tradition.” Over the years, the CCP has “re-Oriented” its message so as to come across as culturally congruent with its principal target audience. The process bespeaks a dynamic and diversified propaganda operation that is as attentive to popular emotions as to party ideology.

Cultural Governance

Cultural governance figures in the legitimation and perpetuation of any enduring state system.² When practiced by critics of the system (whether from inside or outside the state apparatus), cultural governance may serve

¹ Tsai, *Accountability without Democracy*; Tsai, *Capitalism without Democracy*; Naughton and Yang, eds., *Holding China Together*; Heilmann and Perry, eds., *Mao’s Invisible Hand*; Chen, *Social Protest*.

² Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses*; Shapiro, *Methods and Nations*.

to question – or even to resist – state power.³ Controlling and channeling symbolic political expression so that it strengthens rather than challenges regime legitimacy is a concern for all states, but perhaps especially so for those which lack robust and respected electoral and legal institutions capable of conferring procedural legitimacy on state leaders.⁴ In the absence of firmly established democratic institutions, leaders may find historical and cultural assertions of particular value in staking a claim to legitimacy.

China's rulers today are explicit in the high value they place on cultural governance. They are almost equally explicit in their instrumental use of cultural governance for nationalistic ends. In an address to the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, retiring CCP General-Secretary Hu Jintao declared that "culture is the life blood of the nation." He emphasized that "the strength and international competitiveness of Chinese culture is an important indicator of China's power and prosperity and the revival of the Chinese nation." Hu called for promoting "traditional" Chinese culture and made multiple references to the "great revival of the Chinese nation" (中华民族伟大复兴), a phrase repeated by incoming CCP General-Secretary Xi Jinping in his own remarks to the Party Congress. Standing in front of a monumental painting of the Great Wall, Xi proudly referenced China's 5,000-year-old civilization, proclaiming that "the great revival of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream of the Chinese nation in modern history."⁵ Immediately after the Congress, to hammer home his "China Dream" Xi led the Politburo Standing Committee on a well-publicized visit to the National Museum to view an exhibition entitled *The Road to Revival* which featured the heroic role of the Communist Party in spearheading nationalist struggles. Opening with China's humiliation in the Opium Wars, the exhibit sounded a triumphal note with its declaration that "today the Chinese nation towers majestically in the Orient; the brilliant prospect of the great revival is already unfolding before us. The dream and quest of China's sons and daughters can definitely be realized!"⁶ The CCP was re-Orienting its propaganda to showcase the glories of the ancient civilization that it claims to be representing and reviving.

That this line of cultural-cum-nationalist propaganda enjoys considerable currency in the contemporary PRC had been demonstrated two years earlier when the CCP celebrated its 90th anniversary with a blockbuster movie entitled *Beginning of the Great Revival*. Featuring a star-studded cast of Chinese and Overseas Chinese actors, the film

³ Callahan, *Cultural Governance and Resistance*. ⁴ Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*.

⁵ "New Party Leadership"; "Xi Jinping Pledges." ⁶ fuxing.chnmuseum.cn/intro.php.

conflated the birth of the Communist Party with the great revival of the Chinese nation and portrayed the young Mao Zedong as a central figure in that national renaissance. While some of its popularity can be ascribed to the large number of complimentary tickets issued by government agencies, *Beginning of the Great Revival* was reportedly the top-selling Chinese movie in the PRC in 2011, outranking even *Harry Potter* and *Spiderman* in ticket sales.⁷

Cultural Nationalism

The current prominence of cultural nationalism in PRC governance is often interpreted as a recent development, traceable to the suppression of the Tiananmen Uprising of 1989 and subsequent Patriotic Education Campaign. Faced with the discrediting of Marxism-Leninism in the post-Cold War era, so the argument goes, the Chinese state cast about for a new framework of legitimation, settling upon a formula intended to derive strength from popular pride in the glories of Chinese civilization (as well as the gains of the communist revolution).⁸ The state-sponsored Patriotic Education Campaign, launched with much fanfare in the 1990s, sought to inoculate the younger generation against the temptations of “bourgeois liberalism” by a dual focus on the cultural splendors of the Chinese past and the heroic sacrifices of the CCP in rebuilding the Chinese nation.⁹

There is definite merit in this argument, as long as it does not obscure the importance of cultural governance with nationalist objectives as an instrument of mobilization and rule (played in different keys and at different decibel levels) throughout the ninety-plus-year history of Chinese communism. As Mao proclaimed during the war with Japan:

Our national history goes back several thousand years and has its own characteristics and innumerable treasures . . . We should sum up our history from Confucius to Sun Yat-sen and take over this valuable legacy . . . [W]e can put Marxism into practice only when it is integrated with the specific characteristics of our country and acquires a definite national form . . . Foreign stereotypes must be abolished, there must be less singing of empty, abstract tunes, and dogmatism must be laid to rest; they must be replaced by the fresh, lively Chinese style and spirit which the common people of China love.¹⁰

The contemporary emphasis on cultural nationalism, rather than a sharp break with an earlier reliance on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong

⁷ “Historic Rankings.” ⁸ Guo, *Cultural Nationalism*, 1–2.

⁹ Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction*, 219.

¹⁰ Mao, “The Role of the Chinese Communist Party,” 155–156.

thought as the ideological foundation of Chinese communism, marks yet another turn in a tortuous legitimization project that has frequently (if fitfully) drawn upon a wide range of resonant symbols from the Chinese past – elite and folk culture alike – to buttress the standing of the CCP. Today’s Patriotic Education Campaign is a recent expression of an impulse with deep roots in the experience of the Chinese Communist Party.¹¹

Mao Zedong drew the connection between the victory of his revolution and the revival of the Chinese nation ten days before the official founding of the PRC, when he declared dramatically that China had at last “stood up” to reclaim its historical birthright:

the Chinese people, comprising one quarter of humanity, have now stood up. The Chinese have always been a great, courageous and industrious nation; it is only in modern times that they have fallen behind . . . From now on our nation will . . . work courageously and industriously to foster its own civilization . . . Ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation. We have stood up.¹²

A focus on patriotic mobilization, intended to reclaim China’s rightful place in the world order, marked PRC governance practices from the outset. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Chinese citizens were encouraged to sign “patriotic pledges” (爱国公约) guaranteeing their commitment to the nationalist cause. That period also saw the beginning of a series of impressive “Patriotic Health Campaigns” which framed mass public health and sanitation programs as “patriotic” actions to restore the Chinese nation to good health in order to combat American imperialism.¹³ In the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, Chinese nationalism was reframed in opposition to Soviet revisionism. Mao Zedong was now revered as a leader who had not only rescued the Chinese nation from the threat of Western imperialism and Japanese militarism; he was also touted as the global guru of revolutionary ideology. Henceforth, political correctness would be decided not in Moscow but in Beijing.

