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Morality as Legitimacy under Xi Jinping: The Political Functionality of Traditional Culture for the Chinese Communist Party

Aleksandra KUBAT

Abstract: Taking as an example Xi Jinping's use of the phrase "excellent traditional culture" (优秀传统文化, *youxiu chuantong wenhua*), this article looks at the construction of a centrally sanctioned narrative of traditional Chinese culture in resources produced within the Party school system. The specific focus of analysis is on how these resources theorise the functionality of traditional culture for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a political organisation, and what culture-based solutions they put forward to tackle the problems with Party theory and ideology, the state governance model, and cadre performance. It is argued that by referencing traditional culture, and, in particular, by drawing on traditional moral virtues, the CCP realigns itself with societal expectations without making concessions over the ideological foundations of the party state.

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Keywords: China, Chinese Communist Party, governance model, cadre education, Xi Jinping, traditional culture, ideology, legitimacy

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Introduction

While much attention has been given to why the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) adduces Chinese philosophical notions in state policies (Lu 2010; Callahan 2013; Delury 2008; Mahoney 2008) and why it imbues propaganda messages with cultural symbols (Brady 2012; Perry 2013; Clausen 1998), our understanding of how the CCP actually goes about transforming Chinese tradition into a politically useful resource is currently very limited. This is despite the fact that since his selection as Party leader, Xi Jinping has shown an ongoing commitment to advocating China's cultural and philosophical heritage as a meaningful resource for improving the performance of the CCP (Buckley 2014a; Brown 2015; *Xinhua* 2016a; Zhang 2015). Xi has called on examples from ancient philosophy and political practice to put forward proposals for cadre management and anti-corruption measures (Angle and Zhang 2013; Anderlini 2017; Schuman 2015). Following his instructions, the CCP has drawn on classical philosophical notions to revamp its governance model (*Xinhua* 2014, 2016b). Despite the Party's programmatic anti-traditionalism in the past, Xi now symbolically depicts the CCP as the rightful beneficiary of and successor to China's cultural traditions (Tatlow 2018; Buckley 2014b).

This evident mining of cultural content by the CCP is commonly interpreted as an intervention aimed at manufacturing and maintaining popular support for the Party, a core priority for it in the twenty-first century. No longer sustainably validated by Marxist ideology, the CCP urgently needs to reinvent the sources of its legitimacy (Holbig and Gilley 2010a; Laliberte and Lanteigne 2008; Yang 1996). The purposeful downplaying of ideology to facilitate the kick-starting of post–Mao Zedong economic reforms caused a serious dent in the Party's original source of legitimacy, leaving it without a cogent theoretical system to justify its right to rule (Misra 1998; Chen 1995; Heberer and Schubert 2006; Wang and Zheng 2000). From 1978 onwards, the CCP instead relied on a mix of performance factors linked to economic transformation. The increase in wealth, the improvements in the living standards of the population, and the provision of limited social infrastructure produced significant levels of support for the authoritarian regime (Wright 2010; Zhao and Yang 2013; Twohey 1999; Chen 1997). Nationalist sentiment, particularly the strand of it fuelled by cultural nostalgia, further strengthened the CCP's position (Zhao 1998; Guo 2016, 2004; Béja 1995).

As the legitimacy-inducing potential of performance factors has become depleted, the CCP has resorted to new methods of legitimacy-building and new sources of legitimation. Economics and nationalism, the previous building blocks of the CCP's legitimacy model, have been gradually replaced by ideological and institutional content supplemented by collective values, culturalism, and governance (Holbig and Gilley 2010b). On the one hand, the Party has reformulated and widened its tired foundational doctrine to retain critical levels of ideological legitimacy (Gore 2003; Holbig 2009; Gilley and Holbig 2009; Zeng 2016; Klimeš 2018). It has introduced institutional developments and structural reforms which regularise political mechanisms and increase citizen participation in policymaking and local politics (Ho 2011; Gilley 2008; Schubert 2008). By improving the efficacy of policy implementation, reforming bureaucratic structures, and enhancing cadre performance the Party has significantly improved its levels of popular support (Saich 2016; Schubert 2008: 198, 2014; Zeng 2014). On the other hand, the CCP increasingly references Chinese culture – which signals that the party state recognises its potential as a functional political asset (Makeham 2009; Billioud 2007; Hu 2007; Bell 2010, 2015; Ford 2015).

However, this article[1] argues that the Party does not simply bandwagon on the growing popularity of tradition, but rather that it strategically selects and exploits the specific attributes which characterise the Chinese polity across temporal and ideological spectra: the culturally formed understanding of political authority and regime legitimacy (Huang 2013; Shue 2004; Tong 2011; Zhao 2009; Guo 2003; Chen 2011); the conjunction of moral instruction and the exercise of political power (Huang and Zürcher 1993; Thornton 2007; Lee 1996; Li et al. 2004); or, the flexibility of political practice paired with the existence of a distinctive ideological core of a regime (Pines 2012; Antony and Leonard 2002; Heilmann and Perry 2011; Shambaugh 2008a). This new legitimacy-building strategy of the CCP can be given conceptual form by using Schubert's idea of "zones of legitimacy" (Schubert 2008). He suggests that support for the CCP does

1 The author greatly benefitted in writing this article from comments by Professor Sam Crane, Dr. Jérôme Doyon, Yuanyuan Liu, Dylan Loh, Jean Christopher Mittelstaedt, Dr. Giorgio Strafella, Prof. Gerda Wielander, and two anonymous reviewers. Special thanks are due to Dr. Phil Entwistle and Dr. Michael Gow for their valuable suggestions and friendly encouragement.

not have a single origin, but comes rather from pockets of legitimacy-building across various geographical, administrative, or ideational spaces. Aggregated together, these dispersed "partial legitimacies" generate critical levels of legitimacy for the CCP. By drawing on such a mix of diverse legitimising factors, the CCP widens its support base and produces a multilayered structure of legitimacy which helps the Party to withstand periods of decreased popularity. Traditional culture, in other words, is becoming a significant zone of legitimacy for the CCP.

Under Xi, the bid for legitimacy has gained yet another pivotal dimension: the Party employs Chinese tradition to assert its unique status and reaffirm its right to rule, and it does so also within its own ranks. This specific facet of legitimacy, where the act of legitimation is aimed at the regime itself, was dubbed by the scholar of political rhetoric Rodney Barker the "self-legitimation of rulers" (Barker 2001). He pointed out that a regime's active approach to cultivating its specific political identity and justifying its right to rule has significance not only for the subjects but also for the regime itself (for example, for the governmental ethos). Building upon Barker's observation, this paper contends that Xi's tenure marks a new stage in the CCP's approach to traditional Chinese culture. Previously relegated to the role of an ideological foe, traditional culture is now being appreciated as a political asset. Most notably, immersion in traditional culture is proposed as a means of political rectification for Party members and cadres – which suggests that Chinese tradition has been granted a mandate to directly influence the very core of the values approved of and promoted by the party state.

To offset the imbalance in our understanding of how the CCP institutes tradition as a political resource, this paper reconstructs the operationalisation of the term "excellent traditional culture" (优秀传统文化, *youxiu chuantong wenhua*; hereafter, YCW) in articles published by authors and/or journals officially affiliated with Party schools in the years from 2012 to 2017. Before the 18th Party Congress, this term was one of many generic phrases used to refer to Chinese tradition; however, since 2012 it has appeared regularly as a coherent part of the official discourse of the party state. Specific to Xi's time in office, it allows us to distinguish his narrative on tradition from the culture-related discourses of his predecessors and references to tradition by the Chinese communist movement. In contrast to other terms

in use, YCW has no academic, disciplinary, or prior political connotations and is applied only domestically. As such, this operationalisation is considered an authoritative exposition of how the CCP under the leadership of Xi sanctions the role of tradition in contemporary public, political, and Party life.

