

The Rise of ‘Republican Fever’ in the PRC: China’s Pre-Communist Legacies and Post- Mao National Identity



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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
DPhil in Politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the
University of Oxford

February 2020

Word count: 97,101

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Abstract

The Chinese Communist Party bases much of its legitimacy on its ‘liberation’ of China from the Nationalist government, and its official historiography describes the Republican era as a dark, chaotic and oppressive period and a part of the ‘Century of Humiliation’. However, during the reform era, while the orthodoxy has persisted, a new image of Republican China has emerged. In books, newspaper articles, documentaries and dramas, pre-communist China has sometimes been portrayed as a vibrant society making remarkable progress in modernization in the face of severe external challenges. In the mid-2000s, the growing fascination with the Republican era became known as ‘Republican fever’. This dissertation seeks to find out why positive reassessments of the Republican era, which deviates from the orthodox historiography, have been allowed to emerge in a country where the media remain under strict state control. Using data gathered mainly from China’s official media. I found that the ‘Republican fever’ has been allowed to emerge and even thrive because, in the reform era, China’s official identity narrative has been gradually evolving from that of a revolutionary socialist state into that of a modernizing nationalist state. While the regime has continued to use the negative view of China’s pre-communist history to maintain its historical legitimacy, it has also been promoting a positive view of aspects of the same period in order to support its post-1978 priorities of modernisation and nationalism. The official reassessment meant that some previously off-limits discursive elements, i.e. Republican legacies, became allowable topics of public discussion. Though the regime imposed its own official framings on these topics, ‘authoritarian fragmentation’ meant that media professionals could act as ‘policy entrepreneurs’ and push for alternative framings of the historical legacies. Collectively, the unofficial framings of Republican legacies led to ‘Republican fever’, which has caused damage to the CCP’s official national identity narrative.

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For my parents,

Yue Zhanping 岳戰平 and
Zhang Baoxin 張保信

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have possibly finished this doctoral project without the guidance and support I was so fortunate to have received over the years. I would like to take a moment to express my gratitude to all those who have helped me along this journey.

I would first of all like to express my heartfelt thanks to Professor Rana Mitter, my doctoral supervisor. Professor Mitter is a world-class scholar on the history of modern China, and I was extremely lucky to be able to benefit from his mentorship and guidance. He was generous with his time despite his very busy schedule as director of the Oxford University China Centre. The high standards he requires of his students will benefit me during the entire academic career I hope to embark on soon.

I am also grateful to scholars who assessed my work and gave valuable feedback at different stages of my doctoral studies – my Transfer of Status assessors Rogier Creemers and Philip Robins; my Confirmation of Status assessors Gordon Barrett and Kate Sullivan de Estrada; and my dissertation examiners Jonathan Sullivan and Jérôme Doyon. The quality of this thesis benefited immensely from their insightful input.

I also benefited from the feedback received at the 2015 graduate conference on ideology in contemporary China held at Oxford, especially the very useful comments from Professor Patricia Thornton. For this, I would like to thank my good friend Dr Olivia Cheung, who organised the conference and invited me to present my research proposal.

My research on ‘Republican fever’ began during my Master’s studies at Cambridge. I am very grateful to Dr Robert Weatherley, my master’s supervisor, who saw potential in the project and helped me turn my initial ideas into a thesis and then into several peer-reviewed co-authored publications, laying a good foundation on which to build my further academic endeavours.

Professor Anne-Marie Brady kindly shared with me her insight on how to research Chinese propaganda and censorship practices. During the course of my research, I also received encouragement and support from professors Hans van de Ven, Frank Dikotter, Arthur Waldron, Perry Link, and Michael Szonyi.

The love from my family sustained me during this at-times difficult journey. My wife Fei Meng took up multiple responsibilities, taking care of the family and at the same time working on her own career, first as a travel writer, then a magazine editor, and now a budding artist. As I write these lines in February 2021, she had been invited by the Royal Society of British Artists to join its “RBA Rising Stars” exhibition. Over the course of my studies, our son Leo grew from a toddler into a young boy who, like his father and grandfather, has a keen interest in history and politics.

Finally, the unconditional love and support from my parents was the single most important factor that motivated me throughout the process and enabled me to pull through in the end. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother Yue Zhanping and the memory of my father Zhang Baoxin, who passed away in 2015. I owe them a huge debt of gratitude which I know I will never be able to repay.

Introduction

Historians and political scientists have long established that the ‘Century of National Humiliation’ is at the root of contemporary Chinese nationalism.¹ China’s humiliating experience at the hands of Western and Japanese imperialists as well as corrupt and traitorous pre-communist regimes during the century, which began with the Opium War in 1840 and ended with the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, is said to be the foundation of the Chinese nationalist discourse today and a key legitimization tool for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).² However, over the past four decades, the Republican era (1912-1949), which is part of the ‘Century of National Humiliation’, has been the subject of a largely positive reassessment in China and has attracted considerable academic and popular interest. The economic, military, intellectual and political history of the era has become a focal point of research and reassessment among contemporary Chinese scholars, media commentators and popular writers.³ During the past 10 years, in particular, the fascination with that era reached fever pitch and became known as ‘Republican fever’ (*Minguo re*) in the popular press.⁴

It is counterintuitive that Republican China, dubbed ‘old China’ in the CCP’s official parlance, has been favourably portrayed in the state-controlled media of the CCP party state. The CCP overthrew the Republic of China in mainland China in 1949 and treated anything related to the old republic as vestiges of the ‘old society’ that must be destroyed. The CCP bases much of its

¹ See Suisheng Zhao, ‘A State-Led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in Post-Tiananmen China’, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 287–302, 1998; Peter Hays Gries, *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (University of California Press, 2004); William A. Callahan, *China: The Pessimist Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

² Ibid.

³ Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China’s Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 299-301.

⁴ Qiang Zhang and Robert Weatherley, ‘The rise of “Republican fever” in the PRC and the implications for CCP legitimacy’, *China Information*, Vol 27, Issue 3, 2013, pp. 277 – 300.

legitimacy on its 'liberation' of China from the Nationalist government and its official historiography describes the Republican era as a dark, chaotic and oppressive period and a part of the 'century of humiliation'. At the same time, China still keeps one of the world's strictest censorship regimes and public discussions are not permitted to deviate from the official line. China is still, in Louisa Lim's words, the 'People's Republic of Amnesia', where the state has successfully prevented most of the population from discussing or even remembering sensitive subjects such as the Tiananmen Massacre.⁵ Under such censorship, why have views of history that are diametrically opposite to the party's orthodox historiography been allowed to appear, let alone thrive?

No systematic scholarly investigation has been conducted on the overall reassessment of Republican China in contemporary PRC. In this dissertation, I aim to go some way towards filling this gap by investigating how China's propaganda authorities have been using the historical reassessment for contemporary objectives. Specifically, I aim to answer the following questions:

- Why has the post-Mao Chinese state allowed, and sometimes even driven, the reassessment of Republican China?
- How have China's propaganda authorities handled the reassessment?
- What is the impact of this reassessment on the legitimacy of CCP rule?

I argue that the CCP has allowed positive reassessments of certain aspects of the Republican-era legacy in the reform era because China's national identity has gradually evolved from that of a 'revolutionary socialist state', which focused on revolution and class struggle, to that of a

⁵ Louisa Lim, *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

‘modernising nationalist state’, by which I mean a state whose main priority is modernisation rather than revolution, and which promises to defend and further the interests of the whole nation rather than selected classes. I also argue that, while the party has continued to legitimise one-party rule with the orthodox, revolutionary socialist view of China’s modern history, it has also attempted to legitimise its reformist and nationalist policies with alternative historical discourses that prioritise modernisation and nationalism.

As Huaiyin Li observed, during the reform era, the historiography of modern Chinese history in the PRC has experienced a profound shift from the ‘revolutionary paradigm’ to the ‘modernisation paradigm’.⁶ In the new historical narrative, the Republican era is depicted as a period during which China was emerging from humiliation and rising as an independent modern state. Unlike the Maoist view of history, which sees the whole century before 1949 as a period of degeneration, during which China sank deeper and deeper into the semi-feudal and semi-colonial abyss, the revisionist view holds that China bottomed out and started rising back up during the Republican era.⁷ Unlike the Maoist view, which focuses exclusively on the CCP’s valiant effort in ending China’s humiliation and backwardness, the revisionist discourse is more inclusive and acknowledges the contribution of non-Communist political forces and figures. Also, unlike the humiliation-focused view of history, which focuses on China’s struggle with hostile foreign imperialists, the revisionist discourse emphasises China’s Western-oriented modernisation and its rising status within the Western-dominated international economic and political order during the Republican era as a result of learning from and cooperating with the West.

⁶ Huaiyin Li, *Reinventing Modern China: Imagination and Authenticity in Chinese Historical Writing*, (University of Hawaii Press, 2013).

⁷ Zhang Haipeng, ‘民国史研究的现状及几个问题的讨论’, in CASS Modern History Institute (ed.) 《中华民国史研究三十年 (1972~2002)》, (Social Sciences Academic Press, Beijing, 2008), pp. 11-16.

However, this revisionist discourse is not entirely compatible with the orthodox historiography and therefore poses some potential problems to the legitimacy of Communist one-party rule. While the inclusiveness of this discourse helps the regime woo erstwhile foes in Taiwan and unite non-Communists within China, it could nevertheless damage the CCP's claim to be the only force that could have 'saved' China and even lead to doubts about the necessity of the Communist revolution. While the emphasis on Western-oriented modernisation helps justify the Deng-ist reforms and opening-up, this discourse could lead to criticisms that the entire Mao era had been a disastrous aberration from the Western-oriented modernisation drive already under way prior to 1949. While democracy is not a subject the authorities would emphasise, revisionist interpretations of history have revived discussions on the Republican ideals of constitutional democracy and led to questions over the continued lack of political reforms on the mainland.

Therefore, reassessing the Republican era presents the CCP with both opportunities and risks. As a result, the propaganda authorities have allowed 'contained contention'⁸ in this field and have adopted a strategy of toleration and control so that the CCP can make use of pre-communist legacies to promote contemporary priorities such as modernisation and national unity, while at the same time preventing it from threatening the CCP's nationalist credentials or promoting Western values such as civil freedoms and democracy. Though more space is allowed for debates, the authorities maintain the hegemony of the orthodox view of history and suppress interpretations of history that run counter to the party's interests. At the same time, the propaganda authorities have actively engaged in representations of history by, for instance, exaggerating the CCP's role in key historical events such as the War against Japan, and

⁸ James Reilly, *Strong Society, Smart State: The Rise of Public Opinion in China's Japan Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p.1.

depicting the PRC as a fulfilment of, rather than an aberration from, the Republican ideals of nationalism, democracy and modernisation.

In view of the above, my hypothesis is: While the CCP in the reform era continues to legitimise one-party rule with the orthodox, revolutionary socialist view of China's modern history, the post-Mao Chinese state has allowed positive reassessments of the Republican-era legacies of nationalism and modernisation because China's national identity has gradually evolved from that of a revolutionary socialist state to that of a modernising nationalist state. However, though the reappraisal of Republican legacies is consistent with the new identity narrative, it contradicts with the old identity narrative, on which the CCP's legitimacy still depends. Therefore, the CCP has sought to control the reassessment to minimise the negative consequences.

This study intends to contribute to the literature on Chinese nationalism. In the literature on identity politics in China, a lot has been written about the relationship between China's national identity and its modern history. However, such writings have almost exclusively focused on the impact of China's negative experience in the 'Century of National Humiliation'. In this dissertation, I will investigate how the Chinese state has been drawing on the positive legacies of the Republic as its identity shifts from a revolutionary socialist state to a modernising nationalist state.

In this introductory chapter, I will first give a brief introduction to the phenomenon known as 'Republican fever'. Section 2 will give a summary of the official framing of the Republican legacies. Section 3 introduces the state actors involved in the official reassessment. Section 4 uses the 'fragmented authoritarianism' framework to explain why the state lost control over

the narrative and allowed alternative, unofficial framings of the Republican legacies to emerge. Section 5 will highlight the selection bias in the literature on Chinese nationalism, which focuses almost exclusively on the impact of ‘national humiliation’ on contemporary Chinese national identity, and point out the need to look at the positive lessons China has been drawing from its modern history. The chapter ends with an introduction to methodology and sources, as well as a brief outline of all the chapters in this dissertation.

1. ‘Republican fever’: Nostalgia for pre-communist China

‘Republican fever’ literally means feverish interest in the Republic of China (ROC). However, what the ‘fever’ actually covers is the ROC before 1949, when the Nationalist government retreated to Taiwan after losing the Chinese Civil War. This is consistent with the CCP’s official position, which holds that the ROC ceased to exist in 1949.⁹ But, of course, the ROC continues to exist in Taiwan. Paradoxically, as the ROC brand came under sustained attacks from pro-independence forces in Taiwan after 2000, its stocks rose unexpectedly on the mainland.

The term ‘Republican fever’ first appeared in Chinese media in 2006. According to author Zhou Weijun, it started after the successful launch of several Republic-themed books in 2005.¹⁰ Publishers saw the market potential and started releasing relevant titles in droves. In 2007, a China Youth Daily reporter found that a big bookshop in Beijing had on its shelves over 700 books with the word “*Minguo*” (The Republic) in their titles. Taking into account the fact that many Republic-themed books did not mention ‘*Minguo*’ in their titles, that was a significant

⁹ Richard Bush, ‘Thoughts on the Republic of China and its Significance’ (keynote address delivered at the Academia Historica in Taipei, Taiwan on September 13, 2012), *Brookings Institution website*, January 24, 2013.

¹⁰ Zhou Weijun, “‘民国热’之下的微言大义”, *Nanfang Dushi Bao*, 20 January 2008.

number. The ‘fever’ was not limited to the publishing industry. Television drama series set in late Qing and the Republican era, known as ‘period dramas’ (*niandai ju*), became a dominant genre on television.¹¹ In the media and on the internet, more and more articles discussing the Republic were being published and circulated.¹²

The ‘Republican fever’ is also an academic phenomenon. As Jeremy Taylor observed in 2009, Republican history has become ‘decidedly fashionable’ in the PRC.¹³ According to Wang Chaoguang, a historian at the China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Republican history has become the most dynamic and productive field in Chinese history studies.¹⁴ It is now a widely held view among Chinese historians that Republican history has evolved from a ‘dangerous subject’ into a ‘prominent subject’.¹⁵

Amidst the ‘Republican fever’, in stark contrast to the dark, oppressive and backward image of ‘old China’ prevalent in Maoist propaganda, a new image of Republican China has emerged. In books, newspaper articles, documentaries and dramas, pre-communist China has sometimes been portrayed as a vibrant and colourful society offering more academic and media freedoms than the PRC ever has. Despite the chaos and warfare, it is said to have made remarkable progress in modernization and economic development. The KMT government is also credited

¹¹ Chen Mo, ‘年代剧，最具娱乐效果的电视剧类型’, *New Weekly (Xin Zhoukan)*, Vol. 330, 1 September 2010. <http://www.newweekly.com.cn/index/newsview.php?id=2853>

¹² Zhang Wei, ‘虚虚实实"民国热"', *China Youth Daily*, 24 October 2007. http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2007-10/24/content_1931011.htm

¹³ Jeremy E. Taylor, ‘Discovering a Nationalist heritage in present-day Taiwan’, *China Heritage Quarterly*, No. 17, March 2009. http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/articles.php?searchterm=017_taiwan.inc&issue=017

¹⁴ Wang Chaoguang, ‘Recent research on Republican Chinese history’, *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, 2.1 (2008): 89-97.

¹⁵ Liu Genqin, ‘《中华民国史》：近代史研究的阅兵式’, *Nanfang Dushi Bao*, 25 September, 2011. <http://www.zhbc.com.cn/zhsj/pad/report/bookreviewinfo.html;jsessionid=93F5353BFE9429FD1A3F41363D86F560?id=57ab6d7fb29d11e59f2f0103ea2f9492>. The terms ‘dangerous subject’ (险学) and ‘prominent subject’ (显学) have the same pronunciation - ‘xianxue’.

for ending foreign domination over China and setting the country on course to become a great power.¹⁶

The ‘Republican fever’ has shown considerable strength and resilience. In 2010, four years after the first media mention of the phenomenon, well-known artist and social critic Chen Danqing came up with a new concept – ‘Republican temperament’ (*minguo fan'er*), by which he referred to the gentility, forthrightness and sincerity of the Republican generations.¹⁷ According to a Global Times article, Chen’s new concept drove the public discussion of the Republican era ‘to a new height’.¹⁸ In 2011, as China marked the centennial of the 1911 Revolution, the ‘Republican fever’ reached ever higher temperatures and the constitutionalist and democratic ideals of the Republican revolutionaries became hot topics for discussions in the media.¹⁹ Though the ‘fever’ as a publishing phenomenon declined after 2011,²⁰ possibly as a result of both reader fatigue and increased ideological control, interest in the Republican era persisted, notably among the younger generation. In 2013, some university students in South China had their graduation photos taken wearing Republican-era student uniforms. It soon became a trend in universities across the country.²¹

Even under President Xi Jinping’s tightened political control,²² the positive portrayal of Republican legacies continued. For example, in 2015, while the propaganda around the 70th

¹⁶ Zhang and Weatherley, 2013.

¹⁷ Hu Jiujiu, ‘一种趣味、一种风尚、一种美学：陈丹青民国问答录’, *New Weekly (Xin Zhoukan)*, Issue 330, 1 September 2010. <http://www.newweekly.com.cn/index/newsview.php?id=2838>

¹⁸ Wang Fanfan, ‘A Republic revisited’, *Global Times*, 23 May 2011. <http://special.globaltimes.cn/2011-05/658205.html>

¹⁹ See, for example, Hu Shuli, ‘辛亥百年 怎样纪念’, *Caixin Zhoukan (Caixin Weekly)*, 8 October, 2011. <http://opinion.caixin.com/2011-10-08/100312473.html>

²⁰ Ma Wei, ‘“民国热”阅读为何降温？’, *Tengxun Wenhua*, 11 March, 2016. <http://cul.qq.com/a/20160311/010024.htm>

²¹ Dong Xin and Li Zewei, ‘教授谈民国风毕业照：是对那个时代大学的怀念’, *Beijing Youth Daily*, 24 June, 2014. http://js.ifeng.com/humanity/detail_2014_06/24/2479735_0.shtml

²² Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 37-42.

anniversary of the end of World War II focused on the CCP's role, limited credit was still given to KMT forces.²³ Republic-themed dramas and films have also continued emerging. In January 2018, 'Forever Young' (*wuwen xidong*), a film on the history of Beijing's elite Tsinghua University spanning a hundred years, was released and became a major box office hit.²⁴ The film had been completed in 2012 but had been suspended for six years by censors.²⁵ But the final product, which had presumably gone through numerous rounds of censorship checks, still portrayed Republican-era intellectuals, including those who opposed the Communist Party and later fled to Taiwan, as pioneers of China's modernisation and patriotic struggle against Japanese aggression.²⁶

To sum up, 'Republican fever' refers to a high level of interest among Chinese academia, popular media, publishing and film industries in the politics, economics, society, intellectual life and education, etc. during the Republican era (1912-1949), which began in the mid-2000s, culminated around 2011 and to some extent still persists today despite the tightened ideological control under Xi.

I have previously published a paper giving an overview of the 'Republican fever',²⁷ and this study is not just an expanded or more detailed version of it. As the topic of this dissertation makes clear, this study is not about 'Republican fever' per se, but about its rise. It is not an analysis of the 'fever' itself, but an attempt to find out why it was possible for the 'fever' to

²³ Chen Binhua, Li Hanfang and Li Zhihui, '记忆的力量——共同纪念抗战胜利催生两岸关系发展正能量', Xinhua news agency, 2 September, 2015. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-09/02/c_1116451641.htm

²⁴ '《无问西东》票房终破 7 亿 曝家训片段', *Xinhua news agency website*, 8 February, 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/ent/2018-02/08/c_1122387417.htm

²⁵ Huang An, '《无问西东》引热议 四代清华毕业生故事看哭观众', *Guangzhou Daily*, 16 January, 2018. <http://media.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0116/c40606-29766362.html>

²⁶ Louisa Chiang and Perry Link, 'Before the Revolution', *New York Review of Books*, 7 June, 2018. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2018/06/07/eileen-chang-before-the-revolution/>

²⁷ Zhang and Weatherley, 2013.

emerge and persist in a tightly controlled media environment. In other words, this study focuses on why and how censorship on Republican-era legacies gradually relaxed after 1978, which allowed pre-communist China to be reassessed in a positive way and eventually led to ‘Republican fever’. For the purpose of this study, therefore, it is crucial to understand how the positive reassessment of the pre-communist era began and developed in the reform era.

2. The official reassessment of Republican legacies

It must be clarified that, though the CCP’s reassessment of Republican-era legacies led to ‘Republican fever’, it was not an intended result. In most cases, pre-communist legacies were officially praised or rehabilitated despite their Republican background, rather than because of it. The party-state chose to reassess certain legacies of Republican China in a selective and utilitarian manner, and to frame them in a way that serves its political needs of the day.

The official reassessment has taken place against the background of the PRC’s national identity transition from a revolutionary socialist state to a modernising nationalist state, during which the orthodox Marxist-Leninist doctrine has given way to a new direction towards Western-oriented modernisation and an inclusive, pan-Chinese form of nationalism, which favours national unity over class struggle. These new priorities are at odds with the CCP’s orthodox ideology and past practice. Therefore, at the beginning of reforms in 1978, the party had little historical resources of its own that it could draw on to support its new policies. Under such circumstances, the CCP toned down its routine criticisms of the pre-communist era and started to selectively harvest useful material from the history of Republican China in support of its new propaganda agenda.

According to Dietram Scheufele, framing influences how audiences think about issues ‘by invoking interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of incoming information’.²⁸ To serve its new policies in the reform era, the CCP adopted new interpretive schemas that were very different from those used in the Mao era. Shifts in the party’s priorities, policies and ideology over the past 40 years mean that these schemas have kept evolving, which have in turn caused variations in discourses on Republican-era legacies over time.

When reform started in 1978, Deng Xiaoping and his fellow reformers shifted the CCP’s priority from class struggle to economic modernisation. To serve this new priority, CCP propagandists began reframing selected elements of the Republican history to promote modernisation and national unity. While the Mao regime was obsessed with revolution and rejected all reforms in modern Chinese history as reactionary, the Deng regime, in an effort to justify reform, acknowledged that the ‘constitutionalists’ and other pre-1949 reformers were progressive forces.²⁹ While Sun Yat-sen, founder of Republican China, used to be praised for his socialist inclinations, he was now hailed for his desire to modernise China and his willingness to attract foreign capital and learn from the West.³⁰ The bourgeoisie were demonised under Mao as blood-sucking exploiters, but the Deng regime, in an attempt to encourage entrepreneurship and attract investment from the overseas Chinese community, started to rehabilitate pre-1949 Chinese capitalists as patriotic modernisers.³¹ During the Mao era, Chinese intellectuals who had been active in the Republican era, except for some left-wing activists such as Lu Xun, were criticised as reactionaries. But as Deng’s leadership saw the need to rally support among Chinese intellectuals for reform, those who used to be lambasted

²⁸ Dietram A. Scheufele, ‘Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication’, *Mass Communication & Society*, 3:2-3, 2000, pp. 297-316.

²⁹ See Chapter 4.

³⁰ See Chapter 2.

³¹ Ibid.

for calling for Westernisation, such as Hu Shi, began to receive praise for championing modernisation.³²

Another crucial element contributing to the reassessment was the changing policy in regard to Taiwan. Though the CCP refused to recognise it, the Republic of China still existed on the island of Taiwan and was ruled by the CCP's archenemy, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). CCP leaders saw Taiwan as unfinished business of the Chinese Civil War and a symbol of continued humiliation at the hands of imperialists. Deng listed reuniting Taiwan as one of his top priorities along with economic modernisation and normalisation with the US.³³ To achieve peaceful reunification, Deng adopted a more conciliatory strategy towards the KMT regime. As a result, anti-KMT rhetoric receded, allowing the emergence of a more positive depiction of the KMT and certain Republican-era political, military and intellectual figures who fled to Taiwan in 1949. Most importantly, the history of the War against Japan (1939-1945) was given a significant reappraisal. While the Maoist orthodox insisted that it was the CCP that led China's war effort and portrayed the KMT as ineffective or even traitorous, the new narrative increasingly depicted CCP and KMT forces as comrades-in-arms united in their common patriotic fight against a foreign aggressor.³⁴

The 1989 Tiananmen student movement also had profound implications for the discourses on China's pre-communist legacies. After the massacre, stability became the CCP's biggest concern, and the regime adjusted its propaganda messages to promote nationalism, reject Western influences and discourage 'radicalism'. Praise for Sun Yat-sen's economic legacy

³² See Chapter 3.

³³ Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 478-279.