In the early post-Mao era, when “reform and opening” encouraged criticism of Mao Zedong and his radical policies, CCP leaders debated how to deal with the Maoist legacy.¹⁴ Deng Xiaoping’s decision to stem the rising tide of de-Maoification by affirming commitment to “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” was critical in facilitating a formidable

¹¹ Perry, *Anyuan*. ¹² Mao, “The Chinese People Have Stood Up!”

¹³ Rawnsley, “The Great Movement,” 303ff. The anti-SARS campaign of 2003 was also presented as a “patriotic health campaign,” but without the anti-Americanism of earlier days.

¹⁴ Baum, *Burying Mao*.

blend of “traditional” and “revolutionary” sources of symbolic authority to serve a nationalist end. Although the practice of cultural nationalism gained further attention and momentum after the suppression of the 1989 Tiananmen Uprising, it was already a pillar of CCP propaganda prior to June Fourth.

Internal circulation publications of the Central Propaganda Department (CPD) show that the project of re-Orienting its message to make the communist system appear more “Chinese” is not a post-June Fourth development. In 1983–1984, for example, the CPD issued a series of directives that called for strengthening both “patriotic education” in Chinese history and “education in the revolutionary tradition.”¹⁵ On April 19, 1989, only a few days after the Tiananmen protests had begun and almost two months before the suppression of June Fourth, the CPD communicated a new policy on the hanging of portraits in Tiananmen Square that revealed central leaders’ commitment to the indigenization of their revolutionary tradition. Whereas past practice had called for the portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin to be hung alongside Mao’s portrait on the two major national holidays of May 1 and October 1, the new policy mandated that henceforth no foreign luminaries would be displayed on these occasions. On May 1 (International Labor Day), Mao’s portrait would hang in solitary splendor atop the Gate of Heavenly Peace. On October 1 (National Day), Mao would be joined by Sun Yat-sen. The CPD circular explained that most countries display portraits of their national heroes on national holidays and that it was therefore appropriate that Sun Yat-sen, as forefather of China’s modern revolution, should hang alongside Chairman Mao, who had led the Communist Party and the Chinese people in a revolution that overthrew the “three big mountains” (imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism) to establish the People’s Republic of China.¹⁶

The project of indigenizing the regime’s claim to legitimacy was thus well underway prior to June Fourth, but the official verdict on the Tiananmen Uprising reinforced the trend. In the immediate aftermath of the crackdown, party leaders charged that the student protest had been a product of the neglect of propaganda and “thought work” on the part of the now disgraced former General-Secretary of the CCP, Zhao Ziyang. Zhao’s lax attitude, it was alleged, had allowed proponents of wholesale Westernization to debase China’s traditional culture and revolutionary tradition, thereby permitting “Western bourgeois” notions of democracy,

¹⁵ CPD, ed., “Utilize Revolutionary Relics,” 73.

¹⁶ CPD, ed., “Conditions for Hanging Portraits,” 1867.

freedom, and human rights to gain hold among the young.¹⁷ To rid the nation of such pernicious ideas, the CPD (assisted by the iron fist of public security) spearheaded a massive censorship sweep in which thirty-eight publishing houses were closed down, more than 700 periodicals were discontinued, and some 32 million books and magazines were confiscated.¹⁸

Censorship has been an essential tool of party control over the ideological arena, but of greater significance in the long run would be a proactive effort to re-Orient the terms of public discourse. Quoting Chairman Mao's warning that "if the East wind does not prevail over the West wind, then the West wind will prevail over the East wind," the new General-Secretary of the CCP, Jiang Zemin, called for an acceleration of ideological work intended to showcase China's "dazzling material and spiritual civilization."¹⁹ In response, a central party directive of July 1989 enjoined propaganda departments and social science academies across the country to undertake systematic research into Chinese history, culture, society, and economy to serve as the foundation for a propaganda initiative that would demonstrate the Chinese people's "creativity, fighting capacity, and commitment to national unification."²⁰

The concern for cultural governance has grown steadily in recent years. Although the budget of the CPD is not publicly accessible, figures for government spending on "cultural undertakings" (文化事业) give a rough idea of the general trend. In the years immediately following the Tiananmen Uprising, these expenditures increased by over 200 million yuan per year (from RMB 1,357,000,000 in 1989 to RMB 1,946,000,000 in 1992). With the launching of the Patriotic Education Campaign, spending on cultural initiatives took another major leap (from RMB 2,237,000,000 in 1993 to RMB 3,425,000,000 in 1994). It has continued to climb ever since. In 2010, the official figure stood at RMB 52,952,000,000 – a fifty fold increase in twenty years.²¹

Internal bulletins from the CPD, intended for the use of cadres in the cultural, propaganda, and education fields, stress that the CCP is to be depicted as the chief custodian of Chinese civilization, credited with perpetuating an uninterrupted party tradition of protecting ancient cultural relics as national treasures. Even under the duress of war, it is

¹⁷ Jiang Zemin, "Talk at the National Conference," 916–918; CPD, ed., "Utilize Revolutionary Relics," 72–74.

¹⁸ Wang Renzhi, "Stick to Correct Policy," 964.

¹⁹ Jiang Zemin, "Talk at the National Conference," 915.

²⁰ Party Central Notice, 938–949.