The choice of Party school articles as the resources for analysis was motivated by the ubiquitous role of Party schools in the shaping of the communist cadre corps. Their continuous and intimate link to political processes makes them, and in particular the elite-level institutions such as the Central Party School (CPS), a mirror reflecting the most current trends within the Party itself (Mattis 2012; Zheng 2010: 150–175; Shambaugh 2008b). Although the institutionalisation of learning processes within the Party still follows a vertical, top-down pattern (Tsai and Dean 2013: 96–100; Miller 2015: 5–6), the content of cadre training and education – once defined solely by ideological dogma – is increasingly influenced by marketisation and commercialisation (Pieke 2009, 2007; Lee 2010) as well as being receptive to real-time occurrences and real-life circumstances (Liu 2009; Wibowo and Fook 2006). Cadre training and education can thus be construed as a space wherein political ideas are formed, rehearsed, and played out (Guo and Shan 2009). As such, it provides a unique window through which the political ideas of the central leadership – as well as the rationale behind them – can be investigated. In the case of this paper, resources produced by Party schools are understood to adequately represent the official line of the CCP regarding cultural revival and to provide a working definition of this trend for the Party's internal use as well as for consumption by cadres.

The article begins by looking at how the analysed articles define YCW, and how they attempt to establish the associated narrative's philosophical and political credentials. It then proceeds to explore how these articles diagnose the areas of political contention, and which YCW-based solutions they propose as a means of tackling them. Discussion of these solutions focuses on two areas: proposals for the CCP as a political organisation and proposals for the CCP cadre corps.

Data

Articles for analysis were identified using the China Network Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). This Chinese-language database provides the biggest and most systematic catalogue of publications of the affiliate institutions of the CCP and the Chinese government – including cadre training institutions. Drawing on such a large pool of data allows for the minimising of selection bias.

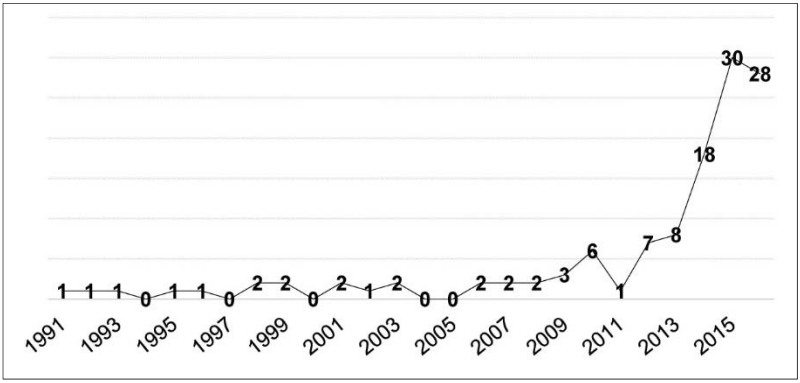
The selection procedure involved three steps. The first was two-fold, and consisted of a search for the term 优秀传统文化 (*youxiu chuantong wenhua*, excellent traditional culture) in the article title, and the word 党校 (*dangxiao*, Party school) in the full article text for an explicit statement on the Party school affiliation of author and/or journal. This procedure was dictated by the specificity of the database, which does not provide a search category for Party schools or cadre training institutions – but does nevertheless allow for the identification of the Party school affiliation of authors and journals in the search results. In the second step, the timeframe of 2012–2017 was applied to the existing selection of articles, yielding 276 items (the final search was carried out mid-April 2017). The third and final step included the manual identification of articles published in Party school journals and/or written by authors identified by their institutional affiliation with such a school. The final selection consisted of 94 articles whose content was subsequently coded for analysis using NVivo. To economise space, in the following text roman numerals will replace articles' full titles.

In the final selection, 61 articles were authored by individuals with an official Party school affiliation, 17 were published in Party school journals, and 16 conformed to both criteria. Seventeen articles specifically discussed traditional Chinese culture in the context of improving the Party or Party cadres (as measured by keywords in the title and abstract). As demonstrated by the yearly distribution presented in Figure 1 below, in the analysed period the number of relevant articles increased exponentially – reaching a maximum of 30 in 2015. Three articles were published in the first quarter of 2017, when the database search was carried out. In the preceding decade, between one and three relevant articles were published per year.

The geographical and administrative distribution of authors' institutional affiliations reveal no significant patterns. Almost all administrative levels are represented. City-level Party schools (40 counts)

are the most often listed institutions of affiliation, followed by provincial (19), county (9), district (5), and prefecture-level Party schools (2). Central-level institutions, specified as the affiliation of 13 authors, include the CPS (9), Yan'an Leadership Academy (2), Central History Research Office (1), and Central Literature Research Office (1). Among 17 authors with university affiliations, two are from Renmin University of China, one from Peking University, three from universities across Shandong Province, and three from Shanghai-based universities.

Figure 1. Distribution of Articles Identified by the Phrase 优秀传统文化 1991–2016



Source: Author's own compilation.

The most frequently featured journals in the final dataset, both at four counts, are the *Journal of the Jinan Municipal Party School* (济南市党校, *Jinan shi dangxio*) from Shandong, the home province of many ancient Chinese philosophers, and, puzzlingly, a magazine called *Chinese Foreign Entrepreneurs* (中外企业家, *Zhongwai qiyejia*). Among journals with two or three counts, roughly half are official Party school journals; the remainder include publications by other types of party-state institution such as institutes of socialism (社会主义学院, *shehui zhuyi xueyuan*), administration colleges (行政学院, *xingzheng xueyuan*), or economy institutes (经济学院, *jingji xueyuan*). Single articles were published in Party periodicals such as *The Red Banner* (红旗文稿, *Hongqi wengao*), *China Leadership Science* (中国领导科学, *Zhongguo lingdao*

kexue), *Party Building* (党建, *Dangjian*), *The Frontline* (前线, *Qianxian*), *The Science of Leadership Forum* (领导科学论坛, *Lingdao kexue luntan*), *Journal for Party and Administrative Cadres* (党政干部学刊, *Dangzheng ganbu xuekan*), *Theoretical Horizon* (理论视野, *Lilun shiye*), and *Party History Research and Findings* (党史博采, *Dangshi bocai*).

The Definition of YCW

At its most capacious, the term excellent traditional culture is used to refer to the sum of the spiritual and material wealth created in the historical process of developing traditional Chinese society. Unsurprisingly, most attempts to define the term repeat or closely reverberate formulations used by Xi himself. Most commonly, YCW is described as the "soul and blood" of China and the "spiritual home of Chinese people" which assure the survival of the Chinese nation [V, 102] [XIII, 83] [XLIV, 33–34]. Despite the general conceptual and definitional imprecision, it is possible to discern several themes in Xi's YCW narrative. Most importantly, traditional culture in Xi's use is understood in terms of civilisational heritage as the long-term, uninterrupted, and cumulative process of the maturation and realisation of the inherent potential of the Chinese people [V, 102] [XXVII, 69] [XXI, 147–148]. A visible attempt is made to create an image of historical unity and coherence to Chinese society [XXI, 147–148], while at the same time underlining also its ethnic and religious diversity [XXVII, 72]. The strong relational focus of traditional culture is emphasised, pointing to the interdependence between individuals in a society – but also between people and the natural world. YCW is also defined in terms of "life practice," as the embodiment and product of the everyday efforts and endeavours of ordinary people [XV, 49] – possibly in an attempt to create distance between the CCP's current application of tradition and the view of traditional culture as an ossified theory, political ritual, or elite custom detached from everyday life.

Furthermore, as China's own endogenous cultural system, YCW is seen as predisposed to playing an important role in the nation's contemporary context. First, the current stage of the unveiling of tradition is but a new phase of the realisation of its innate energy, everlasting potential, and strong formative ability. Second, traditional culture – especially Confucianism – is believed to possess a distinct

intellectual strength and appeal. It is lauded for its ability to dominate over other systems of thought and to create a syncretic intellectual system without losing its own specificity. Third, as one author puts it, YCW – in particular classical literature – constitutes an inclusive system of knowledge which offers a wide margin for interpretation and has proven able to produce state-strengthening solutions in the past [LV, 68–69].