³⁴ Rana Mitter, 'China's "Good War": Voices, Locations and Generations in the Interpretations of the War of Resistance to Japan', in Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter (eds.) *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia* (Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 172-191.

continued, but the emphasis on his ‘open-ism’ was tempered by a new focus on his economic nationalism.³⁵ In an attempt to use Chinese traditions to fend off Western influences, *Guoxue* (national studies), a Republican-era academic tradition, received backing from the party leadership and was promoted nationwide.³⁶ The so-called ‘neo-conservatism’ thought, which favoured gradualism over radical change, gained traction among senior party leaders. As a result, the 1911 Revolution, which led to the founding of the Republic, was increasingly represented in the media as a case of ‘radicalism’ disrupting modernisation, in an apparent warning against attempts at political change.³⁷

In the new millennium, the official reassessment of Republican legacies was greatly boosted by two factors. One of these was the changes in cross-strait relations. CCP-KMT rapprochement stalled in the 1990s, when KMT leader and ROC president Lee Teng-hui sought to expand Taiwan’s international space in defiance of Beijing. But after Chen Shui-bian, leader of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was elected president in 2000,³⁸ the CCP moved to court the KMT, now in opposition, in order to contain the rise of the pro-independence camp.³⁹ As a result, censorship was relaxed on media content about the Republican era and the CCP’s erstwhile enemies such as Chiang Kai-shek, who used to be portrayed as villains and traitors, were given much more positive portrayals and credited for their patriotism.⁴⁰ The benign conditions for the reassessment persisted after the KMT’s Ma Ying-jeou became president in 2008 and adopted pro-China policies.⁴¹

³⁵ See Chapter 2.

³⁶ See Chapter 3.

³⁷ See Chapter 4.

³⁸ Christopher R. Hughes, ‘Negotiating National Identity in Taiwan: Between Nativisation and De-Sinicisation’, in Robert Ash, John W. Garver, Penelope Prime (eds.), *Taiwan’s Democracy: Economic and Political Challenges* (Routledge, 2013), pp. 51-74.

³⁹ Sheng Lijun, *China and Taiwan: Cross-Strait Relations under Chen Shui-Bian* (London: Zed Books, 2002), pp. 72-75.

⁴⁰ A prominent example is Yang Tianshi, *找寻真实的蒋介石* (Shanxi Renmin Chubanshe, 2008).

⁴¹ Jonathan Sullivan and Eliyahu Sapir, ‘Ma Ying-jeou’s Presidential Discourse’, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 41, Issue 3, 2012, pp. 33–68.

The second factor was globalisation and China's rise to great power status. China joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001 and became the world's biggest trading nation within a few years' time. The new reality meant that Republican legacies needed to be fit into a set of new frames. Pre-1949 Chinese businessmen from places like Shanxi and Ningbo were eulogised for their international business ventures and hailed as predecessors of today's Chinese business elite on the global stage. The once humiliating semi-colonial history of treaty ports such as Tianjin and Qingdao was reframed as historical legacy of openness and assets for current globalisation projects.⁴² In the regime's drive to build 'world-class universities', legacies of Republican-era universities such as Xinan Lianda, which were built on Western models, were hailed as a 'treasure trove' for PRC universities to draw lessons from.⁴³ The history of China's War against Japan was elevated to new heights and presented as evidence that China had long been a 'responsible great power'.⁴⁴

Xi Jinping's heightened ideological control and the intensified crackdown on 'historical nihilism' have rolled back the reassessments to a certain extent. But as most of the above-mentioned political priorities remain valid, the propaganda framing of much of the Republican legacies is still useful to the regime. For example, the historical international links of border cities and former treaty ports have been used to support Xi's 'Belt and Road Initiative'.⁴⁵ Therefore, much of the result of the reassessment can still be seen in CCP propaganda output despite tightened ideological restrictions.

⁴² See Chapter 2.

⁴³ See Chapter 4.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 6.

⁴⁵ See Chapter 2.

3. Different actors taking part in the reassessment

A variety of state actors were involved in the reassessment of Republican legacies, including the propaganda system, the United Front Work Department and local governments at different levels. Though they are all parts of the party-state, they target different audiences and their objectives are not always consistent with one another.

The ideological and propaganda establishment

The most important state actor involved in the process is obviously the propaganda system. The CCP Central Committee's Propaganda Department (CPD) has a guiding role over the propaganda system and is responsible for sustaining the party's dominance in the fields of ideology and culture.⁴⁶ The CPD is led by the Central Leading Group on Propaganda and Ideological Work (CLGPIW), which is headed by a member of the Politburo Standing Committee.⁴⁷ In addition, most of the CCP's top leaders have taken a close interest in propaganda and ideological work.⁴⁸ The party leadership's guidance on propaganda work has not always been uniform and consistent. When there was ideological division at the top, fragmentation and bargaining took place even within the propaganda system. This was especially evident during the early reform era,⁴⁹ when reformist leaders such as Hu Yaobang wanted the CPD to be an engine of reform, while leftist conservatives such as Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun tried to thwart what they saw as 'bourgeois liberalisation'.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Yuezhi Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2008), pp. 24-25.

⁴⁷ David Shambaugh, 'China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy', *The China Journal*, No. 57, 2007, pp. 25-58.

⁴⁸ Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing dictatorship: Propaganda and thought work in contemporary China* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), pp. 9-10.

⁴⁹ Vogel, pp. 553-591.

⁵⁰ Brady, 2008, pp. 40-41.

As this study shows, while the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the state-run think-tank controlled by the CPD, took the initiative to rehabilitate the legacy of Republican-era liberal intellectual Hu Shi in the late 1970s, it was prevented from publishing his selected works by a senior leader in the CCP Central Committee on ideological grounds.⁵¹ While the liberal-leaning CPD head Zhu Houze praised Republican-era Peking University president Cai Yuanpei for his inclusive academic policy, leftist ideologue Deng Liqun opposed it.⁵²

But it would be simplistic to assume that liberal reformers and leftist conservatives had polar opposite views on Republican legacies. The reality was much more complicated, as individuals may have different views on different aspects of it. A striking example is Hu Qiaomu, a prominent leftist leader who wielded immense influence in Deng's government. He had reservations over rehabilitating the pre-1949 liberal intellectual legacy, but was instrumental in starting the favourable reappraisal of the Nationalist war effort during the War against Japan, though he later voiced displeasure that it ended up going too far.⁵³

Tussles over historiography within the propaganda system did not end with the ideological tussles in the 1980s. For example, *Towards the Republic*, a 2003 television drama series which radically reinterpreted the history around the 1911 Republican Revolution, was written and produced with active involvement of the CPD. But the drama, which included unusually positive portrayals of the Qing court and was unflattering about the 'radical' revolutionaries, triggered opposition from veteran members of the propaganda establishment who were

⁵¹ See Chapter 3.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See Chapter 5.

determined to defend the orthodox historiography. After the row reached the Central Committee, the series was pulled.⁵⁴

United Front Work Department

Another key player in this process - the United Front Work Department (UFWD) - is the CCP's main organisation responsible for managing the non-party elite to ensure it is both supportive and useful to the ruling party. The non-party elite the UFWD is tasked to work with include intellectuals, religious communities, former KMT figures and former capitalists.⁵⁵ In the early reform era, the UFWD worked to win back the support of China's alienated intellectuals and the former businesspeople who had been persecuted under Mao.⁵⁶ It was also responsible for developing and maintaining relations with influential people in Taiwan and Hong Kong.⁵⁷ As Republican-era businesspeople, intellectuals, politicians, military leaders and their descendants on both sides of the Taiwan Strait were all groups the UFWD was tasked to woo, the department was naturally motivated to please those people by pushing for positive reappraisals of their historical records.

Local governments

In the reform era, local governments at different levels, in their attempts to develop the local economy, have been actively encouraging entrepreneurial behaviour among the local population and attracting investment from outside. Some local authorities began developing

⁵⁴ See Chapter 4.

⁵⁵ Tong Zhan, 'The United Front Work System and the Nonparty Elite', in Carol Lee Hamrin & Suisheng Zhao (eds.) *Decision-making in Deng's China: Perspectives from Insiders* (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁵⁶ Gerry Groot, *Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Party, United Front Work, Corporatism, and Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 110.

⁵⁷ Tong, 1995.

new discourses of regional cultures and identities that were consistent with marketization and internationalisation.⁵⁸ Legacies of commercialism and cosmopolitanism in the pre-1949 era were key in this new wave of regional identity construction. Driven by local needs, some local governments have gone further than the CPD in their positive reappraisals of Republican legacies. For example, Shanxi mobilised the memory of Yan Xishan, a local KMT warlord who had fought against the CCP and therefore had never been formally rehabilitated, as a key aspect of its provincial legacy of capitalistic modernisation; and the Jiangxi provincial government distanced itself from the Communist revolutionary legacy the province was known for.⁵⁹ In order to help their local universities raise their prestige and attract alumni funding, some local governments also supported the universities' attempts to resume their pre-1949 names, sometimes despite concerns of the central government.⁶⁰

This phenomenon can be understood under the framework of 'Fragmented Authoritarianism', which challenges the conventional wisdom that assumes that policy outcomes in China are driven primarily by power or an aggregation of a rational division of labour and interest.⁶¹ The fragmented authoritarianism model argues that authority below the very peak of the Chinese political system is fragmented and disjointed.⁶² It holds that power can be manipulated at the policy implementation stages and that policy rationality is constantly being undermined by the self-interest, short-term and parochial calculations of institutional actors. Bureaucratic bargaining takes place at and between all levels and, as a result, policy outcomes often bear

⁵⁸ Feng Chongyi, 'Seeking Lost Codes in the Wilderness: The Search for a Hainanese Culture', *The China Quarterly*, No. 160 (Dec., 1999), pp. 1036-1056.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 2.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 3.

⁶¹ Andrew Mertha and Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard, 'Introduction', in Brødsgaard (ed.) *Chinese Politics as Fragmented Authoritarianism: Earthquakes, Energy and Environment* (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 3.

⁶² Kenneth G. Lieberthal, 'Introduction: The "Fragmented Authoritarianism" Model and Its Limitations', in Lieberthal and David M. Lampton (eds.), *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 8.

little resemblance to the policy-makers' original intent.⁶³ The result of such 'fragmentation' is particularly striking in the representation of Republican legacies in sections of the media, which will be dealt with below.

4. Unofficial framings led to 'Republican fever'

As mentioned before, 'Republican fever' was actually an unintended consequence of the official reassessment of Republican legacies and the CCP is not entirely comfortable with some of the historical reinterpretations that emerged as part of the 'fever'. But in an authoritarian country with strict media control, why did the state fail to maintain effective control over the media narrative?

The state's failure to monopolise the framing of Republican legacies can be understood under the 'fragmented authoritarianism' framework. As Qian Gang and David Bandurski observes, Despite the CCP's continued emphasis on 'guiding public opinion', media commercialisation, developing norms of journalistic professionalism, and the growth of new media have eroded the CCP's monopoly over the public agenda and opened a limited public sphere.⁶⁴ According to Andrew Mertha, journalists and editors working in Chinese media sometimes act as 'policy entrepreneurs' who can often gain influence through issue framing - repackaging existing ideas in new ways or by rearticulating how an issue is described.⁶⁵ In other words, though official propaganda agencies have 'official framings' of certain issues, media workers can sometimes

⁶³ Mertha and Brødsgaard, 2017, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Qian Gang and David Bandurski, 'China's emerging public sphere: The impact of media commercialization, professionalism, and the Internet in an era of transition', in Susan L. Shirk (ed.), *Changing Media, Changing China* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 38–76.

⁶⁵ Andrew Mertha, "'Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0': Political Pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process", *The China Quarterly*, No. 200 (Dec., 2009), pp. 995-1012.

develop ‘unofficial framings’ of the same issues and thereby express their own views that are often inconsistent with the official propaganda message.

Media workers who strive to push specific social, ideological or economic viewpoints in their work ‘with firmness but subtlety’, termed ‘advocate journalists’ by Jonathan Hassid, can be found in abundance in many of China’s top market-oriented newspapers and magazines.⁶⁶ As Elin Sæther found, in order to avoid party-state sanctions, critical journalists in China consciously represent their journalistic work as being within the boundaries of the politically acceptable. One of the strategies they adopt is ‘normalisation’: ‘they have made use of existing discursive elements and rearticulated the media discourse, in order to construe their own practice as legitimate and conducive to the public good’.⁶⁷ In Maria Repnikova’s words, these critical journalists delve into sensitive areas and ‘provide an alternative framing to that deployed by propaganda journalists on issues of high importance to Chinese citizens’.⁶⁸

As a result of ‘authoritarian fragmentation’, Chinese journalists, editors and media commentators were able to frame Republican legacies in different ways from the official framing preferred by the CPD. While the Republican-era economic legacies were officially framed as China’s own tradition of entrepreneurship, openness and globalisation which contemporary reformers can draw on, they were unofficially framed as evidence that the Communist revolution hampered economic development and socialism has been a failure.⁶⁹ While the pre-1949 intellectuals were officially framed as either modernisers or defenders of

⁶⁶ Jonathan Hassid, ‘Four Models of the Fourth Estate: A Typology of Contemporary Chinese Journalists’, *The China Quarterly*, No. 208 (December 2011), pp. 813-832.

⁶⁷ Elin Sæther, ‘A New Political Role? Discursive Strategies of Critical Journalists in China’, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, No. 4, 2008, pp. 5-29.

⁶⁸ Maria Repnikova, *Media Politics in China: Improvising Power under Authoritarianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 5.

⁶⁹ See Chapter 2.

Chinese traditions, both of whom offer valuable lessons for contemporary China, their legacies were unofficially framed as proof of the importance of intellectual freedom and academic independence, as well as evidence that pre-communist China was culturally superior to Communist China.⁷⁰ Though the CPD endorsed the revisionist framing of the 1911 Revolution as a failure of ‘radicalism’, it was sometimes unofficially framed as part of the common effort by both revolutionaries and political reformers to bring about constitutionalist government, which the PRC has yet to achieve.⁷¹ The Nationalist effort during the War against Japan was reassessed and officially framed as part of the united patriotic fight against aggression led by the CCP, but it was unofficially framed as evidence that the CCP’s role in defending the nation was far less important than it claims.⁷²

The CCP did not intend to carry out a wholesale reassessment of Republican China. What it did instead was to selectively harvest useful legacies from the Republican era and frame them in a way that benefits its new policy directions and priorities in the reform era. However, the official reassessment meant that some previously off-limits discursive elements, i.e. Republican legacies, became allowable topics of public discussion. Though the regime imposed its own official framings on these topics, ‘authoritarian fragmentation’ meant that media professionals could act as ‘policy entrepreneurs’ and push for alternative framings of the historical legacies. Collectively, the unofficial framings of Republican legacies led to ‘Republican fever’, which has caused damage to the CCP’s official national identity narrative.

⁷⁰ See Chapter 3.

⁷¹ See Chapter 4.

⁷² See Chapter 5 and 6. Also see Qiang Zhang & Robert Weatherley, ‘Owning up to the past: the KMT's role in the war against Japan and the impact on CCP legitimacy’, *The Pacific Review*, 26:3, 2013, pp. 221-242.

5. Focussing on ‘humiliation’: Selection bias in the literature on Chinese nationalism

The phenomenon of ‘Republican fever’ has not been given adequate attention in the literature on Chinese nationalism, but it is now an unmissable aspect of contemporary Chinese national identity narrative and must be considered as we further develop our understanding of Chinese nationalism.

Most of the existing literature on China’s identity politics has focused on the anti-foreign strand of Chinese nationalism. In this line of research, scholars have mainly studied the impact of China’s negative experience with the Western dominated international order, especially during the so-called ‘Century of National Humiliation’. For example, Suisheng Zhao argues that Chinese nationalism is rooted in the ‘humiliating century’ following the Opium War. According to Zhao, ‘Because the origin of Chinese nationalism was a reaction to foreign suppressions, it has contained strong anti-foreign, especially anti-Western, mentality.’⁷³ Unlike Zhao, who argues the surge of Chinese nationalism in the 1990s was ‘state-led’, Peter Hays Gries stresses the bottom-up nature of this phenomenon. Nonetheless, he shares Zhao’s emphasis on the importance of the narrative of humiliation and victimisation, which he says is ‘central to Chinese nationalism today’.⁷⁴ In his 2010 book *China: The Pessimist Nation*, William Callahan shows that two decades after its launch, the ‘patriotic education campaign’ is still expanding and the ‘Century of National Humiliation’ discourse remains both very official and very popular. According to Callahan, while Chinese textbooks seek to legitimise the modern Chinese state by linking it to China’s ancient glory, they also include a heavy dose of the ‘century of national humiliation’ discourse knitting together all the negative events in

⁷³ Suisheng Zhao, ‘A State-Led Nationalism’.

⁷⁴ Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism*, p. 45.

the century preceding the founding of the PRC which can be blamed on foreigners and China's pre-communist regimes.⁷⁵

This focus on the narrative of the 'Century of Humiliation' has some merit, but may have gone too far. In a review of the literature on Chinese nationalism, Allen Carlson notes that 'the literature has convincingly demonstrated that a pervasive collective memory of past national experiences plays a central role in framing the content of modern Chinese nationalist sentiment'. Carlson summarises three main points of this historical anchor - a sense of superiority over the past greatness of successive Chinese empires, an equally endemic memory of the more recent historical disgrace stemming from the so-called 'century of national humiliation', and the CCP's 'valiant efforts to save China from its degrading period of semi-colonisation'. But the literature has also shown that the prominence of such an interpretation of Chinese history is not a natural product of its past, but has been consciously and carefully crafted by the PRC regime.⁷⁶

However, Carlson argues that there are some 'fundamental limitations inherent in relying solely on the intellectual paradigm of nationalism to understand and explain contemporary Chinese identity politics'. Citing the seminal work by Lowell Dittmer and Samuel Kim, he calls for a 'broader survey of the construction of national identity in China'.⁷⁷ In Dittmer and Kim's 1993 volume, they argue that 'China's search for a national identity has been unusually tumultuous', characterised by a rotation through a 'series of roles'.⁷⁸ Similarly, Carlson stresses the fluidity of national identity formation in China, and says China's national identity is 'more contested

⁷⁵ William A. Callahan, *China: The Pessimist Nation*, pp. 12-14.

⁷⁶ Allen Carlson, 'A flawed perspective: the limitations inherent within the study of Chinese nationalism', *Nations and Nationalism* 15 (1), 2009, pp. 20-35.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Lowell Dittmer and Samuel Kim, 'Preface', in Dittmer and Kim (eds.) *China's Quest for National Identity* (Cornell University Press: 1993), p. xi.

than we often imagine it to be'. He argues 'there is an especially mixed cauldron of identity-shaping influences within contemporary China' and that even the Chinese state itself is 'experimenting with the availability of new national identities' and 'juggling a host of not always compatible identity constructs'.⁷⁹

Other scholars have also emphasised the diversity and fluidity of Chinese identity narratives. David Shambaugh points out that there are a spectrum of sometimes conflicting discourses on China's international identity, from nativism, realism to globalism.⁸⁰ Yongnian Zheng stresses the 'changing aspects of Chinese national identities and nationalism' and the role of the state in such changes. According to Zheng, 'the State and other institutions can change their perception of national and international identities in order to adjust themselves to changing domestic and international environments.'⁸¹

The existing literature has failed to capture the fluidity and complexity of the various factors shaping China's national identity. In her analysis of 'ideologies of delayed industrialisation', Mary Matossian points out that in industrially underdeveloped countries, ideological positions vis-à-vis the West are 'frequently ambiguous, embracing the polar extremes of xenophobia and xenophilia'.⁸² Developmental nationalism, which is one of these 'ideologies of delayed industrialisation', contains an element of anti-foreignism, as it opposes imperialism and seeks to challenge Western domination. But it also advocates learning from the West and cooperating with the West as long as it is beneficial to national development.⁸³ Anti-foreign nationalism in

⁷⁹ Carlson, 2009.

⁸⁰ David Shambaugh, 'Coping with a Conflicted China', *The Washington Quarterly*, 34:1, 2011, pp. 7-27.

⁸¹ Yongnian Zheng, *Discovering Chinese nationalism in China: Modernization, identity, and international relations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 12-14.

⁸² Mary Matossian, 'Ideologies of Delayed Industrialization: Some Tensions and Ambiguities', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Apr., 1958), pp. 217-228.

⁸³ See A. James Gregor, *Marxism, China, & Development: Reflections on Theory and Reality* (Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 2000), p. 165.

China, which has attracted the most attention from China analysts in the West, may well just be an aspect of China's developmental nationalism which becomes salient when the regimes feels threatened but which is played down at other times. For example, the 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade provoked both official and popular protests in China, which were touted as prime examples of a new anti-foreign Chinese nationalism.⁸⁴ But one year later, on the first anniversary of the bombing, the Chinese government played it down and made sure there were no protests on the eve of an important vote in US Congress on trade relations.⁸⁵

This selection bias inherent in the literature can cause scholars to paint a skewed picture of identity politics in China today. If one looks for nationalistic voices in official and popular forums, chances are he will find anti-foreign, anti-Westernisation voices that oppose Western values, advocate China's own model of development, and promote a confrontational foreign policy challenging international order. But the almost exclusive focus on the officially-propagated 'Century of National Humiliation' narrative can blind scholars from alternative understandings of history and identity narratives that have played significant roles in post-Mao China. Some of these competing views of history and identity, though incompatible with the official historiography, are nevertheless adopted by the state when it is convenient for it. Therefore, a more balanced understanding of the different views of China's modern history that coexist in China's official and popular narratives can help us see the bigger picture of Chinese nationalism.

⁸⁴ Gries.

⁸⁵ Philippa Meagher, 'China: 1st Anniversary of Belgrade Embassy Bombing', *Associated Press*, 8 May 2000. <http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/CHINA-IST-ANNIVERSARY-OF-BELGRADE-EMBASSY-BOMBING-2-/34be89e609d50d35afd367cd7403ca61>

Role of pre-communist legacies in new national identity formation

The humiliation-focused narrative is not the only way of understanding China's modern history. The emergence of 'Republican fever' shows that, during the reform era, a significant part of China's pre-communist legacy has been reassessed in a positive manner and 'humiliation' is no longer the only lens through which to see China's modern history. In this dissertation, I argue that the reason why such a positive reassessment of pre-communist China has been possible in today's China, which still practises strict media control, is because the state has allowed it to happen. In fact, as this study will show, post-Mao China has been using legacies from the Republican era to support its form of developmental nationalism⁸⁶ and the national identity of a modernising nationalist state.

Anti-foreign nationalism is important to the Chinese state, which uses it as an instrument of regime legitimisation⁸⁷ and a foreign policy tool.⁸⁸ But xenophobia alone can do little to help China achieve its other important objectives, such as peaceful reunification, economic development, the expansion of its international influence, and the promotion of national pride. As Lucian Pye wrote in 1993, as a result of the Chinese state's unrelenting attack on 'both the modernized Chinese and the traditional symbols and ideals of the collective memory of the Chinese people', Chinese nationalism lacked a 'substantive core' and therefore could not satisfy the country's need for 'the unifying forces of nationalism'.⁸⁹ In other words, Chinese

⁸⁶ According to A. James Gregor, developmental nationalists, unlike *laissez-faire* economic liberals and Marxists-Leninists, were 'convinced that the survival of their respective nations necessarily involved the expansion and intensification of industrial and commercial life', and emphasised 'the restoration or affirmation of the nation's dignity and security in a world of nations'. See Gregor, 2000, p. 165.

⁸⁷ Zhao, 1998.

⁸⁸ See Jessica Chen Weiss, *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China's Foreign Relations*, (Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁸⁹ Lucian Pye, 'How China's Nationalism was Shanghaied', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 29 (Jan., 1993), pp. 107-133

nationalism suffers from a lack of meaning in terms of both traditional culture and legacies of modernisation from pre-communist China.

Therefore, in its new identity formation in the reform era, the Chinese state has been drawing on the positive legacy of Republican China to serve its new priorities of modernisation and nationalism. Some of the ‘Old China’ legacies, such as China’s achievements in modernisation and international engagement, its victory in the Second World War and the temporary unity between the Nationalist and Communist rivals for the national interest, the intellectual achievements in both learning from the West and researching China’s own traditional culture, and the significant but ultimately unsuccessful attempts to build a constitutional democracy, etc. have become all too relevant to post-Mao China and can help solve some of the most difficult identity dilemmas the PRC is faced with during the post-Mao era.

Drawing on legacies of Republican China has been part of the party-state’s strategy to solve its post-Mao identity crisis. For example, the modernisation experience and the development of capitalism with the help of international capital during the Republican era could serve as a valuable model, precedent and justification for the economic reforms. Also, acknowledging the role of non-Communist political forces in China’s modernisation could help thaw relations with Taiwan’s Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), a necessary first step towards cross-strait rapprochement and peaceful reunification.

In fact, as this study will show, the Chinese propaganda authorities began exploiting positive nationalist legacies from the Republican era shortly after the beginning of the reform and opening up in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a decade before ‘humiliation’ became a major theme of the post-Tiananmen ‘patriotic education’. The nationalist slogan of the time –

‘Rejuvenate China’ – was borrowed from Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the Republic. The ‘Chinese nation’, also a term coined in the run-up to the founding of the Republic, also came back into prominence as the CCP attempted to shift from a class-based nationalism to an inclusive form of nationalism which covers Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas Chinese communities. Sun’s idea of utilising foreign capital to make China strong was eagerly cited to provide a nationalist justification for Deng Xiaoping’s policy of opening-up.

These are just part of the reason why the Chinese state has been drawing on Republican-era legacies. In this study, I argue that, though the CCP uses the ‘Century of National Humiliation’ as a key basis for its legitimacy and its official historiography sees the PRC as a clean break from China’s pre-communist past, the Central Propaganda Department has tacitly allowed and has sometimes even actively promoted a different view of history which focuses on the continuity between the Republican era and post-Mao China. The Maoist regime’s single-minded focus on class struggle and revolution meant that it did not leave a legacy that could be utilised to meet new challenges in the reform era - economic development, national unity, and peaceful reunification. To remedy this, the Communist state turned to the pre-1949 era for political resources that could be used to justify and facilitate economic reforms, bolster national unity, and improve relations with the political and business elite in Taiwan. Later, more Republican-era legacies were invoked to serve the regime’s new needs. In the wake of Tiananmen, the pre-1949 legacy of *Guoxue* (national studies) was used to promote Chinese traditions as a way to fend off Western influences, and lessons from the 1911 Revolution was reinterpreted to stress the need for gradualism in any attempts at political liberalisation. In the new millennium, the War against Japan became a prominent theme of official propaganda aimed at wooing the KMT in Taiwan and justifying China’s newfound status as a major world power. By pointing to China’s use of positive legacies of the Republican era, I hope to go some

way towards addressing the selection bias in the existing literature on Chinese nationalism and understanding the complexity and diversity of Chinese national identity.