²¹ *Statistical Yearbook of Cultural Initiatives*; Editorial Committee of the Chinese Financial Yearbook, ed., *Chinese Financial Yearbook*.

alleged, the party ordered the military to go to great lengths to safeguard China's cultural heritage. In order to preserve priceless artifacts such as those contained in the Forbidden City, for example, the CCP supposedly took every possible measure to ensure the peaceful liberation of the city of Beijing. In the forty years thereafter, the importance of cultural preservation was reflected in the establishment of a special government agency and the promulgation of numerous national laws, policies, and directives for this purpose.²²

The CPD emphasizes that schools, family, and society all bear responsibility for instructing the younger generation in the protection and promotion of cultural relics, which is considered beneficial for cultivating allegiance to one's hometown as well as fostering patriotism.²³ National holidays, anniversaries of important historical events (including those causing national humiliation), and major athletic competitions are singled out as excellent opportunities for disseminating propaganda capable of stirring strongly patriotic feelings. The collective participation and mass enthusiasm exhibited on such occasions, it is explained, permits a deep and abiding educational impact.²⁴ These bulletins make no mention of the destructive episodes in CCP history when party leaders actively encouraged vicious attacks on elements of Chinese tradition: the Red Terror of the 1920s, the Destroy the Four Olds of the 1960s, and the Criticize Lin Biao Criticize Confucius Campaign of the 1970s, for example.²⁵ Rather, the re-Orientation of the CPD calls for the recognition, protection, and preservation of revolutionary and pre-revolutionary relics alike, as though they are all an integral part of a unitary and uninterrupted glorious "Chinese tradition."²⁶

As part of the post-Tiananmen Patriotic Education Campaign, propaganda departments at all levels of the system are encouraged to identify familiar local sites to serve as "educational bases" where instruction in the history of China and the indispensable role of the CCP in unifying and modernizing the nation can be effectively conducted.²⁷ Such education, it is stressed, should encourage young people to nurture fervent feelings for the motherland.²⁸ "Patriotism," the CPD explains, "is the powerful emotion . . . of deeply loving the motherland . . . The children of China, having been raised in the bosom of the motherland, should harbor

²² CPD, ed., "Notice of CPD, Ministry of Culture, and National Relics Bureau concerning Publication of 'Everyone Loves and Protects the Relics of the Motherland,'" 1875.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1876. ²⁴ Wang Renzhi, "Stick to Correct Policy," 964–965.

²⁵ Some CCP leaders did, however, make an effort to protect certain cultural treasures from Red Guard rampages in the Cultural Revolution. See Ho, "To Protect and Preserve."

²⁶ CPD, ed., "Important Points from the Conference," 1949–1951.

²⁷ CPD, ed., *Raise High the Banner*, 152. ²⁸ Party Central Notice, 938–949.

profound sentiments toward the motherland akin to what they feel toward their own mother.”²⁹ The key to instilling these feelings is said to be a proper appreciation of China’s unique “national character” (国情).³⁰

Reeducating Chinese youth so as to prevent another student uprising was a top priority in the aftermath of June Fourth, but party leaders also recognized a pressing need to counteract the hostility of the international community. At a July 1989 meeting of provincial propaganda directors from around the country, Premier Li Peng blamed reporting by American and Hong Kong journalists for having fanned the flames of insurgency prior to the imposition of martial law. Li went on to reveal that he had recently floated with Chinese diplomats posted overseas his own suggestion that the CPD produce a video sympathetic to the June Fourth crackdown and pay for it to be broadcast on television networks around the world. Having been rebuffed on grounds that his scheme would be unacceptable to the foreign media, Li Peng remarked sarcastically that although the Western media claimed to have a free press, it was obviously highly restricted and rigid! He bemoaned China’s having failed to seize the propaganda initiative while the Tiananmen protests were still underway, and concluded that the PRC must redouble its international propaganda efforts in future.³¹

The dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991 further convinced the Chinese leaders of the need for an international propaganda initiative that would distinguish its own “national character” from that of its erstwhile communist “Big Brother.” The CPD called for drawing a sharp contrast between China’s political stability and the existential crisis unfolding in the former USSR.³² Post mortems on the Soviet collapse highlighted the issue of cultural governance, noting the significance of ethnic and cultural identity in sustaining or subverting a communist system.³³ As one analyst put it,

The survival of the Soviet Union as a sovereign state was due to the eleven minorities who allied in support of the socialist system and Marxist ideology. It was precisely this cultural identity that constituted the national interest of the Soviet Union. As soon as this cultural identity was no longer recognized, the national unity of the USSR disintegrated. From this we can see that cultural identity [文化认同] is the precondition for national interest.³⁴

²⁹ CPD, ed., *Raise High the Banner*, 217. ³⁰ Party Central Notice, 945.

³¹ Li Peng, “Talk at the National Conference,” 926.

³² Wang Renzhi, “Stick to Correct Policy,” 966.

³³ See, for example, the internal circulation video on lessons from the Soviet collapse produced for party cadres by the Central Discipline Commission in 2006, *Thinking of Danger*.

³⁴ Tao Xiuaio, “The Advent of an Era,” 13.

Overseas Chinese, especially those residing in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau, are a major focus of international propaganda efforts aimed at solidifying national identity and interest. The selection of sites for patriotic education that would appeal to this critical constituency is particularly encouraged. For example, in 1994–1995, Shaoxing’s Propaganda Department was praised for having identified and publicized (with the assistance of academic expertise) more than twenty sites in the city that could be associated with Yu the Great, a legendary ruler who is respected along with Yao and Shun as one of the three major sages of ancient China and to whom prayers were traditionally offered for purposes of flood prevention. Noting that Overseas Chinese continue to pay homage to Yu, the Zhejiang government approved a recommendation by the Shaoxing Propaganda Department to promote the public worship of Yu the Great by refurbishing his tomb so that tourists and pilgrims could congregate there for collective observances. In connection with the city’s initiative, dubbed the “Number One Construction Project for Worshipping Yu,” donations were sought from both domestic and overseas organizations and individuals. The Shaoxing native-place association of Hong Kong explained its sizable donation to the project by noting that public worship of Yu “promotes our Chinese national spirit, perpetuates our excellent historical and cultural traditions . . . and strengthens national cohesion.” To publicize the initiative, the Shaoxing Propaganda Department convened several international academic conferences and sponsored the publication of a series of scholarly monographs on the subject of Yu the Great. It also fed favorable reports about the project to domestic and international newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. At a ceremony to mark the first public commemoration of Yu at his refurbished tomb on April 20, 1995, more than a thousand representatives of the PRC’s people’s political consultative conference, central ministries, and provincial and city governments were joined by delegates from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and even a number of Western countries.³⁵

As the Shaoxing case suggests, propaganda departments often enlist professional academic talent in the effort to uncover and exploit appropriate cultural resources. This is not a new practice; establishment intellectuals have long played a critical role in promoting the party-state’s agenda.³⁶ Grants from the Ministry of Education and other government agencies are frequently tied to projects that reflect propaganda priorities. Academies of social sciences at all levels and departments of social

³⁵ CPD, ed., *Raise High the Banner*, 119–122.