Almost universally, authors tend to narrow down traditional culture to the spiritual domain – and more specifically, the moral domain. The propensity to see YCW as a moral doctrine leads to claims that it should be seen as a new embodiment of "The Way" (道德, *daode*) [XIII, 83] and a "crystallisation" of humanistic ethics and moral philosophy [LIII, 106]. As achieving the moral ideal is intimately linked to practice through ritual or education [III, 20], YCW is often presented as a repository of practices aiming at the improvement of individuals, societies, and their relationship with nature [LXXIX]. Importantly, from the perspective of the political functionality of YCW, such moral interpretations underline the existence of universal order and associated rules of behaviour with specific manifestations at the individual, social, and national levels [LV]. In this model, the moral potential of individuals is fulfilled by means of "self-cultivation" (修养, *xiuyang*) or "self-strengthening" (自强, *ziqiang*) [XXXVI, 124]; social morality is realised through the practice of "filial piety" (孝, *xiao*) [III, 19]; at the national level, meanwhile, the moral order is exercised through implementing ideals such as "benevolent governance" (仁政, *renzheng*) and "the rule of virtue" (德治, *dezheng*) [LV]. Filial piety plays a particularly important role in the argument for transposing the traditional moral hierarchy into modern times: extended beyond the immediate social setting, it can become the foundation for national-level loyalty and thus become equivalent to modern-day patriotism [III, 19].

Two clusters of mutually complementary philosophical concepts emerge as core elements of the YCW narrative, professing its strong orientation towards the moral and political disciplining of the society. The "Doctrine of the Mean" (中庸, *zhongyong*), "harmony" (和谐, *hexie*), and "benevolence" (仁, *ren*) together comprise the more prominent of the two clusters which appear in the majority of analysed articles. The Doctrine of the Mean is understood as an exhortation for a conscious, impartial, and balanced approach to reality [III, 19]

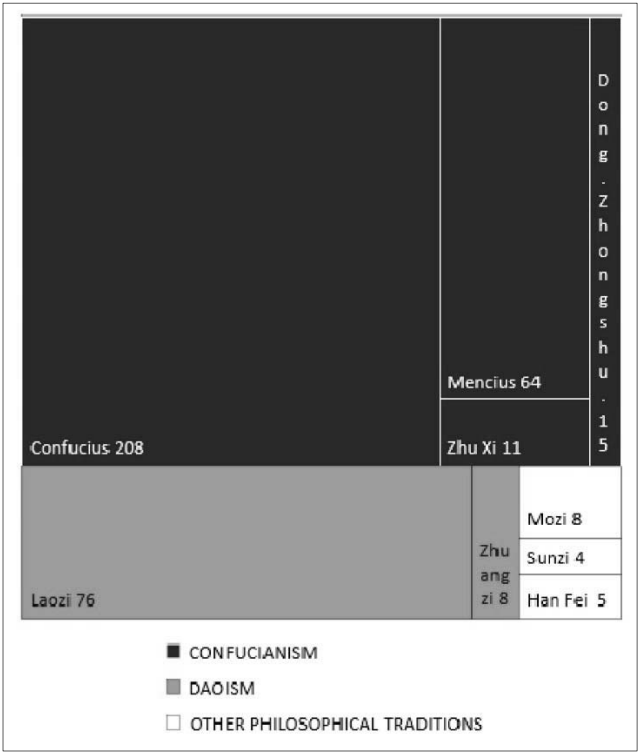
and as a pivotal influence on the essence of Chineseness – including on the specific cognitive patterns and value-orientation of the Chinese people [LXVIII]. It is linked to benevolence (benevolent love), the "highest moral realm" in Confucian theory whose realisation leads to harmony [XIV, 44]. Harmony, by some authors seen as the core value of YCW, represents a holistic approach to human relationships as well as to man's interaction with nature [XIX, 215]. In an arguably more modern interpretation, the ideal of harmony is inherently linked to "civilisational" (文明, *wenming*) and "patriotic" (爱国, *aiguo*) values [XIV].

The second cluster includes values and ideals which aim to actualise Confucian humanism through politics. It is represented by the concept of benevolent governance. While not divorced from the advocacy for hierarchical relationships between people, benevolent governance promotes "governing for the people" (执政为民, *zhizheng wei min*) and thinking about political and public duties as "people-oriented" or in terms of "people as foundation" (以民为本, *yimin wei ben*) [LXVI, 54]. As "the highest value goal of Confucian legal culture," "people-centred thought" (民本思想, *minben sixiang*) is thus seen as one of the fundaments of state ideology and political culture in ancient times [XXXVI, 124]. Its reappearance in contemporary political life proves, for some authors, that YCW represents a lineage of society-oriented political theory and practice which runs uninterrupted from ancient rulers all the way up to the current communist leaders [LXXXV].

Philosophical Credentials

The analysed articles directly and liberally list philosophers, schools of thought, canonical texts, and traditional virtues. However, their treatment is far from substantial and, at times, even inaccurate. Confucianism, explicitly named as the most important source of YCW, is very often paired with two other major cultural traditions of China: Taoism and Buddhism. Mohism and Legalism, meanwhile, receive far less attention.

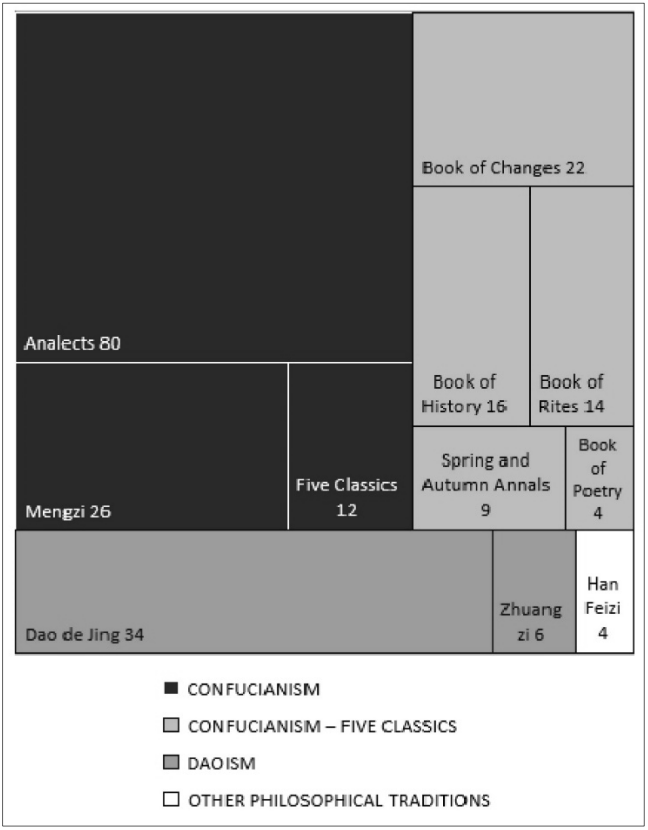
Figure 2. Reference to Chinese Thinkers



Source: Author's own compilation.

Figure 2 above represents the proportion of references made to Confucianism, Daoism, and other philosophical traditions as well as the number of instances in which specific thinkers are mentioned. Confucius is by far the most referenced philosopher, accounting for two-thirds of references among Confucian thinkers. In this group, Dong Zhongshu, a Han-era philosopher and promoter of Confucianism as official state ideology, receives a surprisingly high number of mentions. Among non-Confucian traditions and thinkers, Daoism accounts for almost one-quarter of references – the majority of which are to Laozi. Mohist philosopher Mozi, Legalist thinker Han Fei, and Sunzi (in the capacity of famous historical figure rather than that of philosopher) are mentioned in singular instances.

Figure 3. Reference to Philosophical Texts



Source: Author's own compilation.

As Figure 3 shows, references to philosophical texts follow a pattern similar to those to philosophical traditions. The Confucian *Analects*, with 80 mentions, is the most quoted canonical text. Separately, volumes comprising the *Five Classics* receive almost one-third of all mentions. Interestingly, the *Book of History* is only mentioned by its more colloquial title *Shangshu* and not by the more philosophically adequate title *Shujing*. For non-Confucian texts, only *Dao De Jing* receives a relatively high number of references.

The treatment of traditional virtues and values is similar to that of classical thinkers and canonical texts. The quantity of mentions –

with the secondary and even tertiary level of Confucian values being listed in analysed texts – does not translate to their quality. In addition to the above-mentioned benevolence, harmony, and filial piety, the following concepts and values receive significant number of counts: "great unity" (大同, *datong*), "loyalty" (忠, *zhong*), "respect" (恭, *gong*), "righteousness" (义, *yi*), "sincerity" (诚, *cheng*), "goodness" (良, *liang*), and "honesty" (廉, *lian*).