Methodology and Sources

As is clear from my hypothesis, I aim to find out about how the portrayal of aspects of Republican China in CCP propaganda has evolved as a result of the shift in the PRC's national identity narratives over the past 40 years. Thus my research involves tracing the changes in the way the Chinese media portrays the pre-communist era and understanding the political context of such changes. To achieve that, I adopted content analysis and case studies as my methodological approaches.

Sampling

This project focuses on the gradual emergence in CCP propaganda of positive portrayals of Republican legacies, rather than the average attitude towards Republican legacies in the totality of CCP propaganda at any given time. For example, in the late 1970s, when the reforms had just started, most mentions in the Chinese media of Republican-era figures, such as 'capitalists' and the Nationalists, were negative. There would be no point at all in collecting a sample of texts representative of all media mentions of the Republic in 1979, most of which were still along Maoist lines. What I am interested in, however, is the small number of incidents when Republican legacies began to be talked about in a positive way and the trend they represented, which grew stronger and stronger, eventually leading to the relaxed parameters which allowed the emergence of 'Republican fever'.

Therefore, for the purpose of data selection, the ‘population’ is not all CCP propaganda output that touch on Republican legacies, but incidents of CCP propaganda system either promoting, allowing or backpedalling on the shift towards positive reappraisals of those legacies. What needs to be selected are not articles that are representative of all propaganda output on Republican legacies. Rather, following advice from qualitative methodologists,⁹⁰ I sampled *incidents* that are representative of all instances of shifting official views of Republican legacies over the past four decades.

The object of this study is the CCP propaganda system’s handling of Republican legacies. At any given time, the CPD and its branches act under the same set of propaganda guidelines and the same set of political circumstances. Therefore, the variance of the propagandists’ behaviours at any given time is very low. According to Giampietro Gobo, ‘you look at the variance of the phenomenon under the study. If it is high, you need many cases in order to include in your sample each category or class of your phenomenon. If its variance is low you need few cases’.⁹¹ Therefore, due to the low variance, by selecting ‘incidents’ involving a small number of the CCP’s most authoritative propaganda outlets, I can be confident that my sample is representative.

The most authoritative propaganda output I draw my sample from include:

- People’s Daily – the CCP’s most authoritative mouthpiece
- Xinhua News Agency – the state news agency
- Guangming Daily – CCP newspaper for intellectuals

⁹⁰ Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 1990), p. 177.

⁹¹ Giampietro Gobo, ‘Sampling, Representativeness and Generalizability’, in Clive Seale, Giampietro Gobo, Jaber F. Gubrium & David Silverman (eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice* (London: SAGE, 2004), pp. 405-426.

- TV dramas and documentaries aired by state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) and endorsed by the People's Daily
- Key propaganda movies endorsed by the People's Daily

In practice, the selection was done through keyword searches in the People's Daily and the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) databases. For example, when studying the changing official appraisal of the 'national bourgeoisie', I conducted keyword searches for '*minzu zichan jieji*' and observed how the portrayal of the group shifted in CCP propaganda. When studying the reassessment of Nationalist war effort during the War against Japan, I searched for articles containing '*guomindang*' and '*kangzhan*' or '*kangri*' and analysed articles from different periods to identify the trend in the reassessment.

The focus of this study is the propaganda system, not the liberal-leaning media professionals and scholars writing in market-oriented newspapers and magazines who play the role of 'policy entrepreneurs'. However, a small number of articles reflecting the unofficial framing are selected to illustrate the contrast between the official and unofficial framings, the challenge these 'policy entrepreneurs' pose to the propaganda authorities, and the reason why the CPD moved to contain such unofficial framings.

Content analysis and case studies

As already mentioned, I see each piece of propaganda output as an 'incident' of the propaganda authorities' handling of Republican legacies. Most of these incidents take the form of the

publication of newspaper articles, which I use qualitative content analysis to analyse.⁹² Earl Babbie defines content analysis as ‘the study of recorded human communications’.⁹³ According to Klaus Krippendorff, ‘The content analyst views data not as physical events but as texts, images, and expressions that are created to be seen, read, interpreted, and acted on for their meanings, and must therefore be analyzed with such uses in mind. Analyzing texts in the contexts of their uses distinguishes content analysis from other methods of inquiry.’⁹⁴ As Roger Pierce explains, ‘Qualitative content analysis is highly interpretive. It essentially involves the *reading* of texts, etc. to determine the extent of *bias* in terms of supportive, critical or (more or less) neutral accounts of organisations, institutions, concepts or figures.’⁹⁵

By analysing these propaganda pieces, I aimed to find out about three things. First of all, I analyse the context of the ‘Republican fever’ - the gradual shift of China’s national identity narrative from that of a revolutionary socialist state to that of a modernising nationalist state. Second, I look at the portrayal of pre-communist China in CCP leader’s speeches, official editorials and commentaries, and films and dramas aired by the state broadcaster, etc. and compare this new portrayal with the assessment during the Mao era. I then analyse what kind of changes took place in the official historiography. Third, I aimed to find out what the censorship rules are in regard to media content involving the Republican era by looking at documents issued by propaganda authorities, such as the Central Propaganda Department and the publication and broadcasting watchdogs under its control, giving guidance to media outlets on how particular history-related events should be covered. This effort is also aided by

⁹² Lindsay Prior, ‘Content Analysis’, in Patricia Leavy (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 359-379.

⁹³ Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research (13th Edition)* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013), p. 295.

⁹⁴ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology (Third Edition)* (London: Sage, 2013), p. xii.

⁹⁵ Roger Pierce, *Research Methods in Politics: A Practical Guide* (London: Sage, 2008), p. 264.

commercial media articles, magazines and memoirs which contain information on the experiences of particular writers or filmmakers with censorship.

I also developed case studies for cases where detailed information is available. According to John Gerring, a case study is an ‘intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units’.⁹⁶ Through in-depth investigations of specific propaganda incidents, I managed to gain insight into the processes of censorship and ideological control practised by the propaganda authorities.

The case studies in this dissertation are also accounts of incidents of reassessment. They differ from the other incidents sampled for this study in that they include more details. The CCP propaganda system is opaque and it is very hard to get detailed information about the decision-making process and internal discussions. But there are some rare cases that offer such opportunities to develop some insight into such processes, mostly because a long time had passed and details of past controversies were no longer sensitive and were divulged in the press. This may look like ‘convenience sampling’ or ‘opportunistic sampling’, but it does not mean the sample is potentially skewed as a result. Because these cases are all incidents that would have been selected anyway using the sampling standard stated above. Developing these incidents into case studies does not skew the sample. What it does is to provide rarely available insight into the otherwise impenetrable system.

For example, I chose to write case studies on the reassessment of Hu Shi, not only because Hu was one of the greatest liberal intellectuals of the May Fourth generation, but also because his

⁹⁶ John Gerring, ‘What is a case study and what is it good for?’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 98, No. 2, pp. 341-354.

reassessment was controversial and triggered intense discussions within the CCP propaganda system.⁹⁷ Another example is the 1986 film *'Battle of Taierzhuang'*, which included groundbreaking depiction of the valiant war effort by KMT force and, as a result, became a subject of immense controversy at the time.⁹⁸ Likewise, the 2004 TV drama *'Towards a Republic'*, which contained unconventional assessments of late-Qing revolutionaries, reformers and establishment figures, was hotly debated inside official circles.⁹⁹ These cases and the debates around them offer great opportunities to understand divergent opinions within the CCP propaganda establishment over the shifts in history-related propaganda, which expose the tension between 'toleration and control', the two aspects of the CCP's management of historical reassessments.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 provides a theoretical framework for understanding post-Mao China's reinterpretation and utilisation of memories of the pre-communist era to support its shifting political priorities and identity narratives in the reform era.

Chapters 2-6 describe the main themes of the reassessment of Republican China. Chapter 2 assesses the reassessment of Republican-era economic thinking and development. It argues that, in order to encourage private business and overseas investment, the Central Propaganda Department and its subsidiaries on various levels have allowed the Republican-era economy to be reassessed favourably, recognising the positive roles played by the bourgeoisie and the positive effect of foreign capital in China's modernisation.

⁹⁷ See Chapter 3.

⁹⁸ See Chapter 5.

⁹⁹ See Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 turns to the reassessment of Republican-era intellectuals and academia. It argues that, during the reform era, the portrayal of pre-1949 intellectuals in official Chinese propaganda has shifted from the Maoist focus on the revolutionary legacy of left-wing intellectuals to a new paradigm which focuses on the contrasting views of modernisation held by two groups of non-communist intellectuals - liberal Westernisers and cultural conservatives.

Chapter 4 examines the reassessment of the legacy of the 1911 Revolution. It argues that, while the Maoist historical narrative of the 1911 Revolution, which glorifies revolutionaries at the expense of reformers, has remained the official orthodox view during the reform era, the CCP, in an attempt to support reform and shore up regime stability, has allowed and even encouraged the development of a narrative of political modernisation, which saw gradualist reformers in the late Qing and early Republican era as being more effective than ‘radical’ revolutionaries in making progress towards their common goal of constitutional democracy. As an unintended consequence, however, this alternative narrative contributed to the revival of the Republican-era ideal of ‘constitutionalism’ (*xianzheng*) as a popular topic for debate in state-controlled media.

Chapters 5 and 6 investigate how the history of China’s War against Japan has been reassessed. During the reform era, the CCP positively reassessed the Nationalist contribution in the War against Japan (1937-1945) in order to develop a more inclusive, pan-Chinese nationalism that boosts national unity and prospects of unification with Taiwan. Also, in its attempt to reorient its diplomacy towards the West and justify China’s ‘great power status’, it also stressed the Nationalist government’s wartime cooperation with Western allies so as to

portray China as a historical ally of the West and a founder and defender of the post-war international order.

The concluding chapter assesses the implications of the reassessment of Republican China. It argues that, while allowing ‘contained contention’¹⁰⁰ over modern Chinese history has enabled it to draw on a new set of political capital otherwise unavailable to it, it also causes inconsistencies and confusion in the historical narrative and the national identity. The crackdown on these activists and official media criticisms of ‘historical nihilism’ are signs of the regime’s unease with these negative consequences.

¹⁰⁰ Reilly, 2012, p. 1.

Chapter 1: National identity shift and pre-communist memory in reform-era China

It is a common practice in political propaganda to use historical memories and myths to serve contemporary political needs and shore up the state's official identity narratives. This tendency to 'use the past to serve the present' is especially prevalent and deep-rooted in China. Both the Maoist regime and the reformist governments repeatedly interpreted historical memories in ways that supported their political objectives.¹

When the political situation shifts and the national identity evolves, the historical memories must shift along with them. In Maoist historiography, China's pre-communist society, especially that of the Republican era, was depicted as dark and repressive. This negative portrayal of the 'old society' was then used as the central source of legitimacy of the Communist revolution, which led to the founding of the PRC.² But in the post-Mao era, when reformist leaders prioritised modernisation and pan-Chinese nationalism over revolution and class struggle, the memory of Republican China has had to be remoulded in official propaganda to serve these new priorities.

This chapter develops a framework for understanding post-Mao China's reinterpretation and utilisation of memories of the pre-communist era to support its shifting political priorities and identity narratives in the reform era. I first describe China's shifting national identity narratives

¹ See Jonathan Unger (ed.), *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

² See Guo Wu, 'Recalling bitterness: Historiography, memory, and myth in Maoist China', *Twentieth-Century China*, Vol. 39, Issue 3, pp. 245–268, October 2014

in the reform era and how the official propaganda shifted its focus to support this new identity narrative. Then I turn to the role of historical memory and myths in a country's identity construction and the changing historical interpretations in China's reform era as a result of its identity shift. Section 4 then focuses on a major part of China's reinterpretation of history in service of reform, namely the positive reassessment of Republican China. The last section points out the potential negative consequences of such reinterpretation.

1. China's shifting national identity narratives in the reform era

National identity, as defined by Lowell Dittmer and Samuel Kim, is 'the characteristic collective behaviour of the national system as a whole, in interaction with other subnational, national, and international systems, flowing from the totality of shared attributes and symbols of a solidarity political group known as a "nation-state".'³

During the Mao era, the CCP party-state saw itself as a revolutionary socialist state representing workers and peasants in their class struggle against 'exploitative classes' such as capitalists and landlords.⁴ Internationally, the PRC opposed the Western capitalist world. It strongly identified with the socialist model of the Soviet Union during much the 1950s and, after the Sino-Soviet split, nationalised the socialist identity and focused on China's own socialist revolutionary path.⁵ As Kim and Dittmer wrote, the national identity of the early PRC was based on the

³ Samuel Kim and Lowell Dittmer, "Whither China's quest for national identity?", in Dittmer and Kim (eds.) *China's Quest for National Identity* (Cornell University Press: 1993), p. 240.

⁴ Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution to Reform (Second Edition)* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), pp. 73-76.

⁵ Steven I. Levine, 'China and the Socialist Community: Symbolic Unity' (unpublished conference paper, 1990), cited in Kim and Dittmer, p. 269.

complete repudiation of the identity of the KMT government and its international comporment.⁶

At the end of the Mao era, the PRC's national identity narrative was under tremendous strain. Dittmer and Kim postulate two forms of national identity crises – crises of self-definition and crises of inclusion. A 'crisis of self-definition' may occur when the consensually agreed-upon national development trajectory is thrown open to fundamental question. Such a crisis is likely to erupt when the chosen developmental 'road' conspicuously fails, when it succeeds beyond expectations, or when it is challenged by a convincing alternative.⁷ A 'crisis of inclusion' is apt to occur when there is an extremely sharp or intractable discrepancy between sets of criteria for inclusion of populations or territory into the nation-state. There are three types of inclusion crises: border disputes over irredentas, secessionary conflicts and civil wars, and divided nations. In the cases of civil war and divided nations, the exclusion is defined by both sides as central rather than peripheral to the nation's identity.⁸

In the late 1970s, China was faced with both forms of identity crises. A crisis of self-definition took place because, as Yongnian Zheng notes, China's national identity weakened because of the decline of Marxism-Maoism-based national identity.⁹ After the end of the Cultural Revolution, Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought ceased being a credible ideological framework for national development. By contrast, the capitalist system in not only the West but also in neighbouring Asian countries and territories, including Chinese-speaking Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore, was achieving remarkable success, leading to fundamental questioning about China's development path.

⁶ Kim and Dittmer, p. 258.

⁷ Lowell Dittmer and Samuel Kim, 'In search for a theory of national identity', in Dittmer and Kim (eds.), p. 29.

⁸ Ibid, pp. 27-28.

⁹ Zheng, p. 12.

China's 'crisis of inclusion' involved the continued separation of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan from the Chinese mainland. Dittmer sees the Taiwan issue in particular as a case of 'divided nation' and therefore central to China's national identity. China has consistently viewed Taiwan as a missing piece to be appropriated in order that China's identity might be fully realized.¹⁰

To solve these identity crises, the post-Mao PRC adjusted its national identity narratives. The new reformist leadership saw modernisation as its most urgent task and therefore played down class struggle both domestically and internationally. The PRC government devalued socialist symbols, rituals and language and increasingly portrayed the party-state in nationalist terms as the sovereign agent making China a powerful and prosperous country.¹¹ The regime played down revolution in favour of gradualist reform, and officially re-conceptualised itself from a 'revolutionary party' to a 'party in power'.¹² In its relations with Taiwan, the PRC also played down class rhetoric and stressed national unity and the common Chinese heritage of the two rival parties.¹³ At the same time, as China sought to create favourable international conditions for its development, the regime changed from priding itself on being a rebel against the capitalist international order to depicting itself as a student of the West and a supporter of the global status quo.¹⁴

Despite Xi Jinping's adoption of some Maoist rhetoric and tactics, the regime's focus on economic modernisation and nationalism has not fundamentally changed. Xi has abandoned or

¹⁰ Lowell Dittmer, 'Taiwan as a Factor in China's Quest for National Identity', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Volume 15, Issue 49, 2006, pp. 671-686.

¹¹ Levine, 1990.

¹² Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing dictatorship: Propaganda and thought work in contemporary China* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), p. 47.

¹³ Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 478-487.

¹⁴ Peter Van Ness, 'China as a Third World state: Foreign policy and official national identity', in Dittmer and Kim (eds.), 1993, pp. 206-207.

watered down some of Deng's principles – 'collective leadership', the ban on personality cults, the downplaying of ideology and the abolition of mass political movements - and he has rolled back Deng's criticism of the Mao era.¹⁵ However, while Xi has reasserted the party's nominal embrace of communism, he has not revived class struggle and has instead cracked down on leftist activists.¹⁶ He still tries to make himself out as a worthy successor of Deng and still maintains the model of 'state capitalism with Chinese characteristics'.¹⁷ His pet ideology – the 'Chinese dream' – is about not socialist revival but national rejuvenation and developmental nationalism.¹⁸

To sum up, during the post-Mao era, China's national identity evolved gradually from that of a revolutionary socialist state into that of a modernising nationalist state. Allen Carlson argues that the Chinese state is 'experimenting with the availability of new national identities' and 'juggling a host of not always compatible identity constructs'.¹⁹ On one hand, the regime still protects its revolutionary symbols and pays lip service to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.²⁰ On the other, it has been developing an alternative national identity narrative of a modernising pan-Chinese nationalist state. Both identity narratives co-exist, even though they are inconsistent with each other.

¹⁵ Willy Lam, 'Xi Jinping's Ideology and Statecraft', *Chinese Law & Government*, 48:6, 2016, pp. 409-417.

¹⁶ Suisheng Zhao, 'The Ideological Campaign in Xi's China: Rebuilding Regime Legitimacy', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 56 No. 6, November/December 2016, pp. 1168-1193.

¹⁷ Willy Lam, *Chinese politics in the era of Xi Jinping: renaissance, reform, or retrogression?* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 175-189.

¹⁸ Zheng Wang, 'The Chinese Dream: Concept and Context', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, March 2014, Volume 19, Issue 1, pp. 1-13.

¹⁹ Allen Carlson, 'A flawed perspective: the limitations inherent within the study of Chinese nationalism', *Nations and Nationalism* 15 (1), 2009, pp. 20-35.

²⁰ Anne-Marie Brady and Wang Juntao, 'China's Strengthened New Order and the Role of Propaganda', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 18:62, 2009, pp. 767-788.

2. Propaganda change in support of new national identity

The Chinese state supports its national identity narratives with its vast propaganda system. In the reform era, the propaganda system has undergone changes both in its method and in its content. It has adapted to the market environment and has also shifted its goal from promoting Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and socialist transformation to promoting the regime's new priorities – modernisation and national unity.

China's propaganda system has always been under strict CCP control. The CCP's top leaders, with the exception of Zhao Ziyang, the reformist leader who was ousted for his sympathy towards the Tiananmen pro-democracy movement, have always taken a close interest in propaganda and thought work.²¹ At the pinnacle of the propaganda system is the Central Leading Group on Propaganda and Ideological Work (CLGPIW), which is headed by a member of the Politburo Standing Committee.²² The CCP Central Committee's Propaganda Department has a guiding role over the entire propaganda system.²³ Media content that is seen as harmful to the party's policy and legitimacy is put under control by the propaganda system's sophisticated censorship machine. The CPD has formidable power in sustaining the party's dominance in the fields of ideology and culture. It tends to handle censorship from a macro level, setting propaganda disciplines and issuing instructions governing the operation of the media.²⁴ Censorship activities has been the task of a number of institutional actors with overlapping responsibilities. Under the guidance of the CPD, several state bodies, such as the

²¹ Brady, 2008, pp. 9-10.

²² David Shambaugh, 'China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy', *The China Journal*, No. 57, 2007, pp. 25-58.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Yuezhi Zhao, *Communication in China: Political Economy, Power, and Conflict* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2008), pp. 24-25.

State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television,²⁵ the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, have specific responsibilities over the press, publications, broadcast media, etc.²⁶ Those who break censorship rules would be subjected to punishments ranging from intimidation, sacking to arrest and imprisonment.²⁷

Television is the most tightly controlled medium in China, because it is the most important source of information for the majority of the population.²⁸ Following the CCP's tradition of using culture and entertainment as a vehicle for political messages,²⁹ China's primetime TV dramas and documentaries always feature an underlying educational message.³⁰

Even in academia, where there tends to be less control, censorship and self-censorship is widely practised. It is true that control on academic research has been relaxed considerably since the beginning of the reform. As Jonathan Unger has pointed out, although Chinese historians still operate under political constraints, they can now choose to serve one political mentor or another, and one or another line of political thought. Within the wider parameters of permissible discourses, they can even publish their own views.³¹ However, though social science research in China is subject to relatively light controls, it is still carefully managed, with clear boundaries on what can and cannot be explored.³²

²⁵ This body came into being in 2013 as a result of the merger of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) and the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-28.

²⁷ Shambaugh, 2007.

²⁸ Miao Di, 'Between propaganda and commercials: Chinese television today', in Susan Shirk (ed.), *Changing Media, Changing China* (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 96.

²⁹ Brady, 2008, p. 74.

³⁰ Brady, 'Conclusion: the velvet fist in the velvet glove: political and social control in contemporary China', in Brady (ed.), *China's Thought Management*, (Routledge, 2012), p. 194.

³¹ Jonathan Unger, *Using the Past to Serve the Present*, p. 7.

³² Brady, 2008, p. 202 and pp. 117-118.

But the method of control has become very different from that of the Mao era. In the reform era, according to Brady, the Chinese government ‘embraced modern communication technologies, theories, and methodologies early on’, while at the same time carefully introducing ‘controls to limit any potential negative impact from these new influences’.³³ Daniela Stockmann notes that, ‘In China, the introduction of market mechanisms leads media to undergo cycles of liberalization and retrenchment, whereby the state walks a fine line between tolerating space to respond to market demands and controlling media content’.³⁴

During the reform era, the content of Chinese propaganda has changed beyond recognition. In the first decade of the reforms, the ideological sphere was marked by an increasing laxness, which was a natural reaction to the excesses of Maoist ideological radicalism. During the 1980s, reformist leaders Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang undermined ideological propaganda work of the Central Propaganda Department. Hu wanted the CPD to drive China’s political and economic transformation rather than to guard against ideological deviations. But more conservative voices within the Party and propaganda system, such as Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun, continued to assert the importance of propaganda and thought work. The resulting conflict over the Party’s leadership in propaganda work raged throughout the decade.³⁵

After the 1989 Tiananmen student movement, the new CCP leadership saw social stability and regime maintenance as its top priority and stressed the importance of propaganda and thought work in shoring up the legitimacy of one-party rule. The new approach to propaganda work recognised that CCP legitimacy would be based on the ability to make China economically strong and prosperous, to maintain the party’s stronghold over China’s national ideology, and

³³ Brady, 2008, p. 2.

³⁴ Daniela Stockmann, *Media commercialization and authoritarian rule in China*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 5.

³⁵ Brady, 2008, pp. 39-41.

the promotion of that ideology throughout society.³⁶ The contrast with Maoist propaganda has been stark. For example, as Brady notes, ‘economic propaganda’, aimed at creating market confidence, and ‘economic thought reform’, aimed at getting Chinese people to come to terms with the new economic order’, became key themes of official propaganda.³⁷ Also, while the CCP used to call for the elimination of Confucianism from the Chinese society, it is now in the vanguard of those who promote a revival of Confucianism and other traditional values.³⁸

As the next section explains, the shifting tone of propaganda during the reform era is also evident in the way historical memories are interpreted.

3. Shifting memory in service of new national identity narrative

It is hardly disputable that history is central to the national identity narratives of any nation-state. There are various theories giving different explanations on the origins of nationalism, which Anthony Smith categorised into four distinct types - primordialists, perennialists, modernists and historical ethno-symbolists.³⁹ But as Duncan Bell observed, all these theories are ‘united in the centrality of historical representation and hence narration within their explanatory schemas’ and representational practices are ‘inherently bound up in the process of national identity formation’.⁴⁰ According to Bell,

³⁶ Brady, 2008, p. 60.

³⁷ Anne-Marie Brady and He Yong, ‘Talking up the market: economic propaganda in contemporary China’, in Brady (ed.), 2012.

³⁸ Brady, ‘State Confucianism, Chineseness, and tradition in CCP propaganda’, in Brady (ed.), 2012.

³⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1-19.

⁴⁰ Duncan S. A. Bell, ‘Mythscapes: memory, mythology, and national identity’, *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 54, Issue 1 (March 2003), pp. 63–81.