³⁶ Hamrin and Cheek, eds., *China’s Establishment Intellectuals*.

sciences and humanities in the major universities depend heavily upon such funding and routinely reshape research programs to align with the party's changing priorities as announced by the CPD.³⁷ Today, for example, researchers across the country are scrambling to put some flesh on the barebones of Xi Jinping's call for a "China Dream."³⁸ But this work is not left entirely to academics. Cadres are also supposed to devote serious attention to investigation and study. According to an internal directive of the CPD, propaganda cadres are expected as a rule of thumb to spend 90 percent of their workday engaged in research and only 10 percent in formulating propaganda materials and policy recommendations.³⁹ The CPD by no means sees its primary mission as an academic one, however. It is much more concerned about the emotional and political than the cerebral or scholarly impact of its efforts.

Emotion Work

The importance of gauging and guiding public emotions, both domestic and international, is emphasized repeatedly in CPD teaching materials developed for party cadre schools at all levels of the system. The overriding goal is to make people *feel* sympathetic to the party's agenda. Central to this goal is a concern for "public sentiment" (輿情) – an umbrella concept that refers to the cumulative emotional and cognitive impact on ordinary people (Chinese and foreigners alike) of party and government actions. In contrast to the more familiar phrase "public opinion" (輿論), the term "public sentiment" highlights the emotional – as opposed to rational – underpinnings of public discourse. It is the responsibility of party cadres to assess and interpret public sentiment so that policies can be fine-tuned in response.⁴⁰

Under the principle that "internal and external are different" (内外有别), the CPD recommends discrimination in choosing appropriate symbols to appeal to different audiences. When the target audience is international rather than domestic, Chairman Mao and the revolutionary origins of the PRC usually go unmentioned in favor of concentrating on the splendors of the "Chinese cultural tradition." Within this "tradition," moreover, international propaganda may be further differentiated according to the

³⁷ Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship*; Sleeboom-Faulkner, *The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*, 19–22.

³⁸ Propaganda chief Liu Yunshan also ordered that the concept of the Chinese dream be written into school textbooks so that it "enters students' brains." "Chasing the Chinese Dream."

³⁹ Wang Renzhi, "Stick to Correct Policy," 978.

⁴⁰ Fan Hongyi, ed., *The Latest in Party Propaganda Work*, 182–183.

particular country toward which it is directed. A recent cadre handbook notes that propaganda aimed at the United States should emphasize the contributions of individual heroes in Chinese history because Americans admire individuals; propaganda targeting Japan should emphasize China's beautiful natural scenery and colorful folk customs because these appeal to Japanese sensibilities; propaganda directed at Europe should highlight China's love of the environment and its inherent pacifism in order to satisfy the Green and anti-war sympathies of Europeans, and so on.⁴¹

CPD directives often begin with a familiar quote from Chairman Mao: "Without investigation, no one has a right to speak." The main purpose of investigation, today as in the past, is to understand the attitudes and outlook of the intended audience so as to formulate effective tactics and strategies to advance Communist Party priorities. The CPD still points to Mao's 1927 *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, which extolled revolutionary violence in the Chinese countryside, as setting the standard for gauging public emotions in accordance with "mass line" principles. Cadres are urged to approach their work as an art form as well as a science; propaganda should appeal as strongly to ordinary people's aesthetic and emotional awareness as to their reason. At the same time, propaganda work must be continuously upgraded and updated to suit the ever-evolving inclinations of a wide variety of contemporary audiences.⁴²

As the reference to Mao's *Hunan Report* indicates, serious attention to mass emotions is nothing new for the Chinese Communist Party. From its revolutionary days, the CCP systematized "emotion work" as part of a conscious strategy of psychological engineering. After 1949, patterns of emotion work developed during the wartime years lived on in a series of highly charged mass campaigns that stretched from Land Reform and the Suppression of Counter-Revolutionaries through the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.⁴³

Mao Zedong himself was keenly attuned to the importance of emotions in mass mobilization, and devoted significant attention in his writings to a discussion of the role of human feelings in revolutionary transformation.⁴⁴ But Mao was not alone among the Chinese communist revolutionaries in this recognition. As early as the Anyuan workers' club of 1922–1925, CCP propaganda cadres made a conscious and concerted effort to enlist mass emotions to serve the revolutionary cause. Cultural activities such as drama and cinema were seen as especially effective

⁴¹ Ibid., 163–164. ⁴² *Pragmatics of Propaganda Work*, 59–67.

⁴³ Perry, "Moving the Masses," 111–128; Perry, "From Mass Campaigns to Managed Campaigns," 30–61.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Mao, "Talks at the Yen'an Forum."

mobilizing vehicles because of their ability to tug at people's heartstrings.⁴⁵ The process of cultural governance with an eye toward its emotional effect was further systematized after the establishment of the Jiangxi Soviet in the early 1930s. A CCP propagandist recalled of the make-shift theatrical performances staged in Ruijin to generate support for the Red Army: "When the audience watched the comic scenes they laughed loudly; when they watched tragic scenes they lowered their heads and wept or angrily denounced the landlords. Thus we knew that the drama had deeply stirred the audience, achieving propaganda results. How happy we were then!"⁴⁶ Once moved by such cultural performances, peasant recruits were encouraged to articulate their own accusations against their former oppressors. As a propaganda worker in the northeast noted, "We felt that speaking bitterness was extremely effective in stimulating class hatreds and heightening feelings of vengeance . . . The purpose of war became clear, and the emotions of the troops were raised."⁴⁷

The origins of the Chinese communist revolutionaries' unusual aptitude for emotion work are obscure, but presumably traceable to a number of sources. China's rich history of peasant rebellion, which Mao Zedong so admired, offered ample evidence of the ingenious use of local opera, folk religion, and other elements of popular culture for purposes of mass mobilization.⁴⁸ The Bolshevik practice of "agitprop," communicated by Soviet advisors, was certainly another important inspiration. But both of these sources were also available to the Guomindang (GMD), or Chinese Nationalist Party, which despite its own persistent efforts at mass mobilization fell far short of the accomplishments of the CCP. The difference between the two revolutionary parties in this respect may have stemmed from the contrasting social backgrounds of their leaders. Whereas most of the early GMD leaders hailed from the coastal cities of China, their CCP counterparts had generally grown up in villages located deep in the interior of the country.⁴⁹ The Chinese communists' greater familiarity with rural customs probably afforded an advantage in deploying cultural symbols with an earthy flair that resonated emotionally with their target audience. Ultimately, however, much of the credit for the CCP's comparative success surely lies with the temperament and talent of individual leaders such as Mao Zedong, Peng Pai, and Li Lisan, who brought to the task of revolutionary mobilization an exceptional level of both empathy and creativity.