Political Credentials I: The Classical Underpinnings of Communist Legacies

The construction of YCW as a Party-sanctioned narrative requires establishing not only its philosophical but also historical and political credentials. To that effect, an image is created of tradition as a source of inspiration for Party leaders and policies – both contemporarily and in the past. Two lines of reasoning can be clearly identified in this respect. First, almost all articles depict the CCP as the rightful "inheritor" (传承者, *chuanchengzhe*) or "successor" of past traditions, and a willing "carrier" (弘扬者, *hongyangzhe*) or "promoter" of tradition into the future [VIII, 25]. Second, strong emphasis is put on the claim that the ideas guiding current Party policies are rooted in classical Chinese philosophy and ancient ethical principles.

This positive stance towards tradition is in most cases corroborated by tracing the origins of the concepts used by communist leaders to express Party policy back to ancient persons, phrases, or philosophies. The slogan "seeking truth from facts" (实事求是, *shishi qiushi*) is discussed as a prime example of the integration of traditional ideas into Marxist theory. It is said to originate in the phrase 修學好古, 實事求是 (*xiuxue haogu, shishi qiushi*; cultivate learning and love the ancient, engage in substantive matters and pursuing the true; translation following Hunter 2012: 422), first recorded by the Eastern Han dynasty historian Ban Gu to praise rigorous textual study; in Mao's use, it became an epistemological proposition expressing the insistence on "seeking" (求, *qiu*) the "objective state" (实事, *shishi*) and "internal logic or essence of phenomena" (是, *shi*) [XV, 49]. Mao is said to have "excavated" this idea and given it a "scientific explanation" by reinterpreting its inherent pursuit of objectivity into radical study and thought transformation, useful for establishing the ideological line of

the CCP [XV, 49]. It is claimed that throughout the Communist Revolution and the following period of socialist construction the CCP aimed to inherit old traditions, as proven by Mao's comment that communist victory will bring about a revival of Chinese culture [LIII, 102].

Another Party concept, the "well-off society" (小康社会, *xiaokang shehui*), is traced back to the *Book of Poetry* phrase "民亦劳止, 汔可小康" (*min yi lao zhi, qi ke xiaokang*) rendered by James Legge as: "The people indeed are heavily burdened, but perhaps a little ease may be got for them." Originally expressing the objectives of an agricultural society, it was transplanted into the context of an industrialising society and introduced to Party theory by Deng Xiaoping [XI, 15]. Furthermore, Jiang Zemin's theory of "Three Represents" (三个代表, *sange daibiao*), focused on development and "keeping up with the times," is based on the passage 終日乾乾, 與時偕行 (*zhong ri qian qian, yu shi xie xing*; [an exemplary person] remains diligent and vigorous all day long and changes with time; translation following Zheng 2017: 208) from the *Book of Changes* [XI, 15]. Another interpretation argues that political ideas, strategies, and goals at the core of Jiang's concept derive from traditional Chinese notions such as: "the people are the root of a country; the root firm, the country is tranquil" (民惟邦本, 本固邦寧, *minwei bangben, bengu bangning*); "unity between heaven and man" (天人合一, *tianren heyi*); "all-inclusiveness" (兼容并包, *jianrong bingbao*); or the Mencian 民贵君轻 (*mingui junqing*), which pronounces the precedence of people's interests over those of the state or the ruler [V, 104–105].

In addition to specific theoretical concepts in Party use, several political strategies, mechanisms, and even decisions of past communist leaders are also ascribed roots in YCW. For example, the revolutionary attitude of the peasant class as captured in the spirit of the Yan'an period is interpreted as an echo of Mohist thought [XI, 15]. Comparative analysis carried out by one of the authors claims to have uncovered the spirit of the Doctrine of the Mean in Deng's decision to restore college entrance examinations shortly after the Cultural Revolution; the author sees this decision as echoing the Northern Song dynasty scholar Zhang Zai's insistence on moderation and Zhu Xi's emphasis on study and self-cultivation [LXI, 43–44]. The Confucian idea of moderation – the Doctrine of the Mean – is also allegedly the strategic fundament behind the "one country, two sys-

tems" principle, the formula for the transition of Hong Kong from British to People's Republic of China jurisdiction [XV, 50]. Even Deng's "cat theory" (猫论, *maolun*) is said to have been borrowed from a "millennia-old folk proverb" – arguably the very reason it resonated positively within society [XXVII, 70–71].

Political Credentials II: Party Congresses, Politburo Study Sessions, Xi's Speeches

Crucially, the political credentials of the YCW narrative are created by showing how it is being created and validated by contemporary political leaders. Official statements, conference communiqués, and meeting reports help to determine what the authoritative sources are and to pinpoint the chronology of the building of the YCW narrative by the Party. According to the articles analysed, the central government's message about YCW comes from two main sources: the last two CCP national congresses and the collective study sessions of the Political Bureau (Politburo) of the 18th Central Committee.

Mentioned or discussed by more than half of all analysed articles, the 2012 Report of the 18th Party Congress is the most quoted document openly referencing the revival of traditional culture for the advantage of the CCP. The central axis of said report is the idea of "China's national rejuvenation" (中华民族伟大复兴, *Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*) expressed through the notion of the "China Dream" (中国梦, *Zhongguo meng*). These notions are complemented by the slogan "three advocacies" (三个倡导, *sange changdao*), which provides a new definition of "socialist core values" (社会主义核心价值观, *shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhiguan*; hereafter, SCV). This report is seen as a call for constructing "socialist cultural power" through strengthening the moral quality of citizens, enriching the spiritual life of the people, and making Chinese culture more competitive as a source of social values [XII, 312]. Importantly, improving social morality should be effected by a two-pronged strategy of combining the rule of law and the rule of virtue [LXXXIX, 218]. Authors provide an extensive discussion on the moral education of citizens in the context of this report, because it is understood to make a strong association between the moral state of society and national governance [XXV, 9]. All this leads to the 18th Party Congress being dubbed a "new historical starting point,"

marking the resurrection of Chinese tradition – whose mission is to mitigate the negative consequences of globalisation [LXXXXVII, 28].

The Report of the 18th Party Congress is on occasion complemented by mentions of Party meetings and documents from before the selection of Xi as Party leader. This tactic purportedly aims to showcase a long-term, developmental character to the CCP's cultural agenda. The most relevant of these references, however, go back no further than to the beginning of the new millennium. The 2002 16th Party Congress is described as having discussed the promotion of traditional culture as an antidote to the perceived problem with SCV [III]. The popularisation of YCW as a mechanism for spiritual self-improvement, national rejuvenation, and the realisation of a well-off society is also understood to be the main theme of the October 2011 report on "Deepening Cultural Structural Reform and Promoting Socialist Culture" (关于深化文化体制改革推动社会主义文化, *Guanyu shenhua wenhua tizhi gaige tuidong shehui zhuyi wenhua*) of the 6th Plenum of the 17th Central Committee [V, 102]. The strategic objective of this decision, according to another author, is to explain and interpret classical texts for contemporary use, for example by elaborating on the traditional roots of notions such as "democracy" and "public law" [VII]. Importantly, this document is also credited with introducing the idea of the CCP as a "loyal inheritor and carrier" (传承者和弘扬者, *chuanchengzhe he hongyangzhe*) as well as an "active advocate and developer" (积极倡导者和发展者, *jiji changdaozhe he fazhanzhe*) of traditional Chinese culture [X, 28].

In addition, "Xi Jinping's series of important speeches" (习近平总书记系列重要讲话, *Xi Jinping zongshuji xilie zhongyao jianghua*) delivered since the 18th Party Congress serve as a meaningful auxiliary resource. They are quoted in nine articles. Examples include Xi's talk during a 2014 visit to Confucius's home province, dubbed "the Shandong inspection" (山东视察, *Shandong shicha*) [XIX, 215], or his speech at the National Propaganda and Ideological Work Conference in August 2013 – where he called YCW China's "deepest cultural soft power" [XIX], and stressed the need for cultural and historical specificities of a nation to be respected [XXIX, 28]. Authors also recall lesser-known but symbolically significant occasions such as Xi's speech during the National Model of Morality Competition (全国道德模范, *quanguo daode mofan*), where he directly called the absorption

of YCW a "strategic task" in the effort to attune Chinese transformation and the country's developmental path [XLIV, 34].