‘to mould a national identity – a sense of unity with others belonging to the same nation – it is necessary to have an understanding of oneself as located in a temporally extended narrative, and in order to be able to locate one as such, nationalist discourse must be able to represent the unfolding of time in such a way that the nation assumes a privileged and valorized role.’⁴¹

Bell termed such an understanding as a ‘nationalist myth’, which is ‘a story that simplifies, dramatizes and selectively narrates the story of a nation’s past and its place in the world, its historical eschatology: a story that elucidates its contemporary meaning through (re)constructing its past.’ A country can have multiple ‘nationalist myths’. The nationalist governing myth is the state’s attempt to impose a definite meaning on the past, on the nation and its history. But the governing myth coexists with and is constantly contested by alternative, ‘subaltern’ myths. Bell introduced the concept of a ‘national mythscape’, the discursive realm in which the myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, reconstructed and negotiated constantly.⁴²

In China, a communist country where the freedom of speech is highly restricted, the space for ‘subaltern myths’ to challenge the CCP’s governing myth is very limited. However, as explained in the last section, as the PRC’s policy priorities and ideology changed significantly when it embarked on reforms, though the state still retains elements of its traditional, revolutionary socialist identity narrative, it gradually developed a new identity narrative which was consistent with Western-oriented modernisation and pan-Chinese nationalism. The new

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

identity narrative must be supported by a different set of governing myths, though they may not necessarily be consistent with the traditional governing myth.

How can the regime create a new set of governing myths to support its new identity narrative? Aleida Assmann made a useful distinction between ‘active memory’ and ‘archival memory’.⁴³ The active memory refers to the historical memories ‘a society has consciously selected and maintains as salient and vital for a common orientation and a shared remembering’, and is supported by institutions such as curricula, museum, stage, holidays, customs and remembrance days, etc. In contrast, contents of the archive linger in a state of latency, as it has not been selected nor is it transformed into a living memory supported by public awareness and validation by cultural institutions and the media. According to Assmann, the borderline between the archival and the active memory is permeable in both directions. ‘Some things may recede into the background and fade out of common interest and awareness while others may be recovered from the periphery and move into the centre of social interest and esteem.’⁴⁴

When a state needs to create new historical myths to support a new identity narrative, it needs to reinterpret and selectively erase the ‘active memory’, and selectively activate its ‘archival memory’ in a way that conforms to the new identity narrative. This is exactly what happened in China when the new reformist leadership took China onto a different path and adopted a new identity narrative.

In China, using history to make arguments about contemporary politics is an ancient tradition that remains alive and well today. It is a common practice for Chinese officials, academics and

⁴³ Aleida Assmann, ‘Re-framing Memory: Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past’, in K. Tilmans, F. van Vree and J. Winter (eds.), *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), pp.39–44.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

commentators to make political points about contemporary affairs through historical analogies.⁴⁵ In Michael Szonyi's words, the presentation of history in China today is important because 'history is to some degree a venue for politics in the broadest sense'.⁴⁶ Therefore, as the CCP's goal shifted to modernisation and nationalism in the reform era, it used historical reinterpretation and selective memory activation to serve its new objectives.

The existing literature on Chinese nationalism has noted the use of ancient history and traditional culture in Chinese nationalist narratives. Suisheng Zhao writes, 'The CCP tried to discover a non-Communist past of the PRC, and define patriotism in terms that had everything to do with Chinese history and culture and almost nothing to do with Marxist tradition.'⁴⁷ Kim and Dittmer observed that, after the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, 'Paradoxically, the "new" communist state, in a desperate and promiscuous search for relegitimation, has changed its tune and become the self-styled defender of the national identity and symbol system of the old China.'⁴⁸ William Callahan points out that Beijing wants to stress the historical and moral continuity between its ancient glories and its current prosperity. Using the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games as an example, he shows that the party-state wants to show that it has inherited the Confucian idea of harmony and the spirit of openness embodied by the cosmopolitan Tang Dynasty and the epic voyages of Ming Dynasty Admiral Zheng He, and is firmly on a path of 'peaceful rise' based on mutually beneficial foreign relations.⁴⁹ Michael Szonyi points out that, over the past two decades, there have been various 'history fevers' in China which seek to use China's dynastic history to justify the country's contemporary reality

⁴⁵ See Jonathan Unger (ed.), *Using the Past to Serve the Present*.

⁴⁶ Michael Szonyi, 'Ming fever: the present's past as the People's Republic turns sixty', *China Heritage Quarterly*, 2010, 21.

⁴⁷ Suisheng Zhao, 'A state-led nationalism: The patriotic education campaign in post-Tiananmen China', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol 31, Issue 3, September 1998, pp. 287-302.

⁴⁸ Kim and Dittmer, p. 268.

⁴⁹ William A. Callahan, *China: The Pessimist Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 2-6.

or suggest future directions. For example, the ‘Ming fever’ describes Ming China (1368-1644) as economically vibrant and globally engaged, reminiscent of the PRC’s current vision of development, while the Qing (1644-1911) during its heyday is often depicted as a strong, stable and united multi-ethnic empire under the centre’s wise leadership, reflecting the CCP’s emphasis on strong leadership, stability and national unity.⁵⁰

Compared with the Ming and the Qing, the history of Republican China, whose overthrow has been celebrated as a key source of Communist China’s historical legitimacy, is much more sensitive and its official interpretation is therefore much more carefully guarded by the CCP state. However, the reinterpretation and selective activation of historical legacies have not left out the Republican era. As mentioned in the Introduction, the reassessment of the Republic has developed over four decades and has resulted in a major cultural phenomenon – the ‘Republican fever’, which has been almost completely ignored by the existing literature. The next section introduces how the shifting identity narratives has led to a shift in how China’s pre-communist past is portrayed in official propaganda.

4. Reviving positive legacies of Republican China

As mentioned earlier, the national identity of the PRC under Mao was based on the complete repudiation of the identity of Republican China, especially that of the period of KMT rule.⁵¹ The CCP saw China’s modern history as the history of the communist revolution against the KMT and foreign imperialism. For decades, the main focus of official propaganda in the PRC was attacking Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT and praising the CCP’s struggle against Chiang’s

⁵⁰ Szonyi, 2010.

⁵¹ Kim and Dittmer, p. 258.

regime and the foreign imperialists the KMT allegedly collaborated with. The CCP's official historiography portrayed the Republic as a dark, poverty-ridden and oppressive 'old China' and a 'semi-feudal and semi-colonial society' crying out for revolution.

But as China in the reform era played down class struggle and focused on modernisation and national unity, the Maoist interpretation of China's modern history was no longer adequate. While a complete repudiation of pre-communist China suited Maoist China's revolutionary socialist identity, it was not entirely consistent with the new identity China was developing in the reform era which focused on modernisation and pan-Chinese nationalism.

In fact, several aspects of China's pre-communist history were consistent with the goals and priorities of reformist China. In Western scholars' re-appraisal of Republican China, it has been noted that the Republic, especially during the Nanjing Decade (1927-1937) under the KMT, bore striking similarities to reform-era PRC.⁵² In his biography of Chiang Kai-shek, Jonathan Fenby wrote, 'the modern PRC is not all that different from the China that Chiang had once sought to create from Nanjing'.⁵³ In a more recent Chiang biography, Jay Taylor wrote, 'the vision that drives modern China in the twenty-first century is that of Chiang Kai-shek, not Mao Zedong.'⁵⁴ Rana Mitter and Aaron William Moore also noted that the Nationalist state was 'a non-Communist developmental state that bears more than a passing resemblance to the Chinese state of today'.⁵⁵

⁵² See The China Quarterly's special issue "Re-appraising Republican China", 150 (1997).

⁵³ Jonathan Fenby, *Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the China he Lost*, (London: The Free Press, 2003), pp. 499-505.

⁵⁴ Jay Taylor, *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China*, (Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 595

⁵⁵ Rana Mitter and Aaron William Moore, 'China in World War II, 1937-1945: Experience, Memory, and Legacy', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 45 (Special Issue 02) (March 2011), pp. 225-240.

In terms of China's modernisation efforts during the pre-communist era, William Kirby hailed China's 'internationalization' during the Republican era, which he said helped China move 'from being a ward, if not semi-colony, of the "great powers" to being a great power itself'.⁵⁶ Frank Dikötter called the Republican era an 'age of openness' characterized by engagement with the rest of the world on all levels of society.⁵⁷ Thomas Rawski rejected the once-dominant view among Western historians that the Republican era was a period of economic stagnation or decline, and argued instead that significant economic expansion took place, fuelled by both domestic private market forces and foreign participation in the economy.⁵⁸ The positive effect of economic openness and a market economy is clearly consistent with the central tenets of Chinese economic policy in the post-1978 reform era.

In its attempt to modernise the country, the CCP abandoned domestic class struggle and its dream of a proletarian 'world revolution'. As a result, the importance of the CCP-KMT Civil War and the international revolutionary wars such as the Korean War was greatly discounted in Chinese propaganda. The regime has been stressing national unity not just within mainland China but also with Taiwan and other Chinese communities around the world, and have tried to make the international community believe it is a cooperative rather than disruptive power. Therefore, the Sino-Japanese War became a propaganda focus, as it could be portrayed as a period 'when Nationalist and Communist fighters had stood together to battle a foreign invader, regardless of party differences',⁵⁹ and a time when China fought alongside the US, Russia and Britain as one of the Allies.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ William C. Kirby, 'The Internationalization of China: Foreign Relations at Home and Abroad in the Republican Era', *The China Quarterly*, No. 150, *Special Issue: Reappraising Republic China* (Jun., 1997), pp. 433-458.

⁵⁷ Frank Dikötter, *The Age of Openness: China before Mao*, (Hong Kong University Press, 2008), pp. 1-7.

⁵⁸ Thomas G. Rawski, *Economic Growth in Prewar China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

⁵⁹ Mitter, p. 12.

⁶⁰ Mitter, p. 8.

Driven by the new needs of the reformist government, Chinese historiography has changed significantly. In addition to the traditional ‘revolution paradigm’, Chinese historians working for official think-tanks and universities have developed a new ‘modernisation paradigm’.⁶¹ According to historian Huaiyin Li, in the late 1980s and 1990s, studies of modern Chinese history under the rubric of modernisation flourished. Unlike the traditional paradigm which focused on revolution, the new modernisation paradigm was intended to ‘prove the historical and logical “necessities” of the capitalist transformation of the Chinese economy in the reform era and its integration with the capitalist world under the grand narrative of a linear process of modernization’.⁶² Under this paradigm, the Chinese society in the late Qing and Republican periods was depicted as ‘the beneficiary of the introduction of Western civilization to China rather than a victim of Western imperialism’, and ‘modern Chinese history was retold as a story of the slow yet steady growth of modernity in Chinese society that was unfortunately interrupted by the communist revolution and the subsequent Maoist radicalization but was resumed in the post-Mao era through the reform and opening-up programs.’⁶³

But positively reinterpreting China’s pre-communist history and activating previously hidden memories are not risk-free. As the next section discusses, the CCP propagandists have had to be selective in the reassessment and have also had to work hard to control the discourse so as to avoid the potentially negative consequences of the relaxation of permissible historical discussions.

⁶¹ Huaiyin Li, *Reinventing Modern China: Imagination and Authenticity in Chinese Historical Writing*, (University of Hawaii Press, 2013).

⁶² Huaiyin Li, p. 26.

⁶³ Huaiyin Li, p. 235.

5. Incompatible identities, incompatible memories

China is not alone in having a change of mind over its past historical legacies. This has been a common phenomenon in post-communist countries. As Vladimir Tismaneanu wrote in his book about post-communist Eastern Europe, the ‘struggle with legacies of the past’ is a hallmark of the post-communist condition.⁶⁴ In Eastern Europe in the 1990s, the decline of the Leninist ideology and political culture left a vacuum to be filled by discourses drawing from the countries’ historical heritages.⁶⁵ In their efforts to build new political identities, people developed various nostalgias for both the pre-communist era and the heyday of communism. Different discourses could relate positively to different pasts - the communist near past and deeper pre-communist pasts - or certain aspects of them.⁶⁶

Despite continued communist single-party rule, the PRC resembles post-communist societies with a huge ideological vacuum to be filled by discourses drawing from the country’s historical legacies, including those from its pre-communist era. But unlike other post-communist countries, China is still under Communist Party rule and therefore has had to defend its revolutionary legitimacy based on the old interpretation of history. Therefore, the regime cannot afford to tolerate those nostalgias and historical narratives that challenge the party’s legitimacy.

Though certain aspects of the history of Republican China, such as economic openness, can be interpreted in ways that are useful to the CCP regime’s contemporary political needs, some

⁶⁴ Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*, Princeton University Press (2009), p. 163.

⁶⁵ Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Postcommunism between hope and disenchantment", *Journal of International Relations and Development* (2009) 12, pp. 354–364.

⁶⁶ John S. Dryzek and Leslie Holmes, *Post-Communist Democratization: Political Discourses across Thirteen Countries* (Cambridge University Press: 2002), p. 259.

other aspects and interpretations of the history could make uncomfortable reading for party propagandists. As Unger also points out, the contemporary ‘use of the past to serve the present’ is not without risks, potentially acting as a double-edged sword which sometimes undermines CCP-sponsored interpretations of history or sabotages the Party’s latest political line.⁶⁷

One Republican-era legacy that the regime would rather ignore is the relative openness in the cultural and political spheres. The Republic, according to Dikötter, offered remarkable freedoms of speech, diversity of thought and economic development, and was more democratic than many comparable regimes in Europe at the time.⁶⁸ It has been argued that the media in the Republican era were actually quite autonomous, more so than some European media and much more so than the PRC media. As Dikötter observes, ‘even with censorship, often erratic and inconsistent, the opportunities for political expression outside of the ruling party before 1949 by far exceeded anything even remotely possible under emperor or Mao’.⁶⁹ Such historical comparisons in terms of cultural and political freedom are certainly not desirable for the Communist regime.

Also, positive views of the Republic’s economic, military and diplomatic performance pose serious problems to the CCP’s own nationalist credentials. The CCP state’s founding myth states that the party ‘saved China’ from ‘semi-colonial’ status and ‘liberated’ the Chinese people from the corrupt, incompetent and traitorous pre-communist regime. But according to William C. Kirby, the Republic ‘successfully defended China’s status internationally while regaining its full sovereignty internally’ as China ‘moved from being a ward, if not semi-colony,

⁶⁷ Jonathan Unger, *Using the Past to Serve the Present*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Frank Dikötter, *The Age of Openness: China before Mao*, (Hong Kong University Press, 2008), pp. 1-7.

⁶⁹ Dikötter, p. 25.

of the “great powers” to being a great power itself”.⁷⁰ China’s War against Japan has become a key propaganda theme during the reform era, but as Rana Mitter observes, ‘not all new interpretations of the war have made entirely comfortable reading for the Chinese Communist Party’.⁷¹ Positive portrayals of the Nationalist war effort, which was much more significant than that of the Communists, can undermine the CCP’s claim to be the ultimate saviours of the Chinese nation, a key legitimisation tool for its one-party regime.

Conclusion

During the reform era, China’s Maoist national identity as a revolutionary socialist state was no longer deemed appropriate for the country’s new priorities of modernisation and national unity. To serve the needs of the new situation, the regime has gradually developed a new identity narrative in which China presents itself as a modernising nationalist state. The construction and dissemination of the new identity narrative has been carried out primarily by China’s vast state-controlled propaganda system.

Due to China’s national identity shift, the regime’s official view of history has undergone significant changes. The change in historiography is the most pronounced in the portrayal of Republican China in official propaganda. Vilified under Mao as a backward, oppressive society ripe for revolution, it is now credited for significant achievements in modernisation, national defence and intellectual brilliance.

⁷⁰ William C. Kirby, ‘The internationalization of China: Foreign relations at home and abroad in the Republican era’, *The China Quarterly*, No. 150, Special Issue: Reappraising Republic China (June, 1997), pp. 433-458.

⁷¹ Mitter, pp. 384-385.

While this new view of history is allowed and sometimes even promoted in official propaganda, the regime has had to cling on to its old Maoist historiography in order to safeguard its revolutionary legitimacy. This has caused the bizarre phenomenon that the two opposite views of history co-exist in official propaganda and sometimes clash with each other, reflecting the conflicted nature of the national identity of the post-1978 Chinese state.

The following chapters will examine how the new view of history developed and how the two opposite historiographical inclinations clashed and co-existed.

Chapter 2: Towards a modern economy –

Reassessing Republican-era economy

The positive reassessment of the Republican era began when China under Deng Xiaoping launched economic reforms and adopted the policy of opening-up. Under Mao, the CCP saw class struggle as the highest priority, and CCP propaganda on ‘Old China’, or pre-communist China, mainly focused on the ‘exploitation’ of Chinese people by the bourgeoisie and imperialists. The new economic policy post-1978 called for an adjustment of the regime’s national identity narrative. Instead of a Marxist-Leninist state representing workers and peasants in a life-and-death struggle against foreign imperialists and domestic remnants of ‘exploiting classes’, mainly the bourgeoisie, the PRC in the reform era aimed to unite all Chinese people, including ethnic Chinese capitalists in Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas, to develop the Chinese economy with the help of Western technology and foreign capital.

Unfortunately, the CCP, a Marxist-Leninist party which had dedicated itself to eradicating capitalism, lacked historical legacy of its own that could be used to facilitate its new policy of encouraging domestic entrepreneurship and wooing overseas investment. By contrast, the legacy of China’s pre-communist economy was highly relevant to the country’s post-1978 reorientation towards the market.¹ According to economic historian Thomas Rawski, during the decades before World War II, China achieved significant economic growth under extremely difficult circumstances.² Communist policies under Mao undercut the market-based economic

¹ Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Adaptation and Growth (Second Edition)* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 2018), pp. 61-63.

² Thomas G. Rawski, *Economic Growth in Prewar China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. xix.

patterns, but once economic reform started, Chinese economists began calling for a return to pre-1949 structures for the sake of efficiency.³

Therefore, the CCP was compelled to invoke legacies from the pre-communist era to drive economic development in the reform era. In order to legitimate non-state economic elements, including private businesses and foreign capital, which the reformist policies encourage, CCP propagandists have moved to rehabilitate the Republican-era businessmen and to reassess the role of foreign influences in China's pre-communist economic development.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section 1 investigates how Chinese reformers in the early reform era cited Sun Yat-sen's thinking economic development to justify opening up and how they began to rehabilitate Republican-era businessmen and restore pre-1949 links to the global economy. Section 2 details the invocation of pre-1949 entrepreneurial and cosmopolitan legacies in the formulation of local development discourses in the 1990s. Section 3 argues that the positive reassessment of Republican-era economy was further boosted in the new millennium, which saw China becoming a global economic powerhouse, but the favourable portrayal of the pre-communist era began posing a challenge to the party's historical legitimacy.

1. 1978-1989: Republican legacy invoked to jumpstart reform

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, and especially after the Third Plenum of the 11th CCP Central Committee, held in December 1978, the party downgraded class struggle and turned

³ Rawski, pp. 350-351.

its focus onto ‘socialist modernisation construction’.⁴ To serve the new policy of economic reforms and opening-up, the propaganda focus shifted from class struggle to economic reform. Hu Yaobang, who was the senior leader in charge of ideological and propaganda work from 1979 to 1987, wanted the Central Propaganda Department to help facilitate China’s political and economic transformation. Zhao Ziyang, who succeeded Hu as CCP party secretary, also downplayed ideological work and preferred to focus on economic reform.⁵ As Anne-Marie Brady observes, a key propaganda theme in the new era was ‘economic thought reform’, aimed at getting Chinese people to come to terms with the new economic order’.⁶

Part of the ‘economic thought reform’ agenda was to change the way the economic legacy of the pre-communist era was assessed and represented in official propaganda. At a time when private business and foreign investment were encouraged, the traditional focus on class struggle and the exploitation by domestic bourgeoisie and foreign imperialists in the past was no longer consistent with the new economic reality and needed to be adjusted. Moreover, though China’s post-1978 reforms benefited from significant Western input including not just technology but also economic thinking, as Julian Gewirtz observes, Chinese official narratives tended to portray it as an internal process and to avoid mentioning foreign involvement.⁷ The CCP’s preferred narrative, of course, was that the achievement of the reform was a result of the party’s brilliance.⁸ But, as the party lacks its own legacy of capitalist development, China’s pre-1949 development could at least be used to support a nationalist reform narrative. Therefore, China’s

⁴ ‘中国共产党第十一届中央委员会第三次全体会议公报（一九七八年十二月二十二日通过）’ (Communique of the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (passed on 22 December, 1978)), *People’s Daily*, 24 December 1978.

⁵ Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing dictatorship: Propaganda and thought work in contemporary China*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), pp. 40-41.

⁶ Brady, *Marketing dictatorship*, p. 3.

⁷ Julian Gewirtz, *Unlikely Partners: Chinese Reformers, Western Economists, and the Making of Global China* (Harvard University Press, 2017), pp. 10-11 & 272-273.

⁸ *Ibid.*

pre-communist economic legacy, not just the bourgeoisie but also the country's openness to foreign influences, were reassessed in largely positive ways. In fact, just days after the Third Plenum, the economic thinking of Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the pre-communist Republic, was invoked in pro-reform propaganda.

Using Sun Yat-sen to justify opening-up

After Mao's death in 1976, his successor Hua Guofeng adopted a principle of 'two whatevers', by which Mao's every word or deed must remain unchallenged.⁹ Though Hua did acknowledge the need to import technology from the West and Japan,¹⁰ reform-minded leaders like Deng Xiaoping called for more openness. In the spring of 1978, Deng stepped up his criticism of the Maoist concept of self-reliance¹¹ and emphasised the need to learn from other countries.¹² The Third Plenum of the CCP's 11th Central Committee, held in December that year, marked a triumph of Deng over the 'whateverists' and the beginning of the policy of reform and opening-up. At the Plenum, Hu Yaobang, a staunch supporter of Deng, was named as head of the Central Propaganda Department, replacing 'whateverist' Zhang Pinghua.¹³

On 31 December 1978, just nine days after the Third Plenum of the 11th CCP Central Committee ended, *Guangming Daily*, the CCP's official newspaper for intellectuals, published an article entitled 'Sun Yat-sen's thoughts on accelerating the development of national

⁹ Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 43.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 54.

¹¹ During the Cultural Revolution, the introduction of anything Western, including Western technology, was seen as ideologically unacceptable and was lambasted as 'slavish comprador philosophy'. See Zhao Xianping, '打倒洋奴哲学' (Down with slavish comprador philosophy), *Hongqi*, Issue 4, 1970 (republished in *People's Daily* on 5 April, 1970).

¹² Richard Baum, p. 56.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 63-64.

economy'.¹⁴ The article, penned by Xiamen University historian Luo Yaojiu, said that Sun Yat-sen 'firmly believed that the Chinese people were able to change the country's backwardness within not too long a period' by 'adopting advanced technology as much as possible'. Quoting Sun's words, the article said,

'Sun Yat-sen thought that China lacked neither labour nor market. "What China does lack is capital and talent. If we obtain these two key elements, then our industry will not just rival that of America, it can develop to four times as big as that of America."'

The article asked if Sun's proposal of introducing foreign capital would harm China's sovereignty. It answered the questions by quoting Sun as saying, '(we) can only use their capital and talent, but sovereignty can definitely not be given to outsiders. So long as we hold the initiative on everything, we will definitely not be in any danger.' However, the author then qualified the answer by saying that Sun's idea could not be realised because 'it was very hard to imagine that imperialists' investment in a semi-feudal and semi-colonial China would not harm China's sovereignty'. Though Sun's idea could not be turned into reality in his day, the article said, it nevertheless was 'left for posterity as a valuable asset'.

The article concluded by linking Sun's idea with contemporary politics. It said Lin Biao and the 'Gang of Four' were 'against China's modernisation' and were therefore 'feudal diehards, not even as good as bourgeois revolutionaries'. The author said that the new focus on socialist modernisation, announced at the Third Plenum, was 'completely consistent with the strong desire of all people across the country'.

¹⁴ Luo Yaojiu, '孙中山加速发展国民经济的思想' (Sun Yat-sen's thoughts on accelerating the development of national economy), *Guangming Daily*, 31 December 1978, p. 4.

Eulogising Sun Yat-sen, the founder of Republican China, for contemporary political needs was not new for the CCP. Despite being the founder of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), the CCP's arch-rival for much of the twentieth century, Sun cooperated with the Soviet Union and the CCP from 1923 up until his death in 1925 in his attempt to defeat 'warlords' and unite China. For that reason, he had long been revered by the CCP as a great revolutionary and a great symbol of patriotism. What was new, however, was which legacies of Sun were being drawn upon this time. Under Mao, CCP propaganda on Sun's economic thinking emphasised his advocacy of the equalisation of land ownership (*pingjun diquan*) and the regulation of capital (*jiezhi ziben*), ideas that were seen as consistent with socialism.¹⁵ The official press avoided mentioning his proposal to open the country to foreign capitalist penetration, because the idea was for years seen as an embarrassment to those who wished to stress his anti-imperialism.¹⁶ But immediately after the Third Plenum in 1978, it was exactly the part of his legacy which had been downplayed under Mao – his championing of 'modernization conceived on the Western model and to be realized with the help of the West'¹⁷ - that was emphasised.

From late 1980 to the spring and summer of 1981, there was a conservative backlash against reform. Conservatives successfully froze political and economic reforms in the early winter of 1980-1981,¹⁸ and in early 1981 launched the campaign against 'bourgeois liberalism'.¹⁹ However, in late summer of 1981, concerned that conservatives were endangering the entire reform effort, Deng softened his stance and the anti-liberalism drive was blunted.²⁰ At this juncture, Sun Yat-sen's legacy was evoked again to support reform. On 25 September, 1981,

¹⁵ For example, see People's Daily editorial: '孙中山先生永生' (Mr Sun Yat-sen will live for ever), *People's Daily*, 12 November 1956, p. 1.

¹⁶ See Michael Godley, Socialism with Chinese characteristics: Sun Yatsen and the international development of China, in Unger (ed.), pp. 239-259.

¹⁷ Marie-Claire Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, Trans. Janet Lloyd. (Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 1.