⁴⁵ Perry, *Anyuan*, chs. 2–3.

⁴⁶ Pan Zhenwu, "Remembering the Propaganda Team," 146.

⁴⁷ Mo Wenhua, "Political Work," 194.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*.

⁴⁹ North, *Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Elites*.

Modernization and Improvisation

The tradition of revolutionary “emotion work,” modernized to take advantage of advances in communications technology, lives on in post-Mao China. A telling example was the suppression campaign that party leaders launched against Falun Gong in the summer of 1999. Television and radio broadcasts flooded the air waves with highly charged testimonials by bereaved relatives of Falun Gong victims who railed against the “evil cult” that had led their loved ones astray. Although television and radio had supplanted the community theater as the favored venue for carefully orchestrated emotional performances, the CPD’s methods bore more than a passing resemblance to previous mass campaign tactics.⁵⁰

Less than a decade after the anti-Falun Gong campaign, the CPD embarked on another technological upgrade, this time graduating from radio and television to internet and cell phone as more effective means of reaching a population that relies increasingly on these new modes of communication. Impressive as such modernization efforts are, they constitute but the latest chapter in a long history of governance practices designed to resonate emotionally with their target audience so as to win popular acceptance for the party’s political agenda.

To note such continuities is certainly not to suggest that nothing has changed in recent years. In sharp contrast to Mao’s day, when propaganda was intended to move the masses to revolutionary action, today the point is to dampen any sparks of protest in order to stabilize party rule. Yet the importance of engineering popular emotions in service to party concerns remains a central focus, and “emotion work” creatively combines cutting-edge technology with older mobilization practices. In a recent CPD teaching manual, for example, Hebei Province is commended for establishing an effective “public sentiment office” (輿情办) in response to the infamous tainted milk scandal that beset that province in 2008. With an estimated 300,000 victims of adulterated milk, including six infants who died of kidney failure, the incident triggered impassioned protests by distraught parents seeking redress. The public sentiment office, led by ten cadres from the Hebei Propaganda Department, initially focused on internet communications as a guide to popular feelings. It analyzed tens of thousands of web postings by Hebei netizens, on the basis of which the office issued instructions to internet control agencies (网管部门) on how to manage digital portals, chat rooms, and bulletin boards so as to defuse public outrage. The sentiment office also proactively manufactured internet discussions in order to seize control of the

⁵⁰ Perry, “Reinventing the Wheel?”

public discourse. Once the office had dealt with the internet threat, it undertook a more familiar form of investigation and mobilization. A ten-person survey research team, assisted by seventy investigators, visited every town and neighborhood in Shijiazhuang (where the milk powder scandal had originated) over a one-month period in order to gauge the feelings of various social groups in the affected area. The public sentiment office provided daily updates in a special bulletin for cadres entitled *Daily Trends in Public Sentiment*, and compiled executive summaries with proposals for new government policies – e.g. low-interest loans to dairy farmers for the purchase of high-quality fertilizer – based on the survey findings. This coordinated effort was credited with forestalling mass protest in response to the deadly breach of food safety.⁵¹

Governance under the PRC bespeaks an inventiveness born of decades of experimentation. In a co-edited volume with Sebastian Heilmann, *Mao's Invisible Hand*, we propose that the revolutionary past of the CCP continues to exert a significant influence on contemporary policies. The achievements of the post-Mao economic reforms, we suggest, are due not only to Adam Smith's invisible hand of market forces, but also to Mao's invisible hand of "guerrilla policy-making": a pragmatic, trial and error method of handling crisis and uncertainty that characterized the communist wartime base areas. Thanks to its unusual revolutionary origins, the Chinese communist political system allows for more diverse and flexible input and response than would be predicted from its formal political structures, which remain for the most part standard Leninist institutions.⁵²

The CCP operates according to classic Soviet principles of so-called "democratic centralism," and exercises control over the bureaucracy through standard Soviet Nomenklatura procedures (with the Organization Department assigning party and government officials to their posts). Anyone familiar with the political institutions of the former USSR or the communist countries of Eastern Europe would have little difficulty grasping an organization chart of the PRC.⁵³ But despite this institutional similarity, the operations of the Chinese system are distinctive in ways that reflect China's unusual revolutionary history and that have bequeathed a surprisingly adaptive and responsive policy approach. In reaction to massive tax riots that erupted across the Chinese countryside in the 1990s, for instance, the government in 2005 took the

⁵¹ *Propaganda, Thought and Cultural Work*, 279–289.

⁵² Heilmann and Perry, "Embracing Uncertainty," 1–29.

⁵³ To be sure, there are some differences: the top policy-making group of the CCP, the Standing Committee of the Politburo, was not part of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's institutional make-up, for instance.

extraordinary step of abolishing the centuries-old agricultural tax. In response to widespread internet complaints about abusive treatment of migrant workers at the hands of the police, China substantially revised its repressive vagrancy laws. Such instances by no means imply that the political system is democratic, but they do suggest that there is more policy responsiveness and flexibility than one would expect on the basis of China's communist institutions per se.⁵⁴

China's propaganda czar Liu Yunshan, one of the Standing Committee members of the Politburo elected at the 18th Party Congress, gave an instructive account of this adaptive policy style in a speech entitled "Being Good at Summing up Experience is Our Party's Excellent Tradition." Liu opened his speech with a quote from Mao: "We depend for a living on summing up experience." He proceeded to explain that "propaganda, thought and cultural work" today, as in the revolutionary past, must operate as a pragmatic response to crisis and uncertainty. Liu cited the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, the unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang, and the international financial crisis as examples of recent battles during the course of which the CPD learned to adapt to new challenges with the aid of new tools – cellular technology, the internet, and new social media in particular.⁵⁵