The second quantitatively significant source of political credentials for the YCW narrative are the Politburo collective study sessions, mentioned in 18 analysed articles. The most attention is given to the 13th Collective Study Session from 26 February 2014, which discussed the themes of developing socialist values and carrying forward traditional Chinese culture. It saw Xi praising the wealth of theoretical and moral resources embedded in YCW – values of benevolence, sincerity, and righteousness as well as concepts such as harmony, "people as the root," and *datong* [XXXXIX, 82]. During this session, Xi admitted the centrality of the ethical component in YCW [XXI, 149], and emphasised that SCV must be based on traditional culture [XXIII, 30]. Furthermore, the authors report that this study session produced the criteria for the assessment of what merit valuable elements of YCW for contemporary use [LVI, 59].

Similarly to the sequence of the Party congresses, each unveiling a new phase and a more meaningful integration of YCW into official discourse, the subsequent Politburo study sessions also reveal an increasingly open and detailed approach to traditional culture on the part of the CCP. The 13th Collective Study Session built upon its immediate predecessor of December 2013, whose report praised the value of traditional Chinese morality and promoted the idea of a comprehensive, positive propaganda that combines school education, theoretical and historical research, as well as more popular channels of film, television, and literature [XLIV, 34]. The 5th Collective Study Session of April 2013 is also mentioned. During this meeting, Xi directly stated that YCW should inspire solutions for improving Party leadership and governance and gave the example of the Confucian concept of "clean government" (廉政, *lianzheng*) as a prototype for contemporary anti-corruption measures [XVII, 54].

Diagnosis

The nature of the Party school resources paired with the wider context of promoting a cultural agenda by the CCP give the majority of analysed articles a specific task-oriented character. In most cases, the articles first diagnose some sort of a state of urgency before putting forward YCW-inspired solutions. Presenting their diagnoses, authors

do not limit themselves to one specific source of contention and often loosely enumerate related issues or point to a core issue linked to a wider net of interrelated problems. The buffet of problems range from consumerism, hedonism, private interest, and utilitarianism [LXXV, 124]; through globalisation, political multi-polarisation, technological and scientific development [LIX, 7–8]; to the influx of Christianity and the increasing numbers of Christian converts in China [XIX, 215]. Furthermore, a "cultural crisis of Westernisation" is widely blamed for hindering China's effort to establish its own modern "consciousness and subjectivity" [XIX, 215], with American ideological influence compared to "cultural infiltration," "cultural expansion," and "cultural hegemony" [LXXXVI, 15]. In addition, China's "national strength" is universally seen as compromised by more than a century of both foreign encroachment and domestic conflict [XVIII, 54]. Within this cacophony of diagnoses, it is nevertheless possible to distinguish three blocks of core issues to which the promotion of YCW is assigned to respond. These can be operationalised as value confusion, a social morality crisis, and a governance crisis.

Value Confusion

The normative perplexity of Chinese society is believed to be caused by the neglect of traditional culture in the post-Mao modernisation process. Since the late 1980s, the tradition was deprived of its function as "value carrier" for new generations, causing a debilitating condition of "lack of cultural self-confidence" [L, 39, 40]. Value confusion is deepened by the existence of multiple and competing sources of values and the constant morphing of ideas; according to one author's reverse logic, this can be measured by a recent notable increase in demand for various traditional culture "fevers" (热, *re*) [XXIX, 30]. In addition, the output of the cultural and creative industries is blamed for failing to match the demand for cultural resources [XXVII, 70]. Contemporary works of art are deemed "insufficient and low quality"; at the same time, the ossified and overly theoretical approach to socialist culture pushes people towards foreign (for example Korean) productions in their daily consumption of entertainment [III, 21].

In line with the criticism of modern and socialist cultures, the overly conservative character of traditional Chinese culture is also denounced. One author observes that young people tend to exagger-

ate the practising of traditional values, which leads to their misinterpretation [XXXIII, 102]. He claims that the popular understanding of the pragmatism embedded in philosophies of Mohism but also Confucianism, if misconstrued, produces an overly utilitarian attitude and an expectation of instant success and gratification. Moreover, the conservative character of traditional culture can translate into intellectual conformity, a lack of initiative, or the avoidance of challenging situations – while a conservative interpretation of traditional values can distort the understanding of contemporary social morality [XXXIII, 102].

A Social Morality Crisis

While value confusion is more concerned with the micro level – that is, individuals and their everyday ethical choices – the crisis of social morality refers to the macro-level, systemic perspective. Authors keenly adduce evidence for their diagnosis from official documents, but also draw on academic surveys and popular polls. The aforementioned October 2011 document on the reform of the cultural system is quoted in this context as pointing out the negative impact of the society-wide moral crisis on "national construction" [XXXIII, 102]. One author reports on the findings of a professional study entitled "Research on Social Mentality in China" conducted between 2012 and 2013 by the Institute of Sociology of the Chinese Academy of Social Science, which concluded that mutual trust and relationships between different social groups were drastically deteriorating [L, 38–39]. A similar observation is confirmed by the nationwide "Survey of the Moral Status of Chinese Citizens" conducted by the *People's Daily*, which deems the moral state of society – measured only, however, by SCV – as "passable" (一般, *yiban*) [L, 38–39]. The deterioration of social morality is blamed on the lack of a coherent plan for social development under the pressures of economic modernisation, but also on the long-term neglect of state-supported education in Chinese traditions [XXXX, 179]. In this context, the example of Singapore is used to underline that the state should play a crucial role in moulding the moral foundation of society through purposefully designed educational campaigns [XIII, 82].

A Governance Crisis

Within the widely understood domain of political governance, two contentious areas are identified: corruption and the growing incoherencies within the system, including disparities between Party officials and ordinary people. Following the report of the 18th Party Congress, corruption is explicitly acknowledged as having potentially fatal consequences for the CCP if not addressed [LXXXIX, 218]. Implementing relevant countermeasures is all the more pressing as, according to one author, China traditionally lacks an anti-corruption culture. The long history of a systemic "culture of corruption" – in the past rooted in strong patriarchal and official norms – is understood to be the source of contemporary forms of corruption which severely restrict development, deepen social divisions, and cause public grievances, all of which directly threatens the ruling basis of the CCP [XVII, 55]. The pursuit of luxurious lifestyles but also excessive bureaucracy and formalism are acknowledged as commonly occurring causes of corruption [LXXXIX, 218]. Cases of the breach of professional ethics by Party members which were investigated by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) further reveal formalism and "moral slack" among cadres, as well as the corruptive influence of family ties. All of these problems cause values deviation among cadres, but also slow down the development of the Party – and, what follows, the whole country [LII, 132].

The second contentious area – growing tensions within the system – is seen as a consequence of a "utilitarian trap": the overreliance on economic criteria as a barometer of modernisation, at the expense of social indicators. Recalling distinguished Chinese philosopher Feng Youlan, one author argues that the CCP as the ruling party should go beyond this basic utilitarianism and widen the remit of its governance into the moral realm; furthermore, it should readopt the traditionally expressed realm of heaven and earth – which represents the universal law of the human universe and the natural world [VI, 58]. It is explicitly argued that if the values of the Party are not aligned with the aspirations of society and are not conducive to social development, then the CCP will face social unrest and regime collapse [VI, 55].

A critical caveat emerging from the discussion on the crisis of governance is that the previously identified moral crisis and value confusion are said to also characterise Party cadres, not just ordinary

citizens. The moral deficit among cadres has a wide range of negative consequences for the CCP's governing capabilities, as well as for the ideological coherency of the party state [LXXXVI, 15]. It causes cadres to abandon Marxism-Leninism in pursuit of ideologically "unhealthy values" such as feudal superstitions, historical fatalism, or backwardness [XXX, 13]. Cadres, sometimes intentionally, contradict ideals of public service or only pay lip service to Party ideals to gain position, wealth, or fame; such value-orientation negatively impacts on the decisions that they make [LIII, 102]. In the context of such growing disparities, diversifying influences, and increasing inadequacies, cadre-training and Party-building efforts must become more focused on adaptation [XXX, 12].