¹⁸ Baum, p. 121.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 126-129.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 129-130.

the People's Daily published an article entitled 'Learn from Sun Yat-sen's spirit and fight for the regeneration of China'. The author, Qian Changzhao, deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang, one of eight small non-Communist parties that the CCP allowed to exist, wrote that China needed to learn from Sun Yat-sen's 'farsighted vision' on economic development. Emphasising the importance of Sun's ideas of learning from the West and using foreign capital, Qian wrote, 'I think that, while we study Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, we should also learn from Mr Sun Yat-sen. We should learn his revolutionary stance, his revolutionary perseverance, his constantly progressing revolutionary spirit, and all beneficial things he left us in his works.'²¹

Rehabilitating Republican-era 'national bourgeoisie'

In addition to the introduction of foreign technology and foreign capital, Chinese reformers also saw the importance of domestic entrepreneurship and the opportunities offered by the economic prowess of the Chinese diaspora. Under such circumstances, the CCP gradually played down their conventional demonisation of the bourgeoisie and gradually began to talk about the legacy of Republican-era businesspeople in positive terms.

On 25 January, 1979, one month after the Third Plenum, Ulanfu, head of the CCP Central Committee's United Front Department, announced the Party's new decision on the 'national bourgeoisie'. According to the decision, the capitalists' savings and assets which had been confiscated during the Cultural Revolution would be returned, their reduced wages increased to the previous level, and those who had technical and managerial skills would be given

²¹ Qian Changzhao, '学习孙中山的精神，为振兴中华而奋斗' (Learn from Sun Yat-sen's spirit and strive for the regeneration of China), *People's Daily*, 25 September 1981.

appropriate positions. Ulanfu said he believed that such measures would ‘further motivate industrialists and merchants to work for the realisation of the “Four Modernisations”’.²² Soon afterwards, official media began applauding the role to be played by ‘patriotic national capitalists’ in economic development.²³ The favourable views of the capitalists’ current role gradually led to more positive depictions of their past roles during the pre-communist era.

The reassessment of the Republican-era capitalists can be illustrated with the example of Rong Yiren (1916-2005), a textile manufacturer during the Republican era who chose to remain in mainland China after 1949. Though he was the CCP’s favourite ‘red capitalist’, under Mao, even he had to talk about his own business in condemnatory terms. In an interview with the official Xinhua news agency in 1956, shortly before private businesses in Shanghai came under so-called ‘joint state-private ownership’, a euphemism for state takeover, Rong hailed the abolition of capitalism and said his loss of ‘income earned through exploitation’ was nothing compared to what was gained – ‘a prosperous and strong socialist country where everyone is rich’.²⁴ His docility did not save him from being persecuted during the Cultural Revolution for being a capitalist.

But soon after the reform began, with Deng’s approval, Rong set up the China International Trust and Investment Corporation (CITIC) in 1979 to promote foreign investment, and got special publicity for that in the official media.²⁵ In June 1986, over 200 members of the

²² Ulanfu, ‘在落实党对民族资产阶级政策问题的座谈会上 乌兰夫部长的讲话’ (Department head Ulanfu’s speech at the forum on implementing the Party’s policy on national bourgeoisie), *People’s Daily*, 26 January 1979.

²³ Baum, p. 96.

²⁴ Xu Zhongni (Xinhua reporter), ‘访上海资本家荣毅仁’ (An interview with Shanghai capitalist Rong Yiren), *People’s Daily*, 22 January 1956.

²⁵ Baum, p. 96. For an example of media coverage of Rong Yiren at the time, see Lin Gang, ‘同此一心献身四化——荣毅仁国庆述怀’ (Dedicated to Four Modernisations with the same heart – Rong Yiren expresses his inner feelings on National Day), *People’s Daily*, 4 October, 1979, p. 3.

extended Rong family, many of whom were doing business overseas, were invited to visit the mainland. Welcoming the family in Beijing, Deng Xiaoping said, ‘The Rong family made very big contributions to the development of our national industry, and rendered meritorious service (to the country)!’ He then expressed the hope that overseas Chinese could join in the work to develop China.²⁶ It appeared that ‘exploitation’, past and present, was no longer an issue for the Rong family.

Many other Republican-era capitalists were also rehabilitated, some posthumously. For example, Lu Zuofu (1893-1952), a pioneer of China’s shipping industry, chose to remain in the mainland after 1949. But as a capitalist, he suffered humiliation during the Five-Antis Movement and committed suicide in 1952.²⁷ In the 1980s, however, Lu was posthumously honoured as a ‘famous patriot industrialist’ and his son was allowed to rebuild his Minsheng shipping company in 1984.²⁸

The rehabilitation of capitalists was not limited to those who chose to stay in the PRC in 1949. The need to attract overseas Chinese investment meant that even capitalists previously associated with the CCP’s enemies needed to be wooed. During the Republican era, the business community in Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang had close links to Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists government, the CCP’s arch-rival.²⁹ In the CCP’s official historiography, the ‘Jiangsu-Zhejiang Consortium (江浙财阀)’, which was said to have been made up of primarily

²⁶ Zou Aiguo, ‘邓小平会见二百多位荣氏海内外亲属 赞扬荣氏家族对发展民族工业有功 希望海外同胞参与我们的建设事业’ (Deng Xiaoping meets over 200 Rong family members from China and overseas, praises Rong family for their contribution to the development of national industry, hopes overseas compatriots will join our development cause), *People’s Daily*, 19 June 1986.

²⁷ Keming Yang, *Capitalists in Communist China* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 41.

²⁸ Huang Wenfu, ‘民办重庆民生轮船公司开航’ (Privately-owned Chongqing Minsheng Shipping Company begins operation), *People’s Daily*, 1 April 1984.

²⁹ See Parks M. Coble, *The Shanghai Capitalists and the Nationalist Government, 1927-1937* (Harvard University Press, 1986). Also see Hans van de Van, *War and Nationalism in China 1925-1945* (Routledge, 2003), pp. 125-128.

‘comprador capitalists’, was condemned for allegedly collaborating with imperialist powers to support Chiang’s ‘counterrevolutionary’ regime.³⁰ Businessmen from the coastal city of Ningbo, in Zhejiang Province, known as the ‘Ningbo Group’ (宁波帮), were an important part of this business community. Ahead of the communist takeover in 1949, a large number of businesspeople from Ningbo fled the mainland. Decades on, their businesses remained influential in Hong Kong, Taiwan and many other places. These businessmen and their descendants were exactly the kind of people China’s reformist leadership needed to court.³¹

On 1 August, 1984, at a meeting in Beidaihe on the opening up of China’s coastal cities, Deng Xiaoping proposed that ‘All members of the “Ningbo Group” around the world should be mobilised to develop Ningbo’.³² This positive mention by the paramount leader resulted in concrete changes in the way Republican-era Ningbo businesspeople were treated by the local government and the official media. To attract the exiled business families back, Ningbo’s local government rehabilitated family members of exiles who had been persecuted during the Cultural Revolution and returned properties that had been confiscated.³³ Though Republican-era Zhejiang businessmen were still officially condemned as part of the ‘comprador’ bourgeoisie, official media began to praise the ‘Ningbo Group’. For example, the People’s Daily published a report in February 1986 on Ningbo municipal CCP committee’s effort to attract overseas businesspeople back home. The article praised Ningbo businesspeople for both

³⁰ Hu Sheng (ed.), *中国共产党的七十年* (Seventy years of the Chinese Communist Party), CCP Party History Publishing House, 1991. <http://www.zgdsw.org.cn/GB/218994/219014/220530/14736363.html>

³¹ In the early reform era, most foreign direct investment came from Hong Kong and Taiwan. See Kevin Honglin Zhang, ‘Why does so much FDI from Hong Kong and Taiwan go to Mainland China?’, *China Economic Review*, Volume 16, Issue 3, 2005, pp. 293–307.

³² Zhang Yuanpei, Wang Zheng and Fu Piyi, ‘薪火永传：“宁波帮”帮宁波、兴中国’ (Passing on the flame for ever: ‘Ningbo Group’ helps Ningbo and regenerates China), *Xinhua News Agency*, 1 August 2014. http://www.zj.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/headlines/2014-08/01/c_1111900968.htm

³³ Tang Jiashan, Liao Xiaoying and Zhang Yan, ‘宁波市发挥归侨侨眷的桥梁作用’ (Ningbo city plays role as bridge for returned overseas Chinese and their relatives), *People’s Daily*, 14 February, 1986, p. 4.

their business acumen and their patriotism and stressed their value to China's development and unity:

'The "Ningbo Group" is a force that cannot be overlooked in Ningbo's construction. They have a glorious tradition of loving the country and loving their hometown; Many of them are equipped with a lot of experience and knowledge as well as technical and managerial expertise; They are spread all over the world and have easy access to information, and can therefore adopt the best technologies from various countries; Under the influence of the "one country, two systems" policy, many of the overseas Chinese and those who went to Taiwan have played or are playing a very good role in various ways to facilitate the motherland's reunification. The Ningbo municipal CCP committee holds that seriously implementing the Party's united front policy and further encouraging their patriotic passion toward the country and their hometown are an important task in their united front work.'³⁴

To sum up, in its drive to encourage entrepreneurship and attract overseas Chinese investment, the CCP not only rehabilitated the so-called 'national bourgeoisie', but also began to woo capitalists who had historically sided with Chiang Kai-shek. Moreover, in a further sign of class struggle giving way to money-making, the reformist PRC leadership even started to revive or re-join economic institutions with historical links to the Nationalist government and other 'reactionary' pre-communist regimes.

³⁴ Tang Jiashan, Liao Xiaoying and Zhang Yan, "“引人先引心”" ('To attract people, one must first attract their hearts'), *People's Daily*, 14 February, 1986, p. 4.

Reviving pre-1949 institutions: GATT membership and Bank of Communications

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), signed in Geneva on 30 October, 1947, was the predecessor of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The Republic of China, then under Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, was one of the 23 signatories.³⁵ On 6 March 1950, after losing the mainland in the Chinese Civil War, the ROC government notified the Secretary-General of the United Nations of its withdrawal from the GATT.³⁶ During the Mao era, the PRC government had virtually no contact with GATT³⁷ and saw it as 'a tool used by imperialists to squeeze developing nations'.³⁸ After the PRC was recognised by the UN as the only legitimate government of China in 1971, Premier Zhou Enlai instructed the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade (MOFERT) to consider what stance China should take on GATT, and the ministries recommended that China should 'temporarily refrain from joining' it.³⁹

The situation changed after the onset of economic reforms in the late 1970s. After joining World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), China began to consider joining GATT and sought advice from Shih Chung Tse (Constant Shih), a senior GATT official who had played a key role in negotiating GATT on behalf of the Nationalist government in the 1940s.⁴⁰ In December 1982, MOFERT recommended that China should re-join GATT and the

³⁵ Ya Qin, 'China and GATT: Accession Instead of Resumption', *Journal of World Trade*, 77 (1993). Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/lawfrp/119>

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ A 1959 internal document was entitled 'GATT is a tool used by imperialists to squeeze developing nations'. See Gong Wen (People's Daily reporter, writing under penname Wen Zi), '莱蒙湖作证——中国 15 年入世谈判史解密', *Beijing Wenxue (Beijing Literature)*, Issue 1, 2002, p. 10.

³⁹ Gong Wen, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Li Cong, 'WTO 陷阱十年?', *Zhongguo Qiyejia (China Entrepreneur)*, Issue 23, December 2011, p. 136.

recommendation was endorsed by top Chinese leaders. In July 1986, China made a formal request for re-entry into GATT.⁴¹

It is notable that the PRC requested ‘resumption’ of the ROC’s pre-1949 membership rather than accession as a new member. In a letter to the Director-General of GATT dated 10 July 1986, the PRC government said, ‘upon recalling that China was one of the original contracting parties to the General Agreement’, the PRC government had decided to ‘seek the resumption of its status as a contracting party to GATT’.⁴² In a Q&A about GATT immediately after the application to re-join, the People’s Daily was positive about GATT’s ‘major influence’ over international trade and emphasised that ‘China was one of the founding member states of GATT’.⁴³ It said, ‘After the founding of New China, due to some historical reasons, China’s activities in GATT was stopped for over 30 years’, but ‘our country has gradually established contact with GATT since the mid-1970s’.⁴⁴

According to Ya Qin, the PRC government’s motive behind requesting ‘resumption’ rather than accession was mostly to do with sovereignty. From its perspective, it was a matter of principle to declare the ROC’s 1950 withdrawal from GATT null and void in international law and the PRC must claim its right to resume China’s membership.⁴⁵ But by portraying GATT membership positively and emphasising China’s pre-1949 status as a founding member of GATT, the People’s Daily effectively changed the official assessment of the Nationalist government’s decision to enter GATT, which was no longer seen as a sell-out to imperialist aggressors, but a legitimate trade strategy that the PRC was intending to inherit.

⁴¹ Garver p. 692.

⁴² See Ya Qin, 1993. Also see Ren Zhengde, ‘中国申请恢复关贸总协定缔约国地位’, *People’s Daily*, 13 July, 1986.

⁴³ ‘关税和贸易总协定’, *People’s Daily*, 12 July, 1986.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Ya Qin, 1993.

GATT was not the only institutional link to ‘old China’ that was reassessed and revived. The Bank of Communications, a commercial bank founded in 1908, was one of the four major banks during the Nationalist era. It was taken over by the new PRC government in 1949 and its operations in mainland China stopped in 1952, leaving only its Hong Kong branch open. But in 1987, it was re-established in Shanghai as the PRC’s first nationwide joint stock bank.⁴⁶

The idea of reviving this old bank emerged in 1984. In February that year, Deng Xiaoping visited Shanghai and complained about the slow pace of change in the city as compared with Shenzhen.⁴⁷ Later that year, at a seminar on economic strategy organised by the Shanghai party committee, economist Xu Xuehan said, ‘Before 1949, Shanghai was a very important city in the Far East. Banks big and small, both foreign banks and Chinese banks, all opened branches in Shanghai.’ He concluded that, ‘to develop its economy, Shanghai must have a bank.’⁴⁸ Xu’s suggestion received support from municipal leaders, and the State Council later decided to set up a national bank headquartered in Shanghai. But why did the leaders choose to revive the old Bank of Communications rather than set up a new bank from scratch? According to Chen Hengping, a former deputy board chairman of the bank, the decision was based on the consideration that historical legacy and reputation were important to a bank.⁴⁹ In this case, links to ‘old China’ and even Chiang Kai-shek’s government were no longer seen as a political stigma. Rather, these pre-1949 legacies were actively exploited for economic gains.

⁴⁶ Lu Wangda and Li Jianping, ‘以改革新面貌出现在我国金融界 交通银行上海分行即将开业 试营业四个月初步显示活力’, *People’s Daily*, 24 February, 1987.

⁴⁷ Zhong Jian and Liu Feng, ‘百年交行：从旧军阀“钱袋子”到红色金融改造’, *Fenghuang Zhoukan (Phoenix Weekly)*, Issue 673, 25 December, 2018. <http://www.ifengweekly.com/detil.php?id=7072>

⁴⁸ Zhang Xiaoyun, ‘百年交行的 30 年金融改革试验’, *Jiemiao* (economics website run by Shanghai United Media Group), 15 October, 2018. <https://www.jiemiao.com/article/2534622.html>

⁴⁹ Zhang Xiaoyun, 2018.

Pre-1949 legacies used in continued ideological clashes

The ideological and policy shift in the early reform era opened the door to more positive assessments of the Republican-era economic legacy. As Tim Wright points out, in the early 1980s, Chinese scholars began to make positive reassessments of the Republican-era economy and business management practices, with the intention of supporting the economic reforms.⁵⁰ Writing in the mid-1980s, Marie-Claire Bergère observed that Chinese leaders were trying to exploit the ‘progressive and cosmopolitan force’ produced by the bourgeois phenomenon in Republican China, which was ‘full of useful lessons’ for the reform era.⁵¹ According to Huaiyin Li, since the 1980s, the government has welcomed and supported, with generous research funding,⁵² Chinese historians’ adoption of the modernisation narrative, which aims to use history to prove the historical and logical ‘necessities’ of the capitalist transformation of the Chinese economy in the reform era and its integration with the capitalist world.⁵³

However, ideological clashes continued between conservatives and liberals within the Party. Deng Xiaoping sought to chart a middle course between Leftist dogmatism and ‘bourgeois liberalisation’, which he equated as ‘taking the capitalist road’.⁵⁴ As China marked Sun Yat-sen’s 120th birth anniversary in 1986, Sun’s legacy was used to support this middle course between learning from the West and being mindful of China’s specific national conditions (*guoqing*). A People’s Daily editorial commemorating Sun said, ‘He had been to many

⁵⁰ Tim Wright, ‘The spiritual heritage of Chinese capitalism: Recent trends in the historiography of Chinese enterprise management’, in Unger (ed.), p. 205-238. Also see Tim Wright, ‘Introduction: Modern Chinese economic history in a period of change’, in Tim Wright (ed.), *The Chinese economy in the early twentieth century: Recent Chinese studies*, (Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press), 1992, pp. 1-28.

⁵¹ Marie-Claire Bergère, *The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie 1911–1937*. Trans. Janet Lloyd. (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 5.

⁵² Huaiyin Li, *Reinventing Modern China: Imagination and Authenticity in Chinese Historical Writing*, (University of Hawaii Press, 2013), p. 246.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 26.

⁵⁴ Baum, p. 188.

economically developed countries. He not only paid attention to China's history and reality, but also seriously studied the history and reality of the world. This is an important reason why he had a higher standpoint and a farther vision than many people in his times.' The editorial emphasised that whilst Sun advocated learning from foreign countries, he also stressed that China could not blindly follow other country's footsteps.⁵⁵ Deng Yingchao, wife of the late Premier Zhou Enlai and chairwoman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, eulogised Sun's call for learning from foreign countries in a way that suits China's own conditions. She wrote, 'We should also act this way when we carry out the modernisation construction. We need to not only bravely learn the advanced things from foreign countries, but also do so in an analytical way that suits our country's needs and conditions, so that we can facilitate our own creativeness and development.'⁵⁶

This middle course between opening up and the 'national conditions', as the next section will show, survived the shock of 1989 and became an even more prominent propaganda theme. But 'national conditions' was not just used as an excuse to avoid the potential negative effect of Western capitalism. In fact, China's own developmental legacies in the pre-communist era became a key resource for pro-market reforms in various Chinese regions in the 1990s.

2. 1990s: Pre-1949 legacies invoked in local development discourses

The 1989 Tiananmen incident resulted in a strong backlash by conservative leaders such as Chen Yun and Deng Liqun against Deng Xiaoping's reform programme. In reaction, Deng

⁵⁵ People's Daily editorial, '社论：复兴中国文明的伟大先驱——纪念孙中山先生诞辰一百二十周年' (A great forerunner in regenerating the Chinese civilisation – In memory of Mr Sun Yat-sen's 120th birth anniversary), *People's Daily*, 12 November 1986.

⁵⁶ Deng Yingchao, '纪念孙中山先生诞辰一百二十周年' (Commemorating the 120th anniversary of Mr Sun Yat-sen's birth), *People's Daily*, 12 November 1986.

Xiaoping went on a tour of southern China in early 1992, during which he called for a renewed push for reforms and opening up.⁵⁷

With the tide turning in favour of reform, Sun Yat-sen was again promoted as a patriotic economic moderniser. In June 1992, the People's Daily published an article by Zhang Xiaodan, an author at the People's Publishing House, entitled 'Three thoughts on reading Selected Works of Sun Yat-sen', which used Sun's writings to support three of the top issues for CCP propaganda at the time – China's *guoqing*, or national conditions, the need to continue opening up, and the Three Gorges Project. What is particularly interesting about this article is how it tried to reconcile the post-Tiananmen focus on anti-Westernisation and Deng's call for further reforms. The article first acknowledged the importance of 'Chinese characteristics' by pointing out that Sun Yat-sen, who advocated both Western capitalist theories and 'learning from Russia', was accepting such imported ideas in a 'selective and conditional' way and was opposed to 'total Westernisation'. The author then went on to talk about Sun's 'openism' and stressed that 'openism' was a 'farsighted vision rooted in "Chinese characteristics"' and premised on maintaining China's sovereignty. The article said, 'His thoughts and strategies are a valuable spiritual fortune for us in our attempts to open up and invigorate the economy'.⁵⁸

Supporting economic reform persisted as a key task of the Central Propaganda Department in the 1990s. In 1993, Ding Guan'gen, then head of the Central Propaganda Department, said the department's main role was to 'provide spiritual impetus, intellectual support and positive public opinion for [China's] economic development'.⁵⁹ In the years that followed, tributes to

⁵⁷ Baum, pp. 341-344.

⁵⁸ Zhang Xiaodan, '读《孙中山选集》有感三题' (Three thoughts on reading Selected Works of Sun Yat-sen), *People's Daily*, 22 June 1992.

⁵⁹ Ding Guan'gen, '关于宣传思想工作的基本思路' (Basic thinking on propaganda and thought work), 25 June, 1993. cited in Brady, pp. 13-14.

Sun's economic thinking became an essential part of official commemorations of Sun Yat-sen. When China marked Sun's 130th birth anniversary in 1996, the country was preparing to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and further open its economy. In his speech commemorating Sun, Jiang Zemin said Sun 'drew a blueprint for building modern industries, a transportation system and agriculture, showing his extraordinary vision and magnificent boldness over China's future development'. Jiang quoted Sun's call for 'openism' and 'learning from the strengths of foreign countries', and then stressed Sun's emphasis on the need for China to exercise sovereignty over its development.⁶⁰

Whilst Sun's thinking was used to promote both economic openness and economic nationalism, another major trend in the 1990s was the increasing role of local governments in economic development. The varied pre-1949 economic legacies in different regions became important resources for local development.

The rise of local nostalgia: Restoring Shanghai's past prestige

Economic localism emerged in China in the 1980s. As the post-Mao state began modifying its ideological discourse to encourage economic development and at the same time giving localities more autonomy, some of China's regional governments, in their attempts to mobilise their local populations to strive for development, also began developing new discourses of regional cultures and identities that were consistent with marketization and internationalisation.⁶¹ This trend became much stronger in the 1990s, as Zhu Rongji, who emerged as China's new economic tsar, permitted local governments significant retained

⁶⁰ Jiang Zemin, '在孙中山先生诞辰一百三十周年纪念大会上的讲话' (Speech at the Meeting Commemorating Mr Sun Yat-sen's 130th birth anniversary', *People's Daily*, 13 November, 1996.

⁶¹ Feng Chongyi, 'Seeking Lost Codes in the Wilderness: The Search for a Hainanese Culture', *The China Quarterly*, No. 160 (Dec., 1999), pp. 1036-1056.

resources and new areas of autonomy and gave them stronger incentives to be entrepreneurial and drive economic development.⁶² This led more significant attempts by provincial governments to develop new local identities.⁶³ Historical legacies of commercialism and cosmopolitanism were key in this new wave of regional identity construction.

Nowhere else was this reassessment more dramatic than in Shanghai. Under Mao, pre-1949 Shanghai was condemned as a ‘massive semi-feudal and semi-colonial speculative market’⁶⁴ and a ‘major stronghold of imperialists from various countries invading the whole of China’.⁶⁵ Official propaganda used to hail Shanghai’s transformation during the Mao era from ‘a semi-colonial, semi-feudal city of deformed development’ and a ‘paradise for adventurers’ into a ‘new-type socialist industrial base’.⁶⁶ But after the reform began, the role of Western influences in pre-1949 China, previously assessed only in condemnatory terms as imperialist aggression, gradually became a subject of a more nuanced reassessment. In the 1980s, scholars and writers in Shanghai began publishing articles in local official publications to rehabilitate the city’s history under capitalism and to argue that Shanghai would be able to draw on its capitalist heritage and participate again as a major actor in the world economy.⁶⁷ And, as mentioned earlier, the idea of reviving the Bank of Communications in Shanghai and making the city once

⁶² Barry Naughton, pp. 118-119.

⁶³ For more information on the development of provincial identities in China, see David S. G. Goodman (ed.), *China's Provinces in Reform: Class, Community and Political Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997); and Hans Hendrichske and Feng Chongyi (eds.), *The Political Economy of China's Provinces: Comparative and Competitive Advantage* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁶⁴ Zhang Jiazhi, ‘从上海市场的改造看有组织市场的优越性’ (On the superiority of organised market from the perspective of the reform of Shanghai market), *People's Daily*, 16 January 1955.

⁶⁵ Cheng Shi, ‘外滩——帝国主义侵略罪行的见证’ (The Bund – a witness to the crimes of aggression committed by imperialists), *People's Daily*, 12 March 1965.

⁶⁶ Peng Chong, ‘充分利用和积极发展上海工业 为实现四个现代化作出更大贡献’ (Fully utilise and actively develop Shanghai’s industry, make bigger contribution to the realisation of Four Modernisations), *Hongqi*, Issue 12, December 1977. Republished by *People's Daily* on 8 December, 1977.

⁶⁷ Edmond Lee, ‘A bourgeois alternative? The Shanghai arguments for a Chinese capitalism: the 1920s and the 1980s’, in Brantly Womack (ed.), *Contemporary Chinese Politics in Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 98.

again a financial centre was, to a large extent, based on positive appraisals of its historical legacy.