Liu Yunshan's speech was reprinted as the preface to a series of case studies published as teaching materials at the National Academy for Propaganda Cadres in Beijing. The case studies, based on recent incidents, were chosen to illustrate "breakthroughs" (突破) in propaganda work – some due to planned experiments and others to improvisations "in the midst of battle." According to Liu, the period in the run up to the Beijing Olympics saw a major shift in propaganda work, from a reactive toward a more proactive approach, as cadres turned to the aggressive use of new communications technology to gain the upper hand in dealing with potentially unsettling issues. In Guangdong, for example, in 2009 the provincial Propaganda Department partnered with the local branch of China Mobile, the largest cell phone and internet provider in the province, to develop an attractive and interactive webpage complete with video games and animated cartoons intended to convey in easily digestible form the official line on a range of sensitive international and domestic questions. Within a few months, the website was being visited regularly by more than half a million netizens.⁵⁶ Another case singled out for praise and emulation was the Jincheng Coal Group in Shanxi Province. An old

⁵⁴ Perry, "The Illiberal Challenge of Authoritarian China," 3–15.

⁵⁵ Liu Yunshan, "To be Good at Summing up Experience," 1–7.

⁵⁶ *Propaganda, Thought and Cultural Work*, 47–53.

state-owned enterprise burdened by a large number of disgruntled employees when it embarked on privatization, Jincheng's Propaganda Department contracted with IT specialists at Shanghai's Jiaotong University to construct a multi-tiered digital network aimed at assessing the mentality (思想动态) of all 60,000 members of its workforce. Workers were encouraged to share their concerns and complaints through emails and blogs. As the Jincheng Party Secretary instructed his propaganda cadres, "In this network, information about employees' thoughts are 'letters' that circulate freely. You are the postmen responsible for handling the mail." The more than 10,000 messages received from Jincheng workers provided a treasure trove of information that the enterprise leadership credited with permitting a smooth privatization process, free from the vociferous demonstrations and sit-ins that plagued the privatization of many other state-owned enterprises.⁵⁷

In the above cases, protests may have been averted thanks to the preemptive use of high-tech communications, but in other instances propaganda methods are honed in the actual process of managing protests. On June 1, 2007, thousands of residents of the city of Xiamen took to the streets for what they euphemistically called a "stroll" (散步) to register opposition to the construction of a PX chemical factory in the area. To determine the level of dissatisfaction, Xiamen authorities conducted an online poll that revealed widespread and deep discontent. As a result, provincial officials agreed to relocate the plant to a desolate piece of land in Zhangzhou municipality, a safe distance from Xiamen. When journalists and bloggers encouraged Zhangzhou residents to emulate the Xiamen "strollers," the municipal Propaganda Department engaged experts from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Xiamen University to attest to the appropriateness of the new site in internet postings and other media. The Propaganda Department also came up with a catchy and widely publicized slogan intended to foster collective pride in Zhangzhou's acceptance of the chemical plant: "Maritime development begins with Zhangzhou; Loving Zhangzhou begins with us!" The propaganda cadres realized the need to dispense with their usual practice of responding to protest by censoring the media, in favor of an alternative approach that actively enlisted the participation of the media (state and private alike) in a propaganda blitz intended to "guide public sentiment" along lines congruent with state policy. Hundreds of radio and television broadcasts publicized the remarks of leading officials and academic authorities in support of the factory relocation; newspapers and other periodicals were instructed to print favorable stories; prime-time

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 57–61.

news reports were preempted to announce new developments and work plans for the PX project; countless cellular and computer messages transmitted a stern public security warning against illegal mass disturbances. The city of Zhangzhou employed a group of over 120 distinguished “experts” drawn from propaganda, media, and academia to serve as internet monitors and commentators (网络阅评员) to respond to netizen complaints with blogs and microblogs that defended the government’s position. More than 500 college student volunteers were also dispatched to surrounding villages to educate rural dwellers in the official line through “heart-to-heart” chats with individual families. On the basis of these household visits, influential villagers were selected to participate in state-sponsored visits to Nanjing and other cities where PX factories were already operating without incident so that they could spread the good word to skeptical neighbors. In short, a range of mobilizing techniques – some drawn from decades-old mass campaigns and others from recent technological advances – were deployed in service to the cause.⁵⁸ As the Zhangzhou case indicates, PRC governance is not simply a matter of the state imposing its will on an otherwise inert and uninvolved society. Both in Mao’s day and today, society itself (in the person of journalists, professors, students, villagers, and others) plays a critical role in constructing and communicating state policy.

Another contentious incident that the CPD credited with generating new approaches to collective protest was the notorious Weng’an riot, which erupted in Guizhou Province in June of 2008 after a middle-school girl drowned under suspicious circumstances that her family believed involved police culpability. Crowds broke through public security cordons and set fire to government buildings and police vehicles. Although the rampage was triggered by the girl’s death, it reflected deep-seated anger toward the Weng’an authorities, who for some years had employed heavy-handed tactics to forcibly relocate residents to make way for lucrative development projects. News of the riot went viral on Chinese social media, and by the time the Guizhou authorities intervened the situation was dire. The Guizhou Propaganda Department reported the circumstances to the State Council News Office (新闻办), which gave permission to censor both public and commercial press and internet to eliminate stories deemed harmful to the restoration of order. But provincial authorities soon realized that, with the information having already been so widely disseminated, censorship alone would prove inadequate. Rather than simply silence the discussion, therefore, they decided actively to “shape public sentiment” by commissioning and publishing

⁵⁸ Ibid., 126–135.

information intended to mobilize citizen support for the provincial response to the crisis (which included three contrite public apologies by the provincial governor to the people of Weng'an for the poor performance of their local county authorities). For a time, one third of *Guizhou Daily*, the official newspaper for the province, was dedicated to government-sponsored reporting on the Weng'an incident. The provincial Propaganda Department also recruited dozens of "internet critics" to compose and post hundreds of upbeat essays intended to change the tone of electronic discussions. Having carefully prepared the ground, the provincial Propaganda Department proceeded to invite reporters from all the major national print and digital media outlets to visit Weng'an to conduct prearranged interviews with the victim's parents, relatives, eye-witnesses, and local residents. Within the space of two weeks, nearly 150 reporters from more than thirty media outlets had traveled to Weng'an at the invitation of the provincial Propaganda Department to hear its side of the story, which blamed the incident entirely on the county government.⁵⁹