Solutions

Diagnosis centres on the values deficiency and the absence of norm-building mechanisms as systemic problems of China's post-reform social development. Crucially, it points to critical discrepancies within the existing governance model. Accordingly, the solutions being put forward are framed in moral terms and focus on YCW-based theory and practices which can potentially enhance the performance of the Party and its functionaries.

The Party

With regards to the role that traditional culture can play for the CCP, three main aspects can be identified. First, for the CCP as a political organisation, tradition is seen as a helpful tool for enhancing the methods of "Party-building" and "Party-spirit education." Second, for the CCP as an organisation in charge of the state apparatus, tradition is suggested as a means of improving its governing style and administrative performance. Third, with respect to Marxist theory and Party ideology, traditional culture is interpreted as both their theoretical source and a viable resource for their future development. In this context, SCV are discussed extensively.

Party Spirit

The usefulness of traditional norms and virtues for the CCP as a political organisation is discussed in the context of its value for Party-

building (党建价值, *dangjian jiazhi*) [XXIX] and, in particular, Party-spirit education (党性教育, *dangxing jiaoyu*). A creative and innovative combination of traditional Chinese thought and Party theory can act as a strategic move – or "blade" – in Party-building efforts [XXX, 11]. Authors point to the 18th Party Congress slogan "five major constructions" (五大建设, *wu da jianshe*) as a demonstration that the CCP needs to improve in areas of ideology, organisation, style, anti-corruption, and system construction. YCW can help in this effort by enriching the "ruling theory" of the CCP [XXIX, 31], strengthening "the cultural power of the ruling party," and by expanding its "cultural soft power" (文化软实力, *wenhua ruan shili*) [XXX, 10]. Drawing on traditional ideas can enlarge the very discipline of Party construction, while expanding the scope of Party theory can make it less isolated and less self-referential [XCVII, 29]. Such an application of YCW is compared to the "contemporary use of the past" (古为今用, *gu wei jin yong*), which elevates Party-building – both in theory and practice – to a "new level" [XXX, 10–11]. Without YCW, ideological construction and Party-spirit cultivation would be incomplete and defective [VIII, 25].

Beyond directly enriching Party theory, classical and historical content can also prove valuable for strengthening the cultural foundations of the CCP and helping Party cadres to develop the practices of mindfulness and asceticism without veering away from the main ideological line of thinking [XXXIX, 32]. There is, therefore, an "inherent logic" in linking Party-building and the construction of a state-sponsored system for inheritance, promotion, and education in YCW [XXIX, 31]. Interestingly, some authors postulate that Party spirit was always rooted in traditional (especially Confucian) culture and indeed continuously borrowed from it throughout all the stages of the communist revolution, socialist construction, and post-Mao reform [XCVII, 29–30]. Others, invoking Xi's advocacy of YCW in Party-spirit education, call for greater recognition to be given to the fact that the CCP is a political party of dual attributes: both the Marxist and the inherently Chinese [XCVI, 36].

Governance Style

Despite fundamental differences in their ideological and institutional contexts, the ancient governing ideals observed by imperial rulers are deemed to constitute feasible solutions for enhancing the governance

strategy of a contemporary communist regime. Tradition is said to have "timely" value for promoting the modernisation of the state governance system and enhancing its administrative capacity [XXIX, 29]. It should be "logically interpreted" and creatively transformed to carry out the "extremely important" task of refining the leadership and governance capacity of the CCP [XXX, 12]. The idea of borrowing from tradition to enhance governance practices is attributed to the Central Committee document from October 2011 entitled "Modernisation of the National Governance System and Governing Ability" (国家治理体系和治理能力现代化, *Guojia zhili tixi he zhili nengli xiandaihua*), which is understood to underscore China's right to determine and pursue its own style of governance specific to its unique historical and cultural experience [XXIX, 28–29].

Comments in this domain revolve around Xi's innovation on the traditional concept of "people-oriented governance." Referring to the *Book of History* and to *Mencius*, this concept is described as a proto-democratic element embedded in classical thought; together with the ideal of harmony, it provides the basis for the current expansion of space for public opinion and popular engagement in policymaking processes [LXXXIII, 47–48]. While previous Party leaders are depicted as having approached people-oriented governance solely as a general guiding principle, the current leadership is credited with giving it a more substantial and practical role as a governing principle [LXXXV]. One author elaborates that the idea of "people-centred governance," which originated in the Shang and Zhou dynasties, has been passed on through history to modern times where it received a new incarnation with each new CCP leader: Mao's insistence on "proximity to the masses" (密切联系群众, *miqie lianxi qunzhong*) and the idea of "serving the masses" (为人民服务, *wei renmin fuwu*); Deng's "I am the son of the Chinese people" (我是中国人民的儿子, *wo shi Zhongguo renmin de erzi*); Jiang's "representing the fundamental interests and the overwhelming majority of the people" (代表最广大人民群众的根本利益, *daibiao zui guangda renmin qunzhong de genben liyi*); Hu Jintao's "New Three People's Principles" (新三民主义, *xin sanmin zhuyi*) showing concern for the people and using power for their benefit; and, finally, Xi's idea of "people as the centre" (以人民为中心, *yi renmin wei zhongxin*), which encapsulates the tenor of his development model [LXXXV, 93].

The adoption of the classical ideal of people-oriented governance as a contemporary governing principle must be paired with its implementation and enactment by the political system. This can be effected by grounding the policymaking processes in the mechanisms of "grass-roots deliberative democracy" (基层协商民主, *jiceng xieshang minzhu*). The consultative model has already proven its effectiveness in channelling public opinion and facilitating the exercise of citizens' political rights; by producing a "sense of gain" among citizens and decreasing social tensions, it serves to secure the ruling status of the CCP [LXXXV, 92–94]. Such mechanisms of democratic consultation, supported by the socialist rule of law, replaced the traditional governance model wherein governing principles were enacted by a virtuous and benevolent but individual ruler; in other words, Xi's realisation of the idea of people-centred governance is praised for relinquishing the authoritarian elements of the ancient Chinese governance model [LXXXV, 94].

Marxist Theory

Similar enthusiasm is expressed in relation to the prospect of amalgamating the elements of traditional Chinese culture and philosophy with Marxist theory. Repeating the arguments used in their discussion of governance, the authors praise Xi for devising the formula of "creative transformation and innovative development" to accommodate Chinese tradition in Marxist theory. The theoretical ingenuity of this formula is likened to the "third leap of Marxism in China" [LVI, 59], which puts it in the same order of magnitude as the sinification of Marxism carried out by Mao and also Deng's inventive redefinition of Party ideology into the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics. What is more, adopting YCW constitutes not only a new "leap" in Marxist theory but possibly the only feasible path for the future evolution of Marxism in China. Echoing the deliberations of the early communist movement, the articles discuss the degrees of compatibility of Marxism and Confucianism. Both are described as "strong, inclusive, and open" philosophical theories, with the former deemed the "universal law" and the latter a "natural and social law" [XCVI, 38]. Reverberating Deng's 1991 comment on "not losing the ancestors" (老祖宗不能丢, *laozuzong buneng diu*), the former propaganda czar Liu Yunshan is depicted as a staunch supporter of retaining the idea of the CCP's dual ancestry. According to Liu, forsaking Marxism

would equal neglecting the fundamental ideals of the Party; losing YCW would be tantamount to losing a "spiritual lifeline" [XXX, 11].

Whichever intellectual tradition is proposed to take the lead, theoretical syncretism is seen to have a positive influence on political thought and socialist ideology [LXV]. Traditional political ideas, particularly those of Confucian provenance, are seen as possessing a strong propagandistic potential which could help to revive socialist theory, for example by providing a more accessible and animated explanation of socialist values [LXV, 80–81]. In an evident attempt to give weight to this line of argumentation, the famous slogan of the late-Qing dynasty Self-Strengthening Movement "Chinese substance, Western application" (中学为体, 西学为用, *Zhongxue weiti, xixue weiyong*) is symbolically rephrased as 马体中用 (马克思主义为体, 中国优秀传统文化为用, *Makesizhuyi weiti, Zhongguo youxiu chuantong wenhua weiyong*; "Marxism as foundation, China's excellent traditional culture for practical use") [XI].