In the early 1990s, as the Chinese government decided to restore Shanghai's position as an international commercial centre, the city's capitalist past received more explicit recognition from China's top leadership. In February 1991, when Deng Xiaoping visited Shanghai and listened to Mayor Zhu Rongji's report on the development of Shanghai's Pudong area, he said, 'Shanghai used to be a financial centre where currencies could be freely traded. In the future it should be like this, too. If China is to attain an international standing in the field of finance, it must depend on Shanghai first and foremost.'⁶⁸ Deng made it very clear that his reformist vision for Shanghai's future was at least partly inspired by the city's semi-colonial past. Such top-level endorsement for old Shanghai left the door wide open for a nostalgic reassessment of the city's pre-1949 legacy. Its semi-colonial, bourgeois history changed from a political liability into an economic advantage, and the legacies of the Maoist transformation became a problem that had to be undone for Shanghai to 'restore its past prestige'.

In a 1993 article on Shanghai's development of a 'socialist market economy', People's Daily reporter Xiao Guan'gen wrote that the party Central Committee's strategic decision to develop Shanghai into an international economic, financial and trade centre had stoked local people's confidence in 'restoring the city's past prestige' (*Chong zhen xiongfeng*). Reviewing Shanghai's past, he said, 'as early as in the 1930s, [Shanghai] had already been playing the role as an economic centre, financial centre and trade centre in national economy.' But, he wrote, Shanghai's 'multi-function role was weakened in relative terms' after 1949 'under the highly

⁶⁸ Huang Qifan, '邓小平开放开发思想与上海浦东开发' (Deng Xiaoping's thought on opening-up and development and the development of Shanghai's Pudong), *People's Daily*, 14 January 1994.

centralised system of planned economy'.⁶⁹ In other words, this People's Daily article pointed out in no uncertain terms that the party leadership was trying to overcome Maoist legacies and to restore Shanghai's 'multi-function role' it enjoyed in the 1930s.

As Hanchao Lu observes, 'Beijing's endorsement of Shanghai's growth has permitted more objective views on old Shanghai and its culture. Consequently, it allowed the resurgence of at least part of the city's old commercial spirit and cosmopolitanism. Under this circumstance, nostalgia about pre-1949 Shanghai was tolerated and to some extent even encouraged and promoted'.⁷⁰ As the slogan '*Chong zhen xiongfeng*' showed, 'the mood in the city was one of "seeking revenge" - to regain its status as an unmistakable world-class city.'⁷¹

Nationwide search for pre-communist economic legacies

Such nostalgia for the 'semi-colonial' past is not limited to Shanghai, but can be found nationwide, especially in the cities, because, as Lu observes, what it reflects is a national phenomenon: 'the relaxed political atmosphere, the rising commercial culture, and the desire to modernise by revisiting and drawing inspiration from the past'.⁷² In Guangdong, for example, the municipal government of Guangzhou city played an important role in cultivating a 'commodified nostalgia' for 'Old Guangzhou', or pre-communist Guangzhou. According to Jakob Klein, by promoting the commercial and outward-looking 'traditional culture' of Old

⁶⁹ Xiao Guan'gen, '世纪之交的历史重任——上海建立社会主义市场经济体制的探索之一' (Historical responsibility at the turn of the century – Shanghai's quest to build a socialist market economic system (1)), *People's Daily*, 10 November, 1993.

⁷⁰ Hanchao Lu, Nostalgia for the future: the resurgence of an alienated culture in China, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol 75, No 2, 2002.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Hanchao Lu.

Guangzhou, the political elites of Guangzhou claim to be returning the city to its true identity as a cosmopolitan centre of international trade.⁷³

In the northeast city of Harbin, another Chinese city with a complex history of openness, the historical legacy of foreign influences also underwent a favourable reappraisal. Harbin's history is inextricably linked to the Chinese Eastern Railway, built by Imperial Russia with a concession from the Qing government.⁷⁴ The railway, its employees and the large number of Russians who came with the railway enjoyed extraterritoriality, which encroached upon Chinese sovereignty during the late Qing and early Republican era.⁷⁵ During the Mao era, the railway was seen as a tool used by Imperial Russia to 'suck blood from the people for the lavish enjoyment of the czar and the Russian ruling class'.⁷⁶ But in the 1990s, the same history was used to tout Harbin's status as a 'city of openness'. An article published in the People's Daily in November 1991 said,

'Ninety years ago, after the Chinese Eastern Railway connected China and Russia, 16 countries set up consulates in Harbin, and more than 30 countries established banks here. The wind of modern civilisation blew into Harbin, making her prosperous and bustling and giving her a reputation as an 'Oriental Moscow'.⁷⁷

The invocation of pre-1949 economic legacy even spread to underdeveloped inland provinces. During the early reform era, the inland provinces, which were unwilling to accept the gradual

⁷³ Jakob A. Klein, "For Eating, It's Guangzhou": Regional Culinary Traditions and Chinese Socialism", in Harry G. West & Parvathi Raman (Eds.), *Enduring Socialism: Explorations of Revolution and Transformation, Restoration and Continuation* (Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 44-76.

⁷⁴ Chin-Chun Wang, 'The Chinese Eastern Railway', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 122, The Far East (Nov., 1925), pp. 57-69.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Hu Hua, '关于移交中国长春铁路', *People's Daily*, 21 February, 1950.

⁷⁷ Liu Yin, '北国"夏都"', *People's Daily*, 15 November, 1991.

withdrawal of the central government for fear of losing central subsidies and investments, came under pressure from the centre to take on more economic responsibilities as their coastal counterparts had done.⁷⁸ In 1992, the central government, in an attempt to further encourage provincial economic autonomy, reduced its role in poverty alleviation and forced provinces to develop their own policies.⁷⁹ As the provinces became more autonomous economic actors, the promotion of regional historical legacies rapidly became the standard practice of local and provincial-level officials as they formulate new approaches to encourage entrepreneurship and attract investment.⁸⁰

Shanxi, a relatively backward isolated northern province, was previously known primarily as an important wartime CCP base area and the home of the Dazhai Village, a model of the Maoist rural economy. But as David Goodman noted, in the 1990s, the provincial government cultivated a new provincial identity that was consistent with capitalistic economic development.⁸¹ Surprisingly, the rule of Yan Xishan, the KMT warlord who controlled Shanxi during the 1920s and 1930s, was sometimes cited as a positive example.⁸² Though Yan cooperated with the CCP closely between 1936 and 1939, he was in severe conflict with the party before and after. Therefore he had been primarily known as a ‘reactionary warlord’ and was not personally rehabilitated in the 1990s.⁸³ However, Yan’s record as a moderniser was recognised by the reformist provincial leadership. For instance, Shanxi under his rule was credited with having developed the first native Chinese automobile industry.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Hans Hendrichske, ‘Provinces in competition: region, identity and cultural construction’, in Hendrichske and Feng (eds.), *The Political Economy of China’s Provinces*, p. 6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁸⁰ Tim Oakes, ‘China’s Provincial Identities: Reviving Regionalism and Reinventing “Chineseness”’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 59, Issue 3, August 2000, pp. 667-692.

⁸¹ David S.G. Goodman, ‘Structuring Local Identity: Nation, Province and County in Shanxi During the 1990s’, *The China Quarterly*, Volume 172 (December 2002), pp. 837-862.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Jiang Lianbao and Hao Xiaobin, ‘晋人造车’ (“Shanxi’s people-made automobile”), *Shenghuo Chenbao (Morning Life)*, 25 December 1997, p. 4. Cited in David Goodman, 2002.

The Shanxi provincial leadership also resurrected and actively promoted the history of ‘Shanxi merchants’ (*jinshang*), who provided credit and financial services throughout China, as well as to customers in Japan, Russia, Mongolia and Afghanistan, from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century.⁸⁵ In 1994, Shanxi produced *Changjinyuan Exchange Shop (Changjinyuan Piaohao, 1994)*, a drama series on Shanxi bankers. After that, the province produced numerous similar cultural products.⁸⁶

In Anhui, also a poor province, the provincial government worked hard to publicise the legacy of ‘Anhui merchants’ (*huishang*), who came to dominate trade throughout the Lower Yangtze region during the Ming and Qing dynasties, and to promote their so-called ‘Confucian merchant culture’.⁸⁷ In 1994, Anhui produced a film *Stories of Hui Merchants (Huishang Qingyuan)* and actively promoted it nationally.⁸⁸ Though Shanxi and Anhui merchants declined in late Qing and the early Republican era due to the onslaught of modern banking and commerce that had emerged in treaty ports such as Shanghai, their influences lasted well into the Republican era. In both cases, the local governments mobilised local traditions of commercialism and international interaction in support of reform and opening-up.

All this was happening at a time when the CCP’s revolutionary tradition was given renewed emphasis in the post-Tiananmen Patriotic Education Campaign.⁸⁹ On one hand, the CCP was promoting its revolutionary legacy with renewed vigour to boost its historical legitimacy. But

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Shuyu Kong, ‘Cultural Propaganda In The Age Of Economic Reform: Popular Media And The Social Construction Of Shanxi Merchants In Contemporary China’, *The China Journal*, No. 63 (January 2010), pp. 79-99.

⁸⁷ Tim Oakes, 2000.

⁸⁸ Oakes, p. 678.

⁸⁹ Suisheng Zhao, ‘A state-led nationalism: The patriotic education campaign in post-Tiananmen China’, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Volume 31, Issue 3, September 1998, pp. 287-302.

on the other, it was using China's pre-communist legacy of modernisation to boost its economic performance. Though both legacies were being promoted at the same time, they were not really consistent with each other. As a result, in the process of provincial identity formation in the 1990s, as provincial governments excavated and promoted previously condemned capitalist traditions, the significance of the CCP's revolutionary legacy was sometimes deliberately played down.

For example, in Jiangxi, when the provincial leadership headed by Wu Guanzheng endorsed the promotion of so-called 'Gan culture' (Gan is a classic term that refers to Jiangxi), they explicitly stated that the study of local cultural traditions should serve the purpose of economic development.⁹⁰ Though Jiangxi was traditionally seen as a cradle of the Communist revolution famous for the Nanchang Uprising and the Jinggangshan base area, as Feng Chongyi observed, the need to promote commercialism resulted in attempts in the 1990s to negate the idea that the revolutionary culture was central to Jiangxi's identity.⁹¹ Advocates of 'Gan culture', whose effort was supported by top provincial leaders, saw repudiation of Jiangxi's revolutionary symbols as their priority.⁹² An article published in the provincial CCP mouthpiece *Jiangxi Daily* in 1994 criticised the identification of 'Jiangxi culture' with 'revolutionary culture', which it said hampered economic and cultural development in the province. According to the article, 'the battles on Jinggangshan lasted less than two years and the Nanchang Uprising only several days. Furthermore, most of the leaders of these events were Marxist youths from other provinces.'⁹³

⁹⁰ Zhong Qihuang (Deputy secretary of the Jiangxi provincial CCP Committee), '关于赣文化研究的若干问题', *Jiangxi Shehui Kexue (Social Sciences in Jiangxi)*, Issue 8, 1996, pp. 1-3.

⁹¹ Feng Chongyi, 'Jiangxi in reform: the fear of exclusion and the search for a new identity', in Hendrichske and Feng Chongyi (eds.), 1999, pp. 265-266.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Hu Ping, Zheng Xiaojiang and Chen Dongyou, '千呼万唤“赣文化”', *Jiangxi Ribao (Jiangxi Daily)*, 21 January, 1994. Cited in Feng Chongyi, 1999.

It is important to note that these new provincial identities were created with full support from the central government. The dramas depicting Shanxi and Anhui merchants, for instance, were both praised by the *People's Daily*,⁹⁴ which means the efforts to promote local business traditions were recognised by the Central Propaganda Department.

3. 2000-present: Revisionist views of Republican-era economic legacy led to contestation

In the new millennium, the Chinese economy experienced spectacular growth and rose significantly in global stature. In December 2001, China finally joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO), a giant step which helped it become the world's biggest trading nation within a decade.⁹⁵ As this section will show, in an era of remarkable economic development and increasing globalisation, the legacy of China's pre-communist businesses and international interactions got even more recognition than in the preceding decade. However, as the reappraisal of the Republican-era economy became ever more favourable, it began to cause concerns from party propagandists.

Increased use of pre-1949 legacies in development discourses

In 2000, CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin came up with the new ideology of 'Three Represents', which implied that the CCP should represent the interest of not just workers and

⁹⁴ See Liu Xiliang, '提高质量 多出精品——关于目前的电视剧创作', *People's Daily*, 19 December, 1995. And Shen Peixin, '戏曲电影的新视角', *People's Daily*, 14 June, 1997.

⁹⁵ Naughton, p. 397.

peasants, but also private entrepreneurs.⁹⁶ At the CCP's 16th Party Congress in 2002, 'Three Represents' was written into the CCP's party constitution, and private entrepreneurs were given the green light to join the Party.⁹⁷ The new ideology had profound implications for the way private entrepreneurs were depicted in official propaganda. As Shuyu Kong observed, 'As businesspeople and capitalists are now among the Party's most important bases of support and sources of revenue, a crucial part of the propaganda effort is to alter the overwhelmingly negative image of businessmen in the popular imagination.'⁹⁸

In the years that followed, pre-communist entrepreneurs got even more positive publicity than in the 1990s, thanks to the active promotion of local economic legacies by propaganda departments of various provincial and municipal administrations. Indeed, some of the most popular primetime CCTV-1 dramas in the 2000s belonged to this genre. For example, in 2003, *The Big Dye House (Da Ranfang)*, a 24-episode TV drama series produced under the guidance of the Shandong provincial propaganda department, was broadcast by CCTV and received very high ratings.⁹⁹ It told a story of a successful 'patriotic' Shandong industrialist in the 1920s–1930s, who worked with other Chinese businessmen against Japanese economic encroachment. The drama followed the traditional propaganda line by attributing the plight of Chinese businesses to the humiliation and weakness of China during that period, but the image of the protagonist, an industrious, courageous and patriotic businessman, was in stark contrast to the stereotype of the weak and wavering 'national bourgeoisie' in orthodox CCP discourse.¹⁰⁰ The

⁹⁶ Special commentator of Xinhua News Agency, '按照“三个代表”的要求全面加强党的建设' (Strengthen party building in an all-round way according to the requirements of 'Three Represents'), *People's Daily*, 10 March 2000.

⁹⁷ *Xinhua News Agency*, '中国共产党第十六次全国代表大会关于《中国共产党章程（修正案）》的决议（2002年11月14日中国共产党第十六次全国代表大会通过）' (Decision by 16th CCP National Congress on 'CCP Constitution (revised)' – passed on 14 November 2002 at the 16th CCP National Congress), 14 November 2002. http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2002-11/14/content_630175.htm

⁹⁸ Shuyu Kong, 2010.

⁹⁹ Geng Song, 'Chinese Masculinities Revisited: Male Images in Contemporary Television Drama Serials', *Modern China*, 36(4), 2010, pp. 404–434.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

main contradiction in it was not class struggle but the nationalist struggle against foreign aggressors, and the protagonist fought against imperialism not through revolution, but through industrial prowess and commercial wisdom.

Shanxi merchants, who had already become a key part of the propaganda agenda of the Shanxi provincial government, attained national significance in the new millennium. From 2002 to 2004, Shanxi's propaganda department invested three years and over one million yuan to produce the TV documentary series *Shanxi Merchants (Jinshang)*, which was aired in early 2004 on CCTV's Economic Channel (CCTV-2) during the Spring Festival season.¹⁰¹ Subsequently, a special seminar entitled 'Promoting the advanced culture of Shanxi merchants; collaborating to build honesty and integrity in society' was held in Beijing during the annual parliamentary sessions.¹⁰² The national political significance attached to Shanxi's pre-communist commercial traditions was further demonstrated by the endorsement by Li Changchun, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee and the CCP's highest official in charge of ideological and propaganda work. In 2006, while meeting with the Shanxi delegation during the annual National People's Congress session, Li declared that the 'Shanxi merchant spirit' is a provincial treasure, and said, 'To develop the socialist economy, to accelerate economic marketization and globalization, Shanxi people should embrace the Shanxi merchant spirit and turn it into a great force.'¹⁰³

Earlier in this chapter, I talked about the changing image of pre-1949 Ningbo entrepreneurs in the 1980s. In the new millennium, they were no longer erstwhile reactionaries to be rehabilitated and encouraged to return, but had become a key part of the local identity. As

¹⁰¹ Shuyu Kong, 2010.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

provinces such as Shanxi, Anhui and Shandong made significant propaganda effort to promote their own commercial traditions, Ningbo's local government came under pressure to make dramas on its own pre-communist business traditions. During the sessions of the local people's congress and people's political consultative conference in 2010, several deputies raised proposals for making a TV drama on the Ningbo Group. In 2012, a drama series about Republican-era Ningbo businessmen, *To the East is the Sea (Xiangdong shi Dahai)*, funded and supported by both the Zhejiang provincial government and the Ningbo municipal government, was finally aired on CCTV-1.¹⁰⁴ In the same year, in an interview with the *People's Daily*, Ningbo's municipal party secretary Wang Huizhong praised the 'Ningbo Group' for its contribution to China's modernisation, including founding the first Chinese-run bank, the first insurance company, the first real estate company and the first stock exchange in China, and said the spirit of the 'Ningbo Group', which he said included patriotism, pioneering spirit, openness, honesty and solidarity, must be 'inherited and carried forward'.¹⁰⁵

In addition to these local development discourses, pre-communist legacies were also used in promoting a major national project – the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. Like other World Expos, the Shanghai Expo, which took place from 1 May to 31 October 2010, was intended to showcase the host country's scientific, technological and cultural power, but in a global context in cooperation with other nations.¹⁰⁶ As Astrid Nordin observes, China's state propaganda

¹⁰⁴ Chen Zhaoxia, '首部宁波帮题材史诗性力作《向东是大海》创作揭秘' (Revealing the secrets on the creation of the first epic drama on Ningbo Group 'To the East is the Sea'), *Ningbo Daily*, 4 March 2012. <http://news.cnool.net/0-1-20/101224/1.html>

¹⁰⁵ Gu Chun, '学习继承弘扬“宁波帮”精神 推进现代化国际港口城市建设——访浙江省委常委、宁波市委书记王辉忠' (Study, inherit and carry forward the spirit of 'Ningbo Group, push forward the development of a modern international port city), *People's Daily*, 13 April 2012.

¹⁰⁶ William A. Callahan, 'Shanghai's alternative futures: The World Expo, citizen intellectuals, and China's new civil society', *China Information*, Issue 2, Volume 26, 2012, pp. 251-273.

typically portrayed the Expo as the fulfilment (led by the CCP party-state) of a century-old Chinese dream.¹⁰⁷

For example, an article by the Xinhua news agency on the opening day of the Expo was entitled: ‘Shanghai Expo: After a century-long journey, China fulfils its dream’.¹⁰⁸ The article reviewed China’s participation of World Expos during late Qing and the Republican era, especially the Panama–Pacific International Exposition held in San Francisco in 1915. According to the article, ‘at this Expo, China broke several records – it had the biggest number of exhibits, the biggest exhibition space and the biggest number of awards.’ It did emphasise that China’s award-winning products in 1915 were mostly agricultural products and that China was still an impoverished agrarian economy, and attributed the fulfilment of the ‘Expo dream’ to the CCP’s reform and opening-up. But what was notable was that, typically of propaganda pieces on the Shanghai Expo, this article made no mention of the Communist revolution or the Mao era, and connected the modernisation drive of contemporary China directly to the pre-communist era.¹⁰⁹

Favourable views of Republican economy challenge party orthodox

As discussed above, these positive reassessments of the economic modernisation during the Republican era were intended to facilitate the current state policy of economic reform and opening-up. In the words of Wang Yeyang, a historian at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), China’s top official think-tank, China’s current development cannot be separated from its view of history. ‘What we are doing now cannot be inconsistent with what

¹⁰⁷ Astrid Nordin, Space for the future: Exhibiting China in the world at the Shanghai Expo, *China Information*, Issue 2, Volume 26, 2012, pp. 235-249.

¹⁰⁸ Xiao Chunfei, Wu Yu and Xu Qiaoping, ‘上海世博会：百年长路 中国圆梦’, *Xinhua news agency website*, 1 May, 2010. <http://news.sinovision.net/portal.php?mod=view&aid=133729>

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

is written in the history textbooks,’ he wrote, ‘if such a situation exists, then the textbooks need to be amended.’¹¹⁰

According to historian Huaiyin Li, during the reform era, an increasingly number of Chinese historians adopted a so-called ‘modernisation paradigm’ in their research on modern Chinese history.¹¹¹ Unlike the traditional paradigm which focused on revolution, the ‘modernisation paradigm’ was intended to ‘prove the historical and logical “necessities” of the capitalist transformation of the Chinese economy in the reform era and its integration with the capitalist world under the grand narrative of a linear process of modernization’.¹¹² Under this paradigm, the Chinese society in the late Qing and Republican periods was depicted as ‘the beneficiary of the introduction of Western civilization to China rather than a victim of Western imperialism’, and ‘modern Chinese history was retold as a story of the slow yet steady growth of modernity in Chinese society that was unfortunately interrupted by the communist revolution and the subsequent Maoist radicalization but was resumed in the post-Mao era through the reform and opening-up programs.’¹¹³

The previous sections have shown that, while the party propagandists never gave up on the revolutionary orthodox, they nevertheless adopted some ideas of the modernisation paradigm, such as the positive roles of the bourgeoisie and Western influences, in pro-reform propaganda in the most authoritative media outlets such as the People’s Daily, Hongqi, Guangming Daily and CCTV. Once these most heavily controlled media outlets started to reassess Republican-

¹¹⁰ Wang Yeyang, ““革命史观”和“现代化史观”并不对立’ (‘Revolution historiography’ and ‘modernisation historiography’ are not in opposition to each other), *Beijing Daily*, 31 March 2008. <http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/49157/49163/7064075.html>

¹¹¹ Huaiyin Li, 2013.

¹¹² Huaiyin Li, p. 26.

¹¹³ Huaiyin Li, p. 235.

era economic legacies positively, the less strictly censored, more market-oriented newspapers and magazines began doing the same, and often went much further.¹¹⁴

For example, when talking about Chinese entrepreneurial traditions in *Nanfang Renwu Zhoukan* (Southern People Weekly) in 2009, Fu Guoyong, a well-published popular historian of Republican China, praised the ‘exemplary good traditions’ created by late Qing and Republican-era businesspeople and lamented that, during the ‘socialist reform’ in the 1950s, ‘the whole entrepreneurial class was uprooted, the chain of history was cut off and everything was reset to zero’.¹¹⁵ What Fu was suggesting is that the communist revolution hampered rather than facilitated China’s economic modernisation.

As mentioned earlier, Thomas Rawski’s *Economic Growth in Prewar China* gave a very positive assessment of the Chinese economy before the outbreak of war in 1937. In October 2009, a Chinese version of the book was published by Zhejiang University Press.¹¹⁶ Mao Likun, a history lecturer at Nankai University and one of the translators of the book, published an article in *Nanfang Dushi Bao* (*Southern Metropolis Daily*), entitled ‘During the 50 years before the war, the economy was also remarkable’.¹¹⁷ Summarising Rawski’s findings, the author wrote, ‘China was one of the few underdeveloped countries that achieved economic growth in that era. Pre-war economic growth laid the foundation for Chinese economic development afterwards, including after 1949.’¹¹⁸ CCP propaganda has always praised the party itself for

¹¹⁴ According to Brady, the print media, which cater to a more educated audience, tend to have more leeway in covering sensitive stories. See Brady, ‘Conclusion’, in Brady (ed.), p. 194.

¹¹⁵ Fu Guoyong, ‘中国企业家的本土传统在哪里?’ (Where are the local traditions of Chinese entrepreneurs?), *Nanfang Renwu Zhoukan* (Southern People Weekly), Issue 16, April 2009. <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/26432.html>

¹¹⁶ Thomas Rawski, *战前中国经济的增长*, Trans. Tang Qiaotian, Mao Likun and Jiang Xiuxian. (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Daxue Chubanshe (Zhejiang University Press), October 2009).

¹¹⁷ Mao Likun, ‘战前五十年，经济亦可观’, *Nanfang Dushi Bao* (*Southern Metropolis Daily*), 13 December, 2009, p. GB17. <http://www.press.zju.edu.cn/xwzx-news/2245.html>

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

the economic development achieved after it took, but this article argued that, for whatever it achieved post-1949, the party should give at least some credit to the economic foundation laid during the pre-communist era.

Such arguments were by no means rare. Addressing a forum held in Beijing in 2010 by the liberal-learning Caixin Media group, Professor Yuan Weishi, a veteran historian at the Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, pointed out that during the rule of the Beijing government (1911-1927), China also saw rapid economic growth, with average annual industrial growth at 13.8 per cent over the decade after the 1911 Revolution. According to Yuan, what China achieved in the last 30 years has been nothing more than returning to the past.¹¹⁹

In the same vein, Qin Hui, a history professor at Tsinghua University, wrote in the Guangzhou-based liberal newspaper *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekly) in 2011 that China's economic growth rate from 1911 to 1937 was no lower than the average growth rate in the world or that of most Western powers at the time, and was no lower than China's growth rate during the 20-year period from the 1957 Anti-Rightist Campaign to the beginning of the reform era. It was exactly during the Republican era that, Qin said, China's industrial development and economic growth surpassed that of India, though the large-scale destructive wars that started in 1937 set China back again.¹²⁰ Here, Qin Hui was openly suggesting that the economic performance of pre-war China, seen in orthodox historiography as dark and impoverished, was actually better than that of socialist China under Mao.