Symbolic Resources

Propaganda departments at all levels make liberal use of both revolutionary and pre-revolutionary material to project a persuasive message. The particular issues and instruments vary from one incident to another, but underpinning these diverse efforts is a consistent aim to foster a powerful collective identity that will contribute to the legitimacy and stability of the communist party-state. Prior to the precipitous demise of Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai, the CPD gave high marks to his "singing Red" campaign to revive the Maoist revolutionary spirit, citing surveys which indicated that 97.25 percent of the city's residents had participated in the campaign with 96.51 percent of the participants reporting a high degree of satisfaction with the initiative. Improbably, the CPD credited the campaign with having restored popular faith in Marxism among the younger generation of Chongqing, noting that by the end of 2010 nearly 80 percent of those surveyed responded that they believed in Marxism, an increase of more than 10 percent over the previous year.⁶⁰ An examination of the lyrics of the thirty-six approved "red songs" featured in the campaign reveals, however, that the songs make little if any mention of Marxism. Instead, the dominant themes are patriotism, national unification, and the splendors of Chinese tradition. The top song on the list, entitled *Toward Revival* (走向复兴), includes the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 150–157. ⁶⁰ Ibid., 237–245.

lyrics “We are the heroic sons and daughters of China, whose ancient civilization sparkles anew. To revive the Chinese nation is our ideal . . . China towers majestically in the Orient; march onward, onward toward revival.”⁶¹ The symbolic correspondence with Xi Jinping’s “China Dream” is clear.

A continuing commitment to honoring the legacy of Mao Zedong’s revolution as an integral part of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” has not diminished the party-state’s interest in claiming much older foundations of legitimacy. In response to a “national learning craze” (国学热) focused on the Confucian classics, which swept the country at the turn of the twenty-first century, the symbol of Confucius was deemed especially useful as a vehicle for cultural governance, both externally and internally.⁶² In 2004, a government-sponsored program for a global network of Confucius institutes was launched in Beijing. Eight years later, more than 350 Confucius institutes and 500 Confucius classrooms had been established in over 100 countries around the world.⁶³

Evidently encouraged by this trend, the CPD took the unusual step in January 2011 of installing without prior announcement a large bronze statue of Confucius in the center of Tiananmen Square, directly in front of the National Museum (formerly the Museum of Revolutionary History) and just beside Mao’s mausoleum. The move generated an online outcry from disapproving netizens, however, who drew attention to the jarring impropriety of situating the ancient sage amidst all the monuments to the revolution, and the statue was removed (unannounced and overnight) three months later, just as suddenly and surreptitiously as it had been installed. As the bungled Confucius statue incident shows, efforts at cultural governance – even by as seasoned a practitioner as the CPD – may be ill-considered and unsuccessful. Another example of a failed initiative was the attempt to resuscitate that quintessential exemplar of the Maoist spirit, Lei Feng, through a series of melodramatic movies released in the spring of 2013. The films proved to be a box office disaster, much to the chagrin of responsible officials in the CPD and Ministry of Culture.⁶⁴

Party propaganda does not always strike a chord with its intended audience. Even worse, from the party’s perspective, officially approved symbols and slogans can be hijacked for alternative purposes. The state’s

⁶¹ baike.baidu.com/view/2861610.htm.

⁶² Within China, the popularization of the Confucian classics among college-age youths has been a notable trend. Tellingly, Yu Dan’s accessibly written *Notes on Reading the Analects* sold three million copies in four months in 2006–2007. Guo, *Repackaging Confucius*, 41.

⁶³ Zhou and Mo, “How 21st-Century China Sees Public Diplomacy,” 19.

⁶⁴ Levin, “Cinematic Flops.”

own rhetoric may backfire when, for example, cynics assign unauthorized meanings to Jiang Zemin's Three Represents or workers march behind portraits of Chairman Mao to protest lay-offs at state enterprises. Cultural governance, in other words, is a *variable* – the effects of which will fluctuate depending not only upon the symbols themselves, but also upon the venue, format, timing, and audience. Indeed, it is the CCP's recognition that not all of its projects resonate with the public which explains its close attention to such matters as attitudinal investigation, technological innovation, and emotional impact.

Conclusion

Current efforts to commingle revolutionary and pre-revolutionary symbolic resources, as though there were no inherent contradiction between the two, are but the latest twist in a complicated and circuitous process aimed at justifying the Communist Party's right to rule. The imaginative application of cultural appeals to augment the CCP's moral and political authority by presenting itself as the savior of the nation has played a crucial – albeit ever changing – role since the very inception of the party. Xi Jinping's allusions to a "China Dream" of a strong nation led by a protective Communist Party fits comfortably within this familiar frame of reference.

These days, the CCP makes no apology for the denunciation and devastation that it unleashed on remnants of China's so-called "feudal" culture at various junctures in its tumultuous history. In fact, it makes no mention of these sorry episodes. At the sixth plenum of the 17th Party Congress in October 2011, a central party decision on deepening cultural reform unabashedly asserted that "the 5,000 years of our national cultural development has been a major spiritual force for the Chinese nation and a major contributor to the civilization of all humanity. From the day of its founding, the Chinese Communist Party has been the faithful heir and advocate of this outstanding traditional Chinese culture."⁶⁵ The infamous Document 9, issued secretly in the spring of 2013, prohibits teaching about the party's historical mistakes (along with six other "speak-nots"), suggesting that the CCP's record of cultural destruction is unlikely to emerge as a topic of public debate in the near future.⁶⁶ Xi Jinping recently proffered a blunt warning against any such criticism: "Never allow eating the Communist Party's food and then smashing the Communist Party's cooking pots."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Quoted in Zhang Chuanjia, *Promote the Great Development*, 1.

⁶⁶ "Chinese Government Bans." ⁶⁷ Buckley and Jacobs, "Maoists in China."