SCV

The influence of YCW on Party ideology is framed almost exclusively as an influence on SCV, a concept introduced by Xi at the 18th Party Congress. These 12 values enacted on the individual, social, and national levels promote the "Citizen Basic Ethical Code" (公民基本道德规范, *gongmin jiben daode guifan*) and as such, according to the articles analysed, are inseparable from the promotion of YCW [XXXVIII, 56]. The notion of SCV is understood to build upon the 17th Party Congress's emphasis on the morality of Party cadres and citizens encapsulated in the guidelines set out in the "Eight Virtues and Eight Shames" (八荣八耻, *ba rong ba chi*), also closely related to YCW [IX, 42].

Significant effort has been put into proving that SCV and YCW complement each other; this, in turn, reveals how authors understand the division of labour between these two concepts. While SCV are seen as a "barrier to safeguarding national ideological security" and the realisation of the China Dream [LIV, 32], YCW is construed as the factor strengthening cultural identity and promoting social justice [LXXXIII]. SCV are enhanced by the traditional ethical, educational, and theoretical wisdom that the YCW embodies [LXXIV 81]. Furthermore, authors endeavour to legitimise their reference to YCW by retracing the traditional lineage of SCV. At the individual level, SCV are described as building upon Confucian ideals such as benevolence,

self-cultivation, or *junzi* – an exemplar of morality and moral conduct [XVI, 106]. Harmony, civilisation, and patriotism are interpreted as traditional notions adopted in the SCV canon to denote the state–society relationship [XVI]. Patriotism owes its uniting, spiritual dimension to the Confucian ideal of loyalty; reform and innovation are motivated by traditional orientations around betterment and growth; and, current development is built upon the classical virtues of justice and honesty [XXIII, 31–32]. In other words, YCW is described as a proto-version of SCV – containing timeless solutions that can improve social cohesion, the state governance model, and indeed the Party leadership [XXX, 11].

Notably, much attention is given to the mechanisms of modifying societal behaviour and inducing thought compliance modelled after traditional rituals. The culture of Western Zhou – whose strong emphasis on ritual facilitated the inculcation of ethical prescriptions into society, and thus created an orderly and harmonious social system – is described as a "feasible" direction for thinking about the institutionalisation of behaviour-regulating mechanisms today – perhaps in some sort of contemporary ritualism [LIV, 33]. A system for promoting SCV is compared to ritualised expressions of benevolence, and intervention into the private and public sphere by the party state is seen as originating in the concept of the unity of heaven and man [XXXVIII, 56–57].

In addition to ritual, the repertoire of mechanisms for societal control include education and, in particular, moral instruction. Invoking the example of the Confucian codification of moral education and virtue-based governance, one author states that the "practice of SCV cannot be separated from moral education" [LXV, 80]. In order to establish SCV as a "universal moral view" and promote society-oriented ethics – especially its elements with order-reproducing and order-sustaining qualities – a comprehensive system of family, school, and social education must be established [XXV]. Furthermore, strategies for improving people's "spiritual condition and modern citizenship" should innovate on the formula of familiar cultural activities such as traditional festivals, which should play the role of "subtle educational methods" [XVI, 105–106]. These should become long-term projects involving experts, new technologies, the existing propaganda infrastructure, and local cultures as intermediaries in promoting YCW and SCV [LXXIII, 35–36].

Party Cadres

With regards to Party cadres, deliberations centre on the problems of corruption, morality, and education as well as the inherent interrelatedness of these three domains. Discussion on the moral performance of cadres (or lack thereof) to a large extent substitutes for a direct discussion on cadre corruption. Correspondingly, the anti-corruption measures are redressed as the promotion of moral improvement and virtue-infused governance. In this process, education in traditional culture and morality is intended to prevent undesirable behaviour on the part of cadres and to turn them into propagators of YCW.

Corruption

As stated previously, the articles convey a sense of urgency in introducing the anti-graft agenda by referring to normative comments made by Xi. During the very first Politburo collective study session under his leadership, Xi is quoted as having warned that corruption was a major factor behind the collapse of many imperial rulers and contemporary states [XVII, 54]. During a 2013 CCDI meeting, he called for fighting corruption at all levels of the Party (苍蝇老虎一起打, *canying laohu yiqi da*; fight both the flies and the tigers) and said that improving the conduct of Party members must be based on the rule of law as well as draw on traditional culture [XC, 406]. Xi's comment that curbing corruption must involve "active cooperation of cultural thought" [LXXXIX, 218] is taken to denote complementary roles for moral and legal anti-corruption measures. In relation to the Party itself, it translates into a stronger emphasis on the "organic combination" of Party spirit and Party discipline in cadre work and education [LXXXIX, 219]. On many other occasions, Xi is quoted as calling for "mirroring" solutions from Chinese history in anti-corruption work and Party construction efforts [LXXXIX, 219].

Analysed articles show a visible tendency to equate the essence of Xi's anti-corruption drive with building "clean government" (廉政, *lianzheng*). However, despite the importance of this notion in the YCW narrative, it is not elaborated on in more detail and serves solely as an umbrella term denoting a morally infused discourse on corruption. The more meaningful illustrations of this concept resort to historical cases to exemplify its potential. For example, the Qin dynasty is described as having formed a loyal corps of officials by institution-

alising moral performance as a professional standard [XXVIII, 49]. The selection and appointment system rewarded the moral quality of individuals and examined the knowledge of and conformity to the official ethical code; moreover, strict hierarchical supervision ensured the prompt removal of corrupt officials – thus preventing moral decay among the lower bureaucratic strata [XXVIII , 49].

Some authors put forward rather adventurous propositions for making moral proficiency an integral part of the existing accountability and evaluation system for cadres. One such suggestion is to emulate the ancient bureaucratic systems which recorded officials' "merits," as a way of inducing their self-discipline and self-cultivation. "Morality files" recording the professional, social, family, and personal moral performance of officials could be kept as part of the assessment process which decides about promotions or downgrades [LII, 133]. Quoting Singapore as an example, proposals go even further and suggest instituting a "virtue and salary" relationship [LII, 132]. Another proposal suggests the bureaucratic moral creed should be systematised in the form of a manual which would not only officialise the merger of legal and ethical measures in cadres' professional code [LIII, 103] but would also "curb extravagance" and promote the "habit of thrift" [LXXXIX, 219].

Moral Education of Cadres

A normative interpretation attributes graft among Party cadres to a lack of "cultivation work" and inadequate moral construction [XXVIII, 47]. Such circumstances must be countered with an adequate response; namely, supplementing ideological and theoretical training with education in traditional morality, ideals, and beliefs [XCVII, 30]. As previously, authors stretch their argumentative muscles in their attempts to validate this postulate. Of particular relevance in this context is Xi's "important speech" given on the commencement of the autumn semester at the Central Party School in 2013. It explicitly underlined that ethical learning helps one to properly grasp the meaning of "honours and disgraces" and develop the ability to "tell right from wrong" [LXXX, 244].

Furthermore, three documents are understood by authors to have officially anchored the question of ethics in cadre education. The November 2016 Central Committee document entitled "Several Guidelines on the Political Life of the Party in the New Situation" (新

形势下党内政治生活若干准则, *Xinxingshi xia dangnei zhengzhi shenghuo ruogan zhunze*) is seen as a reminder that communist beliefs do indeed include moral ideals – and that in addition to ideological and theoretical construction the Party also requires moral construction too [XCVII, 30]. The basic content of this moral construction should draw on traditional Chinese virtues – such as the Confucian "Eight Cardinal Virtues" (八德, *bade*) – which are often seen as fundamentally consistent with communist morality.

The second document – "Notice Regarding Strengthening Education in Ideals, Beliefs, and Moral Conduct in Cadre Education and Training" (关于在干部教育培训中加强理想信念和道德品行教育的通知, *Guanyu zai ganbu jiaoyu peixun zhong jiaqiang lixiang xinnian he daode pinxing jiaoyu de tongzhi*), issued in July 2014 by the Central Organisation Department – explicitly calls, meanwhile, for cadre training to pursue the study of distinctively Chinese concepts such as the above-mentioned people-oriented governance, benevolence, sincerity, righteousness, and *datong* – the ideal of social harmony and unity [LII, 130]. The third and final document – entitled "Guidelines on Integrity and Cultivation of the Chinese Communist Party" (中国共产党廉洁自律准则, *Zhongguo gongchandang lianjie zilu zhunze*) from October 2015 – is given as an example of merging the Party's own traditions with traditional moral values. It stipulates that training should teach cadres how to avoid extravagance, persist through hardships, make sacrifices for others, and yield power responsibly – as well as how to be self-conscious, honest, and an exemplary family member [XCVI, 38].