¹¹⁹ 'Reviewing the Century since the 1911 Revolution', *China Reform* magazine (Caixin Media), Issue 11, November 2010. <http://magazine.caixin.com/2010-10-30/100193870.html>

¹²⁰ Qin Hui, '民国历史的不同面相 (二)' (Various aspects of Republican history, 2), *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekly), 4 November 2011. <http://www.infzm.com/content/64459>

These arguments are clearly inconsistent with the traditional CCP orthodoxy, which depicted China in the Republican era as impoverished and stagnant and had to be ‘saved’ by the CCP. But despite the potential challenge these views posed to the party orthodoxy, they were sometimes allowed to be published, as the above discussions showed. This suggests that the Central Propaganda Department was not guarding the traditional revolution paradigm as the only legitimate view of history. Though the revolution paradigm needed to be defended in order to maintain the historical foundation of the CCP’s legitimacy, the modernisation paradigm was also useful to the party’s current policy priority of promoting economic modernisation. As Bu Ping, a historian at the official think-tank Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, wrote in *Guangming Daily* in 2009, the debate over ‘paradigms’ in modern Chinese history, though intense, did not result in the dominance of one over the other, because neither side negated the value of the other paradigm.¹²¹

Continued invocation of pre-1949 economic legacies under Xi Jinping

After Xi Jinping came into power in 2012, ideological control became tighter and criticisms of the so-called ‘historical nihilism’ became louder. For example, in 2013, *Renmin Luntan* (*The People’s Tribune*), a journal published by the People’s Daily, published an article entitled ‘Resist the nihilistic ideological trend and stick to the socialist path with Chinese characteristics’.¹²² The author, Deng Qiuping, a politics professor at an obscure vocational college in Guangdong, wrote, ‘Without doubt, calls for replacing the “revolutionary paradigm” with the “modernisation paradigm” and replacing the “materialistic historiography” with the

¹²¹ Bu Ping, ‘改革开放以来的中国近代史研究’ (Studies on modern Chinese history since reform and opening-up), *Guangming Daily*, 13 January 2009. http://www.gmw.cn/01gmr/2009-01/13/content_878100.htm

¹²² Deng Qiuping, ‘抵御虚无主义思潮与坚定中国特色社会主义道路’ (Resist the nihilistic ideological trend and stick to the socialist path with Chinese characteristics), *Renmin Luntan*, Issue 26, September 2013. http://paper.people.com.cn/rmlt/html/2013-09/11/content_1311788.htm

“modernisation historiography” are not academic viewpoints or paradigms for thinking, but are fundamentally theories that cater to the needs of the political conspiracy against scientific socialism by evil forces hostile to Chinese socialism.¹²³

However, despite some initial remarks that smacked of a return to Maoism, Xi did not reverse the trajectory of China’s economic development. In fact, under his reign, globalisation was raised to an even more prominent position on the policy agenda. During Xi’s visit to Kazakhstan and Indonesia in October 2013, he outlined plans for a so-called ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’, which mainly targeted Central Asia and Europe, and a ‘Maritime Silk Road of the Twenty-First Century’, which mainly targeted Southeast, South and North Asia.¹²⁴ Eager to take advantage of this ambitious plan for closer regional economic integration, which later became known as the ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative (OBOR or BRI), some of China’s less prosperous localities mobilised their pre-1949 links with foreign countries to promote their future prospects of increased openness.

For example, the remote Yunnan Province in southwest China, which was designated as a ‘bridgehead’ in developing links with South and Southeast Asia,¹²⁵ highlighted its advantage in the OBOR project with references to the province’s pre-communist history. A 2014 article published in the People’s Daily noted that Sun Yat-sen proposed building a Yunnan-Burma railway in *The International Development of China*, his blueprint for China’s future, and lamented that the Yunnan-Burma railway project was derailed because of the Second World War.¹²⁶ The article went on to detail Yunnan’s recent effort to build an ‘international transport

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Hong Yu, ‘Motivation behind China’s “One Belt, One Road” Initiatives and Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 26:105, 2017, pp. 53-368.

¹²⁵ Tim Summers, *China’s Regions in an Era of Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 89-91.

¹²⁶ Chu Donghua, Liu Hong and Zhang Ruogu, ‘融入“一带一路”战略 构筑西南“开放高地”’, *People’s Daily*, 7 July, 2014. <http://finance.people.com.cn/n/2014/0707/c1004-25245082.html>

corridor’, which it said ‘laid solid foundation for its integration into the OBOR strategy’.¹²⁷ In so doing, it linked Yunnan’s current development strategy to the pre-communist era and suggested the province was simply back on track on the trajectory already set during the Republican era.

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned Heilongjiang provincial capital Harbin’s invocation in the 1990s of its pre-1949 legacy to project an image of openness. In the province’s drive to participate in the OBOR, Harbin’s history has again featured prominently. A 2017 article published in Heilongjiang Daily, the mouthpiece of the provincial CCP Committee, said:

‘Openness was written into Heilongjiang’s development history a long time ago. According to historical records, as early as May 1928, the Harbin railway station was selling express train tickets various European cities. This station connected the Trans-Siberian Railway and various railways inside China and was the busiest railway station in Asia at the time. Today, in the “One Belt, One Road” initiative and its construction, Harbin has once again become an important node, attracting attention from the world.’¹²⁸

The local government attempted to revive the historical links by inviting foreign residents who had lived in Harbin before 1949 and their descendants to visit the city. In June 2017, the local authorities organised the International Conference of Former Foreign Residents in Harbin.¹²⁹ Official newspaper Guangming Daily quoted Harbin Mayor Song Xibin as saying that the city

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Wang Wei, Qu Jing, Sang Lei and Di Jie, ‘对接“一带一路”挺立开放前沿’, *Heilongjiang Ribao* (*Heilongjiang Daily*), 10 October, 2017. <http://www.hlj.gov.cn/zwfb/system/2017/10/10/010850166.shtml>

¹²⁹ Tian Xuefei and Zhou Huiying, ‘Foreigners return home to Harbin’, *China Daily*, 30 June, 2017. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-06/30/content_29941760.htm

hoped to deepen its links with former residents in order to promote ‘people-to-people bonds along the “One Belt, One Road”’.¹³⁰ Qu Wei, a counsellor at the Heilongjiang provincial government, said during the conference, ‘As Harbin proactively integrates itself into the “One Belt, One Road” strategy and open wider to the outside world, special effort must be made to take advantage of the former Harbin residents’ role as bridges and linkages.’¹³¹

In the globalisation drive, though ‘humiliation’ in China’s modern history was still noted, the focus was often put on modernisation instead. For example, *Wu Da Dao (The Stories of Concessions)*, a documentary series which was produced by the Tianjin municipal propaganda department, CCTV and the Tianjin TV and Radio Station, and was shown on CCTV documentary channel in 2014, told the story of Wu Da Dao, a historical district in Tianjin, which was part of the British concession from 1860 to 1943.¹³² The story started with foreign occupation and unequal treaties, which appears to be perfect material for nationalist outbursts about the ‘Century of Humiliation’. But the documentary did not focus on humiliation. A People’s Daily commentary on the documentary acknowledges that ‘Tianjin used to be a wound in Chinese history that was very slow to heal’ and that ‘for quite a long time, the strong sense of national humiliation forced us to see that history only through the lens of condemnation’. But it goes on to say that ‘Tianjin has now become an international metropolis’ and that, looking at history from today’s perspective, the documentary has been able to ‘give up the simplistic condemnatory stance and calmly depict and explain the changing face of a

¹³⁰ Zhao Hongbo and Zhang Shiyong, ‘哈尔滨构建“一城对一国”对外开放新格局’, *Guangming Daily*, 10 July, 2017. http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2017-07/10/nw.D110000gmr_20170710_6-03.htm?div=-1

¹³¹ Jiang Xuesong, Yin Zufeng and Wang Dong, “‘哈尔滨记忆’架起中西交流“连心桥”——“世界原居哈尔滨人交流大会”专家研讨会侧记’, *Harbin Ribao (Harbin Daily)*, 27 June, 2017. <http://hlj.people.com.cn/n2/2017/0627/c220027-30384423.html>

¹³² ‘纪录片《五大道》全景式反映天津近代百年历史’ (Documentary *The Stories of Concessions* offers panoramic view of Tianjin’s hundred-year modern history), *Tianjin Daily*, 8 October 2014. <http://jishi.cntv.cn/2014/10/08/ARTI1412731714466491.shtml>

city'.¹³³ Explaining his understanding of history in the official *Guangming Daily*, Zu Guang, the director of the documentary and a consultant to the Tianjin government, did not use the word 'humiliation' at all. Instead, he said he saw Tianjin as a microcosm of modern China and Wu Da Dao as a 'perfect window' through which to observe Tianjin's transformation from a traditional Chinese town into a modern international city.¹³⁴ Though the documentary did criticise imperialist aggression and unequal treaties, its focus was not on China's humiliation but on the positive effect of foreign influences on regional development and modernisation.

Similarly, the colonial legacy of the city of Qingdao, which was under German and Japanese control for much of the Republican era, was now seen as a positive factor in its business environment. For example, a 2017 article published in the Overseas Edition of the *People's Daily* attributed Qingdao's status as a burgeoning financial centre partly to its history.¹³⁵ It said, 'As early as a hundred years ago, Qingdao was endowed with powerful "financial genes". In the 1920s and 1930s, Qingdao was a place where foreign banks concentrated and had become one of the financial centres in the Far East.'¹³⁶ The article made special mention of the city's German link, calling the Deutsch-Asiatische Bank, which set up shop in Qingdao in 1898, 'the foreign bank with the deepest ties with Qingdao'. Commenting the 2013 opening of a Deutsche Bank branch and the 2015 opening of a branch of Allianz China Life Insurance, the article said, 'Germany and Qingdao have completed a financial reunion that spanned a hundred years.'¹³⁷

¹³³ Zhang Tongdao, '纪录片《五大道》：历史与现实的双重交响' (Documentary The Stories of Concessions: Double symphony of history and reality), *People's Daily*, 14 November 2014. <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n/2014/1114/c1003-26023173.html>

¹³⁴ Zu Guang, '五大道：读懂一座城市的人文密码' (Wu Da Dao: Deciphering the cultural code of a city), *Guangming Daily*, 7 February 2015. http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2015-02/07/nw.D110000gmr_20150207_4-07.htm

¹³⁵ Zhao Wei, '外金融机构为何青睐青岛', *People's Daily (Overseas Edition)*, 21 September, 2017, p. 10. http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2017-09/21/content_1806823.htm

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

Notably, the article made no mention of colonisation or occupation, and portrayed Qingdao's foreign links in purely positive terms.

But this does not mean the party propagandists are not concerned about the potential damage the positive portrayals of Republican-era economy posed to the party's legitimacy. In February 2018, Xia Chuntao, party secretary of the CASS's Institute of Modern History, published an article on a website run by CASS, in which he lambasted 'historical nihilism'.¹³⁸ According to Xia, in the 'nihilistic' narratives,

'The achievements in social development during the Republican era, especially during the "Golden Decade", have also been exaggerated in a one-sided manner. Attributing the achievements made by some national capitalists between 1927 and 1937 by promoting "saving the country through industry" and seeking development within tight constraints entirely to the Nationalist government in Nanjing, and avoiding any mention of the bureaucratic and comprador capital's terrible record of harming and squeezing national enterprises – can this be the correct interpretation of history? If the Republic was really that good, then what was the basis and significance of our party's leadership in the revolution and founding of New China?'¹³⁹

As Huaiyin Li observes, China's reformist government needs the modernisation narrative, but it also guards against any 'open and direct challenge to the very theoretical and historical foundation of the Party's official ideology'.¹⁴⁰ Despite the incompatibility between the

¹³⁸ Xia Chuntao, '历史虚无主义的产生背景、主要特征及其危害', *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Wang (Chinese Social Sciences Net)*, 8 February, 2018.

http://www.cssn.cn/lxx/lishixuezhuan/bwxcxljzm/bwsf/201802/t20180208_3845298.shtml

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Huaiyin Li, p. 246.

modernisation narrative and the revolutionary orthodox, the CCP has continued to use both paradigms to interpret China's modern history.

Conclusion

Economic reforms resulted in the introduction of 'governmentalities' associated with neoliberal ideas.¹⁴¹ Unlike the Maoist state, which educated the Chinese people to be socialist subjects, the reformist state has been engaged in a 'civilising' project intended to create a 'responsible' citizenry committed to the goal of an orderly and productive market society.¹⁴² As Anne-Marie Brady and He Yong observe, 'In the years from 1949 to 1978 Chinese people were told that markets and capitalism were exploitative and must be abolished in China. Since 1978, and even more so after 1992, Chinese people have been educated to accept the opposite view: that "the socialist market economy" (a euphemism for CCP-controlled capitalism) is a necessary stage for China's (now mythical) socialist future.'¹⁴³

Part of the 'economic thought reform' involves a reframing of the economic legacies of pre-communist China. According to Barry Naughton's assessment, China's rapid growth post-1978 is 'due in no small part to the entrepreneurial and competitive behaviours that the traditional economy had nourished'. The Chinese economy during the reform era has also benefited from foreign influences and the traditional links with maritime China outside the PRC. Therefore,

¹⁴¹ Elaine Jeffreys, *China's Governmentalities: Governing Change, Changing Government* (London: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁴² Luigi Tomba, 'Of quality, harmony, and community: Civilization and the middle class in urban China', *Positions*, 17(3), 2009, pp. 591–616.

¹⁴³ Anne-Marie Brady and He Yong, 'Talking up the market: economic propaganda in contemporary China', in Brady (ed.), *China's Thought Management*, (Routledge, 2012), p. 36.

Naughton concludes, ‘China’s contemporary economy includes a rediscovery of the traditional’, which had been repressed by war and socialism.¹⁴⁴

Therefore, as this chapter has shown, in the reform era, the Central Propaganda Department and local propaganda departments on various levels have reassessed favourably Chinese bourgeoisie and China’s economic interaction with foreign countries during the Republican era and have recognised their positive effect on China’s modernisation. Sun Yat-sen’s thinking on learning from the West and utilising foreign capital have been cited by official media as prescient thinking for China’s economic modernisation; the pre-communist bourgeoisie was described as patriotic modernisers in order to attract investment and encourage entrepreneurship; and foreign influences on Chinese development and the cosmopolitanism of China’s treaty ports became subjects of nostalgic portrayals in official media.

But as a result of the loosening parameters, the positive reassessment of the Republican-era economy under the so-called ‘modernisation paradigm’ has sometimes gone to the point of challenging the CCP’s traditional orthodox view of history, known as the ‘revolution paradigm’. The conflicting demands of maintaining the party’s revolutionary legitimacy and supporting its current priority of modernising the economy have resulted in the continued uncomfortable co-existence of two rival interpretations of history.

¹⁴⁴ Naughton, pp. 61-63.

Chapter 3: Promoting modern ideas and inheriting Chinese traditions – Reassessing Republican-era intellectuals and academia

This chapter argues that during the reform era, the portrayal of pre-1949 intellectuals in official Chinese propaganda has shifted from the Maoist focus on the revolutionary legacy of left-wing intellectuals to a new paradigm which focuses on the contrasting views of modernisation held by two groups of non-communist intellectuals - liberal Westernisers and cultural conservatives.

From late Qing to the Republican era, some Chinese intellectuals imported various schools of Western learning, including liberalism and Marxism, while some others stressed the continuing value and relevance of Chinese cultural traditions.¹ As the Communists came into power in 1949, the relative intellectual autonomy and cultural pluralism of the Republican era was put to an abrupt end. Marxism-Leninism-Maoism was imposed onto intellectual thought and creative arts and all intellectuals were forced to remould their thinking accordingly.²

Under Mao, among pre-1949 intellectuals, only left-wing figures such as Lu Xun were exalted for their fighting spirit against feudalism and imperialism and their support for socialism. Republican-era intellectuals who had alternative visions for China's development, either those

¹ See Edmund S. K. Fung, *The Intellectual Foundations of Chinese Modernity: Cultural and Political Thought in the Republican Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

² Merle Goldman, 'A New Relationship between the Intellectuals and the State in the Post-Mao Period', in Merle Goldman & Leo Ou-Fan Lee (eds.), *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 500.

who favoured a Western-oriented path to modernisation, like Hu Shi, or those who emphasised China's cultural traditions, such as Liang Shuming, were condemned as reactionaries.³ All universities that were not founded by the CCP were labelled derogatively as 'old universities' and the European and American models of higher education in the period were said to have been designed to serve the 'semi-colonial' society.⁴

In the post-Mao reform era, however, as Marxism-Leninism was discredited, modernisation and nationalism became important themes of official propaganda. In this sense, the reform era has had more in common with Republican China than with the Mao era. As Zheng Wang observes, Mao Zedong has been the only exception of modern Chinese leaders in terms of the national rejuvenation narrative. Mao, who focused on class struggle theory, did not use the national humiliation narrative as a major ideological tool or source of legitimacy. But all other generations of Chinese leaders, from Sun Yet-sen to Chiang Kai-shek and from Jiang Zemin to Xi Jinping have used the national humiliation discourse and the goal of rejuvenation to mobilise the Chinese populace to support their revolution or reform.⁵ As the pre-communist themes of national rejuvenation and modernisation became dominant again, it was hardly surprising that participants in the relatively pluralistic intellectual scene during the first half of the twentieth century became subjects of significant reassessments. Though the official orthodox focused on the CCP's role in ending national humiliation, the renewed focus on modernisation and nationalism meant that Republican-era thinkers once again became relevant

³ Frank Dikötter, *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution 1945-1957* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 176-186.

⁴ See, for example, Li Yunyang, '略论我国高等教育的两条路线的斗争', *People's Daily*, 22 November 1957, p. 7.

⁵ Zheng Wang, 'The Chinese Dream: Concept and Context', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, March 2014, Vol 19, Issue 1, pp 1-13.

and, in some cases, even fashionable in what Timothy Cheek terms the ‘directed public sphere’ in post-Mao China.⁶

This chapter traces and analyses this reassessment by drawing on materials from the CCP’s authoritative propaganda outlets such as the People’s Daily and China Youth Daily, as well as the popular press and intellectual memoirs. It is divided into four sections. Section 1 looks at how Republican-era non-Communist intellectuals began to be rehabilitated in the late 1970s and early 1980s and credited for their promotion of Western ideas of modernisation. Section 2 details the tug-of-war over the reassessment of Republican-era intellectuals and academia in the context of the ideological struggles in the 1980s. Section 3 investigates how Republican-era intellectuals were credited post-Tiananmen for their studies of traditional Chinese culture in an attempt to improve the party’s relations with overseas Chinese communities and to counter Western influences. Section 4 argues that praise for Republican-era universities and academia was allowed as China reformed its university education system.

1. 1979-1982: The new focus on modernisation and the initial rehabilitation of Republican-era liberal intellectuals

After Mao’s death, and especially after Deng Xiaoping launched economic reforms in 1978, the regime shifted its priority from class struggle to economic modernisation, for which the cooperation of the intellectuals was crucial. Deng and his reformist ally Hu Yaobang rehabilitated almost all intellectuals and cadres who had been persecuted during the Mao era.⁷ The loosening of political control over intellectual life contributed to a gradual change of

⁶ Timothy Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 9.

⁷ Goldman, 2002, p. 500.

assessment of intellectuals in the pre-1949 era. According to Merle Goldman, the rehabilitation of a large number of intellectuals who had been persecuted in Maoist political campaigns, some to high positions in the political and cultural hierarchy, led to a revival of some of the ideas championed by intellectuals of the May Fourth generation, who advocated the introduction of ‘science and democracy’.⁸ This trend was further boosted by the campaign to ‘liberate thinking’ (*jiefang sixiang*), which was initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 to rally support among Chinese intellectuals for the reforms.⁹

At the same time, the need for improved ‘united front’ work targeting overseas Chinese intellectuals, which was important for facilitating national reunification and creating a favourable international environment, meant that the condemnatory assessments of Republican-era figures such as Hu Shi, who had remained influential in intellectual circles outside of mainland China, needed to be toned down. In this relaxed atmosphere, the literary works of the Republican era that had been condemned in the Cultural Revolution were republished and extolled.¹⁰

The positive reassessment of Republican-era intellectuals who had been condemned under Mao was not just a result of the ‘united front’ strategy targeting domestic and overseas Chinese intellectuals. In the reform era, the intellectual qualities and ideas exalted in the Mao era, such as class awareness, became less relevant. The cult of Lu Xun was scaled down and remoulded and his anti-establishment criticism was no longer encouraged.¹¹ By contrast, the regime encouraged intellectuals to speak out, because their criticisms of Maoist ideology and their call

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Deng Xiaoping, ‘解放思想，实事求是，团结一致向前看’ (13 December, 1978), *The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Volume II)*.

¹⁰ Merle Goldman, *China's Intellectuals: Advise and Dissent* (Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 235.

¹¹ Merle Goldman, ‘The political use of Lu Xun in the Cultural Revolution and after’, in Leo Ou-fan Lee (ed.), *Lu Xun and His Legacy* (University of California Press, 1985), pp. 192-196.

for study and professionalism bolstered Deng's reformist policy.¹² Under such circumstances, the ideas of those pre-1949 intellectuals who had championed Western-oriented modernisation became politically acceptable and even useful. The most prominent representatives of these champions of modernisation were Hu Shi and Cai Yuanpei.

Hu Shi: From reactionary to moderniser

Hu Shi, one of the most prominent literary reformers of modern China¹³ and a key leader in the New Culture Movement, was named a 'war criminal' by Mao due to his anti-communist stance and became a subject of a major campaign of demonisation in the 1950s.¹⁴ During the Mao era, no objective research on Hu could be published. But the situation began to change soon after the reform began in late 1978. In March 1979, the official Xinhua News Agency reported that some of Hu Shi's articles and letters on his research on *Shui Jing Zhu*, an ancient Chinese book on geography, was to be published in a Shanghai-based academic journal. Though the articles in question had nothing to do with politics, the report, which was also published by the People's Daily, was notable in that it contained no criticism of Hu Shi and even praised Hu's research for being 'original'.¹⁵ Quoting the journal's Editor's Note, the report said that these articles were published to encourage intellectuals both in mainland China and in Taiwan and overseas to join academic debates and in so doing contribute to the causes of national reunification and the 'Four Modernisations'.¹⁶

¹² Goldman, 1981, p. 232-233.

¹³ Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 46

¹⁴ See Li Da, *胡適反動思想批判* (Sanlian Bookstore, 1955-1956)

¹⁵ Xinhua News Agency, '《中华文史论丛》发表胡适论著和书札' (Journal of Chinese Literature and History to publish Hu Shi's works and letters), The People's Daily, 23 March 1979.

¹⁶ Editor's Note, 《中华文史论丛》 (*Journal of Chinese Literature and History*), Volume 2, 1979.

The commemoration of the 60th anniversary of May Fourth in 1979 was a major milestone in the reassessment of Republican-era liberal intellectuals. While the CCP's previous May Fourth commemorations had focused exclusively on the contribution made by Chinese Marxists such as Li Dazhao, this time other May Fourth figures, most notably Hu Shi, began to be recognised. In May 1979, *Lishi Yanjiu* (Historical Research), China's top history journal edited by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, published an article entitled 'Hu Shi and New Culture Movement during the May Fourth Period'.¹⁷ While repeating the Maoist critique of Hu's 'bourgeois stance', the author, Geng Yunzhi, a CASS historian, recognised Hu's role in promoting written vernacular Chinese (*baihua wen*), advocating individual freedoms and the liberation of women, and championing social liberties. The article said,

'As a major representative of bourgeois intellectuals, Hu Shi did play a positive role in his time. He made certain achievements in some areas of cultural and academic activities. Therefore, while criticising his bourgeois stance, viewpoint and methods, we should at the same time recognise his progressiveness in opposing feudal culture and some of his specific academic achievements.'¹⁸

This was the first time since 1949 for any PRC publication to reassess Hu Shi favourably, and this initial opening towards rehabilitating Hu Shi was endorsed by the CASS authorities. According to Geng Yunzhi's memoir, he had been instructed to write the article by Li Xin, then deputy head of the CASS's Institute of Modern History, as a submission to a national academic conference marking the 60th anniversary of May Fourth, which the CCP Central Committee had ordered the CASS to organise. Li Shu, another deputy head of the institute

¹⁷ Geng Yunzhi, '胡适与“五四”时期的新文化运动' (Hu Shi and New Culture Movement during the May Fourth Period'), *Lishi Yanjiu*, May 1979.

¹⁸ Geng Yunzhi, 1979.

serving concurrently as editor-in-chief of *Lishi Yanjiu*, decided to publish the article in the journal before the conference started.¹⁹

Geng's was not the only article on Hu Shi submitted to the week-long conference, which was held in Beijing from 2 to 9 May, 1979. Of the 156 theses received, four were dedicated solely to Hu Shi studies.²⁰ The number in no way reflected the actual significance of Hu Shi in the May Fourth era, but it was an important signal that the legacy of Republican-era intellectuals, even those who had opposed communism, was now an allowable topic of academic discussions.

This partial opening was consistent with the new interpretation of the May Fourth legacy presented at the conference. While May Fourth had traditionally been hailed by the CCP as an 'anti-imperialist and anti-feudal' movement, CASS deputy president Zhou Yang said in his speech at the opening ceremony that it was also one of the 'three great thought-liberation movements' in twentieth-century China along with the Yan'an Rectification Movement in the 1940s and the ongoing 'thought-liberation movement' Deng had just launched.²¹ According to the People's Daily, the conference emphasised the May Fourth slogan of 'science and democracy', hailing it as a 'sharp weapon in pushing forward thought liberation'. The conference stressed that 'promoting democracy is the prerequisite of facilitating the constant development of science', interpreting 'democratic spirit' in the context of social sciences as allowing free debate and not imposing any restrictions on research subjects. In the spirit of 'thought liberation', conference participants called for objective assessments of historical

¹⁹ Geng Yunzhi, '心长路远，努力前行——回忆胡适研究的历程', in Geng Yunzhi & Song Guangbo (eds.), *心长路远：胡适研究的历程* (Heilongjiang Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2015).