As one of the most imaginative chefs of CCP cuisine, the CPD does not hold an unblemished record of success in cultural governance, yet its cumulative achievement – especially in light of the collapse of most other communist systems – is remarkable nonetheless. The endurance of the Chinese communist party-state must be attributed to many factors, including brute coercion and bald censorship. But not to be discounted in explaining the regime's persistence are the kindred feelings that many Chinese evidently harbor toward their political system. The party-state by most accounts enjoys a surprising degree of acceptability in the eyes of its own citizens.⁶⁸ As Andrew Nathan summarizes the findings of empirical research on post-Tiananmen Chinese political attitudes, "There is much evidence from both quantitative and qualitative studies to suggest that . . . the regime as a whole continues to enjoy high levels of acceptance."⁶⁹ One reason for this popular support, it would seem, has been a re-Orientation of party propaganda to present the CCP as the acknowledged leader of a national revival that lays claim not only to the legacy of modern revolution but also to much older symbols of cultural splendor and power.⁷⁰

The current brand of Chinese cultural nationalism cooked up by the CPD is not without intrinsic limitations. The prospect of reviving the "Chinese nation" is surely more appetizing to those who self-identify as Han Chinese (wherever they may reside) than, for example, to Uighurs or Tibetans living within the territorial borders of the PRC. Secessionist sympathies among the minority populations of Xinjiang and Tibet suggests that state-sponsored efforts to celebrate the "Chinese nation" are seen as unwelcome expressions of Han chauvinism by some citizens of the PRC who do not identify as Han. This is obviously worrisome to a Chinese leadership mindful that the collapse of the Soviet Union was propelled in part by the defection of non-Russian minorities. Nevertheless, the PRC's accomplishment in fostering a sense of shared cultural identity and national unity among the Han – whose "dialects" of Chinese are linguistically as diverse as the various Romance languages – is no small achievement. The fact that over 90 percent of the population of the PRC identifies as Han Chinese (and, thanks to state-supported migrations, that even Tibet and Xinjiang are now heavily populated by Han) renders this feat of considerable political significance.

Even among the Han, however, cultural nationalism can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, nationalist sentiment encourages popular support for a strong Chinese state. On the other hand, perceived signs of

⁶⁸ Holbig and Gilley, "Reclaiming Legitimacy," 395–422.

⁶⁹ Nathan, "Authoritarian Resilience," 6–17.

⁷⁰ Guo, "Political Legitimacy and China's Transition," 21–22.

weakness or incompetence on the part of Chinese government officials are liable to generate criticisms of the regime by those same nationalistic citizens. The chance of a nationalist movement turning into an anti-government protest is always a possibility.

The Communist Party over which Xi Jinping currently presides faces a host of extremely serious governance challenges. Many of these difficulties stem directly from the basically unreformed Leninist political institutions that persist in contemporary China. Shortcomings inherent in these types of institutions, after all, have been proposed as a key explanation for the collapse of communism across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.⁷¹ The Chinese leadership is well aware of the vulnerabilities of its Leninist institutions. Behind closed doors, Xi Jinping warns his fellow Communist Party leaders that unless they manage to combat corruption, the PRC will suffer the same fate as the former Soviet Union.⁷² But publicly, Xi seldom likens his regime to other communist systems. Rather, he portrays the PRC as an essentially Chinese system, fully in keeping with China's own national character. His attack on official corruption, associated in Chinese political culture with extravagant banqueting, calls for the exercise of culinary restraint with the folksy slogan: "Four Dishes and One Soup."⁷³

A public opinion poll conducted recently among residents in seven major Chinese cities suggests the degree to which China's communist system has been successfully indigenized. When asked to name their twelve favorite countries, respondents failed to include any other communist or formerly communist country. China was the overwhelming favorite, followed at a considerable distance by the United States.⁷⁴ When queried as to whether the collapse of the Soviet Union had been more helpful or harmful to China, only 12 percent considered the Soviet collapse harmful to China's interests.⁷⁵ A strong majority (nearly 70 percent) responded affirmatively to the question: "Influenced by domestic and international factors, contemporary young people have less knowledge of traditional Chinese culture. Do you have confidence in the continuation and flourishing of traditional Chinese culture?"⁷⁶

Skillful as the PRC's leadership has been in re-Orienting its propaganda to both suit and shape public sentiment, it has not managed to eliminate political dissatisfaction among the populace. These days, many Chinese citizens (Han and non-Han alike) readily voice severe criticisms of their political system – from rampant corruption to ruthless coercion.

⁷¹ Solnick, *Stealing the State*; Bunce, *Subversive Institutions*.

⁷² Buckley, "Vows of Change." ⁷³ "Four Dishes."

⁷⁴ Global Sentiment Survey Center, ed., *Survey of Chinese Public Opinion*, 27.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 326. ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

But very seldom do they complain that the system is in any way *un-Chinese*.⁷⁷ Rather than attribute such problems to the shortcomings of an unreformed Soviet system, disgruntled citizens are apt to ascribe the faults of their polity to unjust tendencies rooted deep within the soil of Chinese political culture – nepotism, bureaucratism, preference for rule by man over rule of law, feudal remnants. Those who feel aggrieved at the hands of unscrupulous officials rarely point the finger of blame at the communist system itself. Instead, like their ancestors in bygone centuries, demonstrators often kneel beneath banners emblazoned with the age-old cry of protest in imperial China: “Wronged” (冤枉)!⁷⁸ The implication is that “if the emperor only knew” of the offenses being committed by corrupt officials at the grassroots level, justice would be served. Even liberal critics of the political system, who advocate democratic reforms, depict the root of the governance problem as residing with a CCP leadership that remains “essentially” Chinese in its thought and practice.⁷⁹ Decades of inventive and intensive cultural positioning and patronage on the part of the CCP have paid off handsomely. A political system alien in its institutional and ideological origins has been made to feel indigenous. The foreign has been rendered familiar; a Russian recipe has been cooked so as to taste authentically Chinese.

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⁷⁷ Among the innumerable ironies of “Chinese” cultural governance is the fact that the country’s current territorial boundaries were established in the eighteenth century as part of the (non-Han) Manchu conquest. Perdue, *China’s March West*.

⁷⁸ See, for example, images from the Wukan protests of December 2011. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-17821844.

⁷⁹ The prominent liberal critic Xu Youyu, while praising Chinese society for supposedly embracing universal human rights after the trauma of Tiananmen, nevertheless characterizes the CCP leadership as continuing to operate in the imperial mold: “In several thousand years of Chinese history, the unchanging rule was that of one tyranny replacing another. Among ordinary people, the idea of ‘preparing the way for Heaven’ was very deeply rooted as well . . . From 1989 to 2009, the face and social psychology of Chinese society has undergone enormous change. Yet . . . the mentality of the leaders who took the political stage after ’89 did not change.” Xu Youyu, “From 1989 to 2009.”

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