Numerous proposals are put forward on how to incorporate YCW into the cadre study curriculum and training regime. The most radical propose to put courses on the classics on a par with those on Marxism in all Party schools, administrative colleges, and other cadre training institutions [LXXII, 12]. It is suggested that cadres should directly read, interpret, and comment on canonical texts such as the *Dao De Jing*, *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Great Learning*, or *Doctrine of the Mean* [XCVII, 32]. Self-cultivation, with or without reference to Liu Shaoqi, is still seen as a very effective method of training and disciplining cadres [LXXX]. Furthermore, the authors discuss the grand question of the effect that the teaching of YCW may have on education in Party theory and ideology. It is proposed that, for educational purposes, YCW should be interpreted in terms of contemporary Party ideals such as patriotism, serving the community, or a sense of service

to and responsibility for the country [LXXV, 124]. Courses on YCW should also explain the "philosophical connotations" of Marxist-Leninist values and ideals as embedded in ideological education, many of which have their roots in YCW [LIX, 8]. At the same time, it is strongly underlined that elevating traditional culture by "organically integrating [it] into ideological and political education in Party schools" [LIX] is not meant to replace Marxism with Confucianism as the Party ideology [XCVII, 32]. Interestingly, this is the only instance where this ideologically contentious issue is explicitly addressed.

Among the wealth of commentaries and recommendations made, only one article presents an existing case of YCW teaching. A course organised by the Jinan Municipal Party School in Shandong Province is analysed based on a simple survey conducted in 2016 with a group of 170 attendees [LXXXVII]. It shows that almost 90 per cent of cadres believe that traditional culture is "very useful" or "useful" for contemporary society, and almost 80 per cent believe that it holds a "very high" or "high" relevance to their own work and performance [LXXXVII, 43]. The survey responses reveal that cadres strongly associate traditional culture with the CCP's related terminology and concepts such as China Dream (59.2 per cent), SCV (65.6 per cent), cultural soft power (58.6 per cent), or Xi's notion of "cultural self-confidence" (文化自信, *wenhua zixin*) (73.9 per cent) [LXXXVII, 44]. Furthermore, the survey reveals the levels of familiarity of cadre with Chinese classics such as the *Analects* – with almost 55 per cent of respondents claiming they have read parts of this book, while circa 12 per cent claim they have never read it. Other findings provide valuable pointers for designing similar courses in future. They show that for almost all cadres, printed text (books and newspapers alike) and "computers" are the main channels of systematic (daily) study – while mobile technology is the most popular medium for occasional learners [LXXXVII, 45].

Conclusions

What emerges from the Party school resources is a quasi-moral narrative which aims to subsume both the political and societal domains under the same common normative denominator. Moreover, it aims to establish the normative lineage of contemporary Chinese politics

by associating it with China's historical and philosophical heritage. For the Chinese Communist Party, the necessity of countering the existing widespread value deficit is unanimously assigned paramount importance. Crucially, such a diagnosis applies equally to the Party, the general public, as well as to Party members and cadres too. The deficiencies of the party state are expressed in terms of abstract moral norms and ideals, a manner of discussion that often acts as a substitute for the direct treatment of these problems. Notably, the problem of corruption is seen as emanating from the low moral quality of cadres as individuals rather than being caused by systemic factors. Mirroring the normative orientation of the diagnosis, solutions focus on moral cultivation through cultural education. The proposed enhancements to Party theory and Party-building work – answers to problems such as an incoherent official ideology and the waning organisational ethos of the CCP – are based on the incorporation of elements of tradition. Furthermore, the proposals for improving the governance mechanisms of the party state are expressed through traditional philosophical terms which possess strong ethical undertones ("clean government," or governance based on "people as foundation"). These rhetorical strategies allow the various authors to paint an image of the Party, its policies, and its governance model as guided by moral reflection and care for society.

In painting this image, however, authors conveniently dismiss the programmatic anti-traditionalism of the communist movement and the past periods of radical iconoclasm in the history of the CCP. Only nominal reference is made to the New Culture Movement (17 mentions across 10 articles), the May Fourth Movement (15 mentions across 14 articles), the Cultural Revolution (5 mentions across 3 articles), or the anti-Confucian campaign of the mid-1970s (批孔, *pi Kong* and 批儒, *pi Ru* receive each only 2 mentions). Listed alongside other historical events, their role is limited to that of a chronological caesura in the short sketches praising the development of the communist polity and socialist values. These brief mentions do not convey the fanaticism of the ideologically fuelled anti-culturalism that characterised the CCP throughout most of the twentieth century. Only three articles openly comment on this matter; even then, only briefly. One article calls for not avoiding the discussion on the historical anti-traditionalism of the above events [VIII]. Another identifies Mao's "mistakes in ideological work" as the reason behind the Cultural

Revolution [LXV]. The longest comment is a six-sentence, mid-paragraph insertion which explicitly names the Cultural Revolution as the period when traditional culture was destroyed; this commentary blames the New Culture Movement's "too simple," "too critical," and "even biased" stance on it for effectively "strangling" tradition and "delivering a fatal blow" to any efforts to accommodate traditional ideas and values in the People's Republic [LIII].

Three aspects of the analysed narrative could potentially determine its political longevity and usefulness for the CCP. First, the YCW narrative provides a new dimension for understanding the historical role of the CCP. The current resurfacing of traditional culture in public and political life is framed as the realisation of the natural order of the Chinese cultural and social universe. Such projection is paired with the elevation of the CCP to the role of an exclusive enactor of traditional culture. The Party assigns itself the status of a natural, default inheritor of Chinese civilisational heritage while at the same time claiming the role of being its only legitimate carrier into the future. This new-found role entwines the CCP with the narratives about the past and projections of the future. As a result, the CCP places itself at the centre of China's civilisational narrative – thereby becoming inseparable from discussions on the country's national development.

Second, the YCW narrative can be construed as an attempt to reframe the relationship between the Party and society, with emphasis shifting from the ideological to moral terms. In this new understanding, the CCP acts not as an ideological but a moral vanguard. It leads the progress of China and Chinese society, which is also defined in moral terms. This strategy echoes the mechanisms of imperial rulership whereby the emperor maintains the normative model while paternalistic didacticism requires him to propagate it among his subjects. In other words, the goal of the CCP is no longer defined as the realisation of communism but as the safeguarding of China's distinctive values and model of sociopolitical organisation. This shift towards non-ideological content enlarges the ideational domain safeguarded by the CCP and, as a result, widens the range of available legitimising options.

Third and finally, perhaps the most decisive factor in determining the longevity of Xi Jinping's cultural rhetoric and its function as a strategy of legitimation is the centrality of societal considerations. In

the analysed narrative, the CCP's governance style is conspicuously made synonymous with "people-centrism." Considerations about society underpin various elements of both the diagnosis and solutions presented. The diagnosis focuses on the universal problem of the negative effects of social change on societal values, and points out that cadres are subject to the same morality-distorting forces as ordinary citizens. Raising the awareness of this shared predicament and emphasising that cadres are equals with the masses that they serve can perceivably mobilise thinking in terms of the common good and national interest – and, as such, have a unifying, stabilising, and legitimising effect.

At the level of solutions, the centrality of societal considerations is even more pronounced as the CCP's governance model is recast as people-oriented governance, and the discussion on corruption is replaced by the debate on clean government. As the foundational commitment of the CCP, the pledge to serve the masses is regularly renewed by the Party. The novelty introduced by Xi is that this commitment is currently being reaffirmed by incorporating a vision of the relationship between the rulers and subjects which originated in the polities of ancient China. Paradoxically, in this new cultural narrative of the CCP the societal considerations embedded in Maoism and Confucianism are brought together in mutually strengthening interactions which lead to the enrichment and reappraisal of these respective theories. Tellingly, however, this strong focus on the people does not translate into the provision of agency. Society remains an object of the CCP's actions and endeavours; what changes is only that the objectives of the Party are now framed in moral rather than ideological terms.

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