<http://v.yc.ifeng.com/book/ts/68245/8876012.htm>

²⁰ Chen Xiaoping, '1979~1985：胡适归来' (1979-1985: Hu Shi returns), *Zhongguo Xinwen Zhoukan* (China Newsweek), Issue 25, 2011. <http://www.chinanews.com/cul/2011/07-07/3166077.shtml>.

²¹ Zhou Yang, '三次伟大的思想解放运动——在中国社会科学院召开的纪念五四运动六十周年学术讨论会上的报告', *People's Daily*, 7 May 1979.

figures. They criticised the ‘deification’ and ‘distortion’ of Lu Xun during the Cultural Revolution and held heated discussions on how to assess May Fourth figures such as Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi, etc.²²

After the conference, more studies on Hu Shi and some of his own writings were published.²³ However, this process of opening was not always smooth. According to a China Newsweek report reviewing the reassessment of Hu Shi, in the second half of 1979, Geng Yunzhi suggested to Li Shu that *The Collected Works of Hu Shi (Hu Shi Wen Cun)*, an influential selection of Hu Shi’s articles which was published during the Republican era, should be republished. Li Shu agreed and the CASS’s newly established China Social Sciences Press set out making preparations for its publication.²⁴ Over half way through proofreading, however, the publication was cancelled because, according to Geng, a senior leader in the CCP Central Committee, who he did not name, asked at a meeting on the publishing industry, ‘How can a socialist publishing house of ours publish Hu Shi’s stuff?’ This leader, Geng was later told, even vowed to ‘fight to the death’ against whoever dared to publish Hu Shi’s work.²⁵

Despite such high-level opposition from the Party leadership, however, the rehabilitation of Hu Shi’s legacy did not stop. According to Geng, Hu Yaobang, then CCP general secretary, got a set of original copies of *Hu Shi Wen Cun*, and later issued an internal instruction asking academics to conduct research on two Republican-era figures, namely Sun Yat-sen, ‘the forerunner of China’s modernisation’, and Hu Shi, ‘who was fully devoted to modernising

²² *People’s Daily*, ‘社会科学院纪念五四运动六十周年学术讨论会闭幕 把思想解放运动继续推向前进’, 14 May, 1979.

²³ Chen Xiaoping.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Zhou Ang, ‘胡适：未完成的回归’ (Hu Shi: The unfinished return), *Zhongguo Zhoukan (China Weekly)*, 13 August 2012. <http://www.chinaweekly.cn/bencandy.php?fid=48&aid=6181&page=2>

China'.²⁶ This shows that the leadership was divided on this issue and there was both high-level opposition to the reassessment and high-level support for using the Republican-era intellectual legacy to further the cause of modernisation.

Veneration of Cai Yuanpei

Compared with Hu Shi, whose well-known anti-communist stance made it hard for his legacy to be given a wholesale rehabilitation, Cai Yuanpei, another key May Fourth figure, was less controversial. As president of Peking University (PKU) at the time of May Fourth, Cai advocated modernised education and encouraged genuine academic freedom,²⁷ and was instrumental in creating a free and open academic environment which facilitated the New Culture Movement. As a veteran KMT member, he supported Chiang Kai-shek's 1927 purge of Communists, but he opposed Chiang's high-handed approach and attempted to rescue jailed Communist intellectuals. He also supported the KMT-CCP alliance against Japanese aggression. When he died in 1940, Mao sent a telegram mourning him. After 1949, little mention was made of Cai in CCP propaganda. But when the May Fourth slogan of 'science and democracy' was revived in the reform era, his legacy was mentioned again. According to the wife of CASS deputy president Zhou Yang, when an article linking the PKU's 'brilliant tradition' to Cai's 'inclusiveness' and democratic spirit was brought to Zhou's attention, though there was opposition within the Party to this article on grounds of Cai not having been a Communist, Zhou said the article was 'very good' and allowed it to be published.²⁸

²⁶ Chen Xiaoping.

²⁷ Mitter, pp. 46-47.

²⁸ Zhang Fu, '我眼中的周扬', *Bai Nian Chao*, Issue 10, 2012.

In March 1980, the PRC government commemorated Cai Yuanpei on his 40th death anniversary. At a meeting in Beijing marking the anniversary, Song Qingling, Sun Yat-sen's widow who was then deputy chairwoman of the National People's Congress, called Cai China's 'famous democratic revolutionary, educationalist and scientist' and praised him for 'promoting science and democracy, advocating inclusiveness and letting a hundred schools contend, and educating a whole generation'. Emphasising the significance of commemorating Cai in the context of the drive towards the 'Four Modernisations', Song said,

'His spirit can motivate our intellectuals in education, science, culture and other fields to work even harder and make contributions to realising the "Four Modernisations". His spirit can also play a positive role in facilitating Taiwan's return to the motherland and fulfilling the great cause of unifying the motherland.'²⁹

On 27 June 1981, the CCP Central Committee passed an important document titled 'Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China', which was an official assessment of the CCP's post-1949 history.³⁰ The Resolution vowed to eradicate the Mao-era inclination to 'undervalue education, science and culture and discriminate against intellectuals', to recognise the intellectuals' indispensable role in the socialist cause, and to promote a 'hardworking and enterprising spirit' which required one to 'devote everything to the modernisation drive'.³¹ Just a few days later, on 1 July, CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobang raised Cai Yuanpei's profile even further in his speech marking the 60th

²⁹ Xinhua News Agency, '首都各界人士一千多人集会 纪念蔡元培先生逝世四十周年 宋庆龄主持纪念大会并致词', 5 March 1980. Published by *People's Daily* on 6 March 1980.

³⁰ '关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议（一九八一年六月二十七日中国共产党第十一届中央委员会第六次全体会议一致通过）（Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China' (passed unanimously at the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on 27 June, 1981)), *People's Daily*, 1 July, 1981.

³¹ *Ibid.*

anniversary of the Party's founding. In the speech, Hu called Cai an 'preeminent forerunner of the modern Chinese intelligentsia'. Significantly, Hu's tribute to Cai came immediately after his praise of the CCP's important political and military leaders from Mao to Song Qingling, and before that of Lu Xun, who had been revered under Mao as the unparalleled literary giant of modern China.³² Lifting the political significance of Cai, a Western-oriented liberal moderniser, over and above that of Lu Xun, who was known for his revolutionary zeal, was a reflection of the reformist government's shifting priorities from revolution to modernisation.

In October 1982, a bronze statue of Cai Yuanpei was erected in the Peking University campus along with that of Li Dazhao, one of the founders of the CCP who worked as head of the PKU library.³³ According to a *People's Daily* article, this was the result of a proposal by the PKU Student Union to the PKU Party Committee, which stated that the graduating classes of 1977 and 1978 were prepared to make donations to erect bronze statues of Li and Cai.³⁴ The proposal said that both Li's role in spreading Marxism and founding the CCP and Cai's 'selfless patriotism and lifelong pursuit of science and democracy' could instil students with a sense of honour and responsibility and to enable them to realise their historical mission to 'regenerate China and realise the "Four Modernisations"'. Also, said the proposal, considering the reputation of the two figures, erecting the statues would be significant for the 'united front' work, which would not only send an affectionate signal to all PKU alumni around the world but also have a positive impact on Taiwan's reunification with the motherland.³⁵ The proposal was accepted by the PKU authorities and received endorsement from the top Party leadership.

³² Hu Yaobang, '在庆祝中国共产党成立六十周年大会上的讲话（一九八一年七月一日）' (Speech at the meeting commemorating the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (1 July, 1981)), *People's Daily*, 2 July 1981, p. 1.

³³ *People's Daily*, '北大举行李大钊、蔡元培塑像落成典礼', 16 October, 1982.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ '时代精神的丰碑——北京大学学生筹建李大钊、蔡元培铜像纪实', January 1984. Carried by *People's Daily* website. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/69112/71148/72755/4947289.html>

When the statues were unveiled, the ceremony was attended by Politburo member and NPC Standing Committee deputy chairman Ulanfu, Politburo member and party ideologue Hu Qiaomu, as well as Central Propaganda Department chief Deng Liqun, among others. Hu Yaobang sent PKU students a message through the Communist Youth League saying that he supported their initiative, and Deng Xiaoping wrote the title for a book PKU published to mark the event.³⁶ It was, of course, not surprising for the CCP-controlled university to commemorate CCP member Li Dazhao. What was significant here was that Cai, a non-CCP figure with a chequered history of relations with the Party, was commemorated along with Li for his call for ‘science and democracy’ and for his continuing appeal to intellectuals in Taiwan and overseas.

The positive reassessments of Hu Shi and Cai Yuanpei were driven by the reformist government’s desire to promote Western-oriented modernisation. The same desire also changed the way the Chinese higher education system was perceived. China’s pre-1949 universities, which were built on European and American models, began to get positive reassessments.

Sovietisation of Republican-era universities criticised

Under Mao, all universities that were not founded by the CCP were labelled derogatively as ‘old universities’ and the European and American models of higher education, which were dominant in Republican China, were said to have been designed to serve the ‘semi-colonial’ society.³⁷ In 1952, the new Communist government carried out a total reorganisation of the higher education system under Soviet guidance, during which whole institutions were torn

³⁶ ‘时代精神的丰碑’.

³⁷ See, for example, Li Yunyang, ‘略论我国高等教育的两条路线的斗争’, *People’s Daily*, 22 November 1957, p. 7.

apart and reconstituted and Chinese universities lost many links to the pre-1949 period. The new, Soviet-inspired system was characterised by rigid and narrow specialisation and extremely strong framing which deprived teachers and students of any control over the knowledge transmitted in the pedagogical process. The system suppressed social sciences and upheld Marxism-Leninism as the unquestionable orthodox doctrine. As Ruth Hayhoe noted, the system produced technical experts who could be slotted into appropriate lifelong posts within the socialist bureaucracy and expected to apply their skills to socialist modernisation, without raising fundamental questions in a broad or critical way.³⁸ During the Cultural Revolution, the radical faction under Mao suspended the Soviet-inspired system and attempted to restore the nativist non-formal model of higher education developed during the Yan'an period,³⁹ and it was dangerous to look back with nostalgia on any but the revolutionary colleges of Yan'an and other border regions.⁴⁰

Immediately after the economic reforms began, universities were re-opened and the Sovietisation programme and the Maoist education policy came under criticism. While it was the Soviet-style system that was restored, it was immediately subjected to reforms and universities were granted considerable freedom to change the structure and content of their curricula.⁴¹ Under the overall guidance of the newly established State Education Commission, universities were expected to address the imbalance under the Soviet system between natural and social sciences by increasing programmes in finance and economics, political science and

³⁸ Ruth Hayhoe, *China's Universities and the Open Door* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), pp. 18-20.

³⁹ Ruth Hayhoe, *China's Universities 1895-1995: A Century of Cultural Conflict* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), pp. 99-106.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

⁴¹ According to Hayhoe, the new freedoms were given formal expression in the 'Decision on the Reform of the Education System' adopted by the Central Committee at a National Education Conference in May 1985, but by the early 1980s they had already become evident. See Hayhoe, 1996, p. 122.

law, and management, and to reform the overspecialisation of knowledge areas and make provision for the growth of new and interdisciplinary science courses.⁴²

These changes, which to some extent represented a reversal of the 1952 reorganisation, naturally led to a negative reassessment of the 1952 decision and a positive reassessment of the Chinese university system before that. For example, in 1952, many of the departments of Zhejiang University, a famous comprehensive university during the Republican era, were separated from it and later developed into institutions such as Hangzhou University, Zhejiang University of Agriculture and Zhejiang Medical University. But according to a *People's Daily* report, in June 1980, the Zhejiang provincial CCP Committee studied the higher education system in the province and recognised the fact that Zhejiang University had a history of over 80 years, was relatively strong academically, had a relatively complete array of subjects, and had some influence both in China and overseas. It said that, though the 1952 reorganisation 'had some positive effect' at the time, it also led to problems such structural duplication, waste of human resources, overspecialisation, etc. The party committee therefore decided that what remained of Zhejiang University and the three other universities which 'shared the same roots' should boost cooperation and eventually merge back into a comprehensive university.⁴³

In another case of official media giving voice to such reassessments, the *People's Daily* published an article by Fudan University scholar Zhu Wenhua in its column 'Discussions on Education Work' on 16 August, 1980, in which Zhu proposed a new reorganisation of China's higher education system. While Zhu, like the Zhejiang CCP Committee, recognised the 'positive effect' of the 1952 reorganisation, he criticised it for closing down some well-

⁴² Hayhoe, 1989, pp. 41-42.

⁴³ '中共浙江省委决定 四所大学通过协作逐步办成综合性大学', *People's Daily*, 1 August, 1980.

developed and influential comprehensive universities, forcing some good universities to lose their traditional strengths and character, and abolishing business and management programmes which should have been built upon, etc.⁴⁴ In both these cases, the curricular structure of pre-1949 Chinese universities were given some recognition and the 1952 reorganisation was criticised for damaging them.

The relative academic freedom in Republican-era universities also began to attract praise. The main rationale for the higher education reform in the early 1980s followed the theme of the economic reform, which stressed the autonomy and responsibility of enterprises.⁴⁵ As increased university autonomy became a new policy direction, the limited autonomy of Republican-era universities got positive mentions in official meetings and in official media. According to a People's Daily report on the 'two sessions' held in September 1980, when CPPCC deputies praised the new autonomy granted to state-owned enterprises, some deputies suggested that higher education institutions should also have more autonomy and that the Ministry of Education should not control university affairs too strictly and in too much detail. Legal scholar Qian Duansheng was quoted as saying that 'both the senate (*pingyi hui*) elected by Peking University professors before Liberation and the Executive Committee (*xiao wei hui*) at the National Southwest Associated University [*Xinan Lianda*] during the War of Resistance had plenty of powers'.⁴⁶

As this section has made clear, the ideological liberalisation in the early reform era led to a positive reassessment of the Western-oriented intellectual and academic legacy in the Republican era. But this trend did not go unchallenged. As I will explain in the next section,

⁴⁴ Zhu Wenhua, '建议全国高校进行新的院系调整', *People's Daily*, 16 August, 1980. p. 4.

⁴⁵ Hayhoe, 1989, pp. 40-41.

⁴⁶ '张化东、陈翰笙、钱端升委员谈扩大自主权的问题', *People's Daily*, 11 September, 1980. p. 4.

the tug-of-war between left and right, ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ thinking was a constant feature in the ideological sphere throughout the 1980s, which inevitably had an impact on the reassessment of pre-1949 intellectual legacies.

2. 1983-1989: Republican-era legacies and the ideological struggles in the 1980s

The first major setback for the positive reassessment of Republican-era liberal intellectuals came in 1983. In the spring that year, addressing a Central Propaganda Department meeting focusing on the ‘serious bourgeois liberalism’ within the literary and art circles, Hu Qiaomu criticised calls from intellectual circles for Chinese universities to revive the ‘inclusiveness’ Cai Yuanpei championed at PKU in the 1910s and 1920s. He said,

‘A well-known figure wrote an article on university education, in which one particular sentence highly deserves our attention. He wants our universities to implement the policy of “inclusiveness” and inherit the old tradition of Peking University. When Cai Yuanpei advocated “inclusiveness” at the time, it was progressive. But implementing ‘inclusiveness’ in today’s universities is equivalent to allowing opposition to the Communist Party and socialism in our universities. This would be historical retrogression.’⁴⁷

During the campaign against ‘spiritual pollution’ that ensued, academic studies on Hu Shi also attracted negative attention from the ideological enforcers. Partly because of his work on Hu Shi, Geng Yunzhi was listed as a key target of investigation by the team the Institute of Modern

⁴⁷ Gu Xiang, *晚年周扬* (Shanghai: Wenhui Chubanshe, 2003), pp. 85-88.

History had set up to crack down on ‘spiritual pollution’. Fortunately, the campaign was short-lived due to opposition from Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang.⁴⁸ Geng was later told that the investigation team had concluded that his was ‘not a political issue but just an issue of academic views’.⁴⁹

After the anti-pollution campaign ended, Hu and Zhao took the initiative to create a more benign political and ideological environment for economic reforms and opening-up.⁵⁰ In 1985, Zhu Houze replaced Deng Liqun as head of the Central Propaganda Department (CPD) and his guiding principle was tolerating a range of ideas and encouraging creativity.⁵¹ Under his leadership, the CPD allowed the positive reassessment of Republican-era intellectuals to continue.

Continued evocation of liberal legacies and leftist backlash

In the more relaxed political atmosphere, Hu Shi-related academic studies and publications gathered steam. In 1985, Geng Yunzhi’s *Hu Shi Yanjiu Lungao*, the first academic book on Hu Shi in mainland China since 1949, was published.⁵² In 1986, the first biography of Hu Shi since 1949, written by historian Bai Ji’an, was published. A People’s Daily report on the publication noted Hu’s ‘right-wing conservative’ politics, but nevertheless called him a ‘famous scholar and an important educationist’ and recognised his contribution to the New Culture

⁴⁸ Richard Baum, *Burying Mao*, pp. 161-162.

⁴⁹ Geng Yunzhi, ‘心长路远’.

⁵⁰ Baum, pp. 164-167.

⁵¹ Brady, 2008, p. 40.

⁵² Li Shu, ‘革命、批判和科学性——耿云志著《胡适研究论稿》序言’, *People’s Daily*, 3 May 1985.

Movement.⁵³ In the same year, *Hu Shi Xueshu Zhuzuo Xuanji*, an 11-volume selection of Hu's academic works, was published.⁵⁴

The official veneration of Cai Yuanpei continued and his appeal in Taiwan was exploited. In April 1986, the Cai Yuanpei Research Society was established in PKU and PKU President Ding Shisun was named as head of the society. The occasion was attended by officials from the Central Propaganda Department and the United Front Department and participants were quoted by *People's Daily* as urging scholars from both sides of the Taiwan Strait to study Cai's academic thoughts together and work towards KMT-CCP cooperation and national prosperity.⁵⁵

China's liberal-leaning intellectuals also continued to exploit Cai's liberal legacy to advocate the freedom of thought and the freedom of speech. Fang Lizhi, vice-president of the University of Science and Technology of China (USTC) and a high-profile advocate for democracy, championed the spirit of 'science, democracy, creativeness and independence' in Chinese universities.⁵⁶ He was explicit about the connection between his thinking and the May Fourth spirit. During a speech at Zhejiang University, after talking about his thoughts on academic freedom, he said, 'What I said today is nothing special. In fact, Cai Yuanpei said similar things, including the idea of inclusiveness, in the May Fourth era.'⁵⁷ Notably, the democratic reform at USTC was, for a while, endorsed by state media. In October and November 1986, the *People's Daily* published a series of five articles featuring the reforms being carried out at

⁵³ '建国以来首次发表胡适陈独秀传', *People's Daily*, 26 August, 1986.

⁵⁴ Xinhua News Agency, '黄山书社编辑出版《胡适学术著作选集》', 19 November, 1986. Carried by *People's Daily*, 20 November 1986.

⁵⁵ '蔡元培研究会在北京大学成立', *People's Daily*, 11 April, 1986.

⁵⁶ Bi Quanzhong and Jiang Hanzhen, '中国科技大学副校长方励之教授谈办学思想 大学应充满科学民主 创造独立精神', *People's Daily*, 21 September, 1986.

⁵⁷ Han Shan, '今是昨非: 蔡元培和方励之(下)', *Radio Free Asia* website, 16 June, 2005.
http://www.rfa.org/cantonese/features/history/china_university_reform-20050616.html

USTC, one of which suggested that USTC President Guan Weiyan advocated democracy and inclusiveness in university administration partly because he was a PKU graduate and had been influenced by Cai Yuanpei's principles of 'democracy and freedom' and 'inclusiveness'.⁵⁸

But the official endorsement of such liberalism was short-lived. During the campaign against 'bourgeois liberalisation' in 1987, the People's Daily had to conduct self-criticism for praising 'democratic education administration' at the USTC, saying that the USTC reforms were carried out under the influence of Fang's 'erroneous thoughts' and the serial reports had had a 'bad effect'.⁵⁹ In his memoir, veteran leftist leader Deng Liqun complained that Hu Yaobang had been too tolerant of Fang Lizhi and that the liberal stance of Politburo Standing Committee member Hu Qili and CPD head Zhu Houze had given rise to the 'mistaken' view that Cai's 'inclusiveness' was still applicable in the socialist society.⁶⁰

A key target of the anti-liberalisation campaign was the notion of 'total Westernisation', which liberal intellectuals were accused of advocating.⁶¹ Hu Shi, who called for 'total Westernisation' in his early days, was inevitably implicated. A People's Daily article in March 1987 blamed 'bourgeois scholar' Hu Shi for initiating the idea of 'total Westernisation' and criticised contemporary liberals for 'playing an old tune' which had been tested and had failed.⁶² Guangming Daily published an article criticising attempts to spread Hu Shi's 'idealist' teachings, which Geng Yunzhi thought was targeted at himself and Li Shu.⁶³ Later that year, Anhui provincial government's attempt to get Hu Shi's residence designated as a Major

⁵⁸ Lu Fang, '兼容共进——民主办学在中国科技大学（之四）', *People's Daily*, 4 November, 1986. p. 3.

⁵⁹ People's Daily Commentator, '民主办学决不能摆脱党的领导', *People's Daily*, 17 January, 1987, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Deng Liqun, *邓力群自述：十二个春秋* (Hong Kong: Dafeng Chubanshe, 2006).

http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5f17b79d0102w407.html

⁶¹ Baum, p. 213.

⁶² Zhou Suyuan, "'全盘西化'论的始作俑者', *People's Daily*, 2 March, 1987.

⁶³ Geng Yunzhi, '心长路远'.

Historical and Cultural Site Protected at the National Level was rejected by the Central Committee, because some senior official said that, due to his anti-communist stance, Hu Shi could not yet be given an ‘all-round assessment’.⁶⁴

This shows that in the 1980s, despite the newfound usefulness of the liberal intellectual legacy to the government’s reformist agenda, the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist orthodoxy continued to hold sway.

Beijing’s lukewarm response to bid to revive pre-1949 university legacies

This tug-of-war between toleration and control was also apparent in the reassessment of Republican-era universities. While universities and some local governments became increasingly enthusiastic about reconnecting with pre-1949 university legacies, the central government was lukewarm and sometimes tried to control such enthusiasm.

According to Hayhoe, during the 1980s, one of the stimuli for curricular change and research development at Chinese universities came from a restored interest in their historical legacy, particularly that of the Nationalist period.⁶⁵ For instance, Tsinghua University, which became China’s foremost polytechnic university after all its social science and humanities departments were removed in 1952, began in the 1980s to make attempts to restore its pre-1949 curricular patterns.⁶⁶ Also, Wuhan University revived its pre-1949 traditions such as the use of the credit system and the provision of a greater breadth of knowledge areas.⁶⁷ Some universities took great pride in restoring their pre-1949 names, and universities that had been founded in the

⁶⁴ Chen Xiaoping.

⁶⁵ Hayhoe, 1996, pp. 123-124.

⁶⁶ Hayhoe, 1989, p. 136.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 140.

1950s sought to trace their lineage back to distinguished Republican-era institutions from which specific departments had been separated out in 1952, creating the basis for their establishment.⁶⁸ For example, Sichuan Medical College, which derived from West China Union University, a missionary institution, was renamed in 1985 as West China University of Medical Sciences; Beijing University restored its English name from the 1920s – Peking University; and Nanjing Institute of Technology adopted the name of an illustrious 1920s university – Southeast University, which later became National Central University under the Nationalists.⁶⁹

Despite attempts by Chinese universities to restore Republican-era practices and names, the government's stance on the use of the legacies of Republican-era universities was ambiguous and not always positive. The official media often presented restorations of pre-1949 practices as new reform measures without mentioning their pre-1949 roots. For example, Wuhan University's reintroduction of the credit system, which was widely used in Chinese universities before 1949,⁷⁰ was repeatedly praised by the *People's Daily* from the late 1970s to the 1980s, but the *People's Daily* articles said the system was 'implemented' or 'experimented' and avoided using the words 'resume' or 'reintroduce'.⁷¹ While some universities were allowed to restore their old names, the authorities were sometimes reluctant to allow such name-changes. For example, when Nanjing Institute of Technology filed a proposal in October 1986 to change its name to 'Southeast University', the State Education Commission was at first reluctant to allow it. According to an account by a university official involved in the name-changing process, one of the main obstacles was that restoring pre-1949 university names was a 'very

⁶⁸ Hayhoe, 1996, p. xvi.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

⁷⁰ Hayhoe, 1989, p. 140.

⁷¹ See, for example, Wuhan University Office of Academic Affairs, '实行学分制好处多', *People's Daily*, 19 July, 1979; and Bi Quanzhong, Yang Jianwu, Wen Mian and Chen Zhihong, '着力培养创造型人才——武汉大学的教学改革之一', *People's Daily*, 3 February, 1987.

sensitive issue' at the time and the Commission had rejected several other universities' similar proposals. The institute did not get permission to change its name until May 1988, after the Jiangsu provincial government offered strong support and a former party secretary of the institute who was working at the State Education Commission used his personal influences.⁷²

This was not the only case in which the local government was enthusiastic about pre-1949 university legacies but the central government was less keen. In 1988, the Yunnan provincial government, in collaboration with the United Front Department of the CCP, held high-profile celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the founding of the National Southwest Associated University (*Xinan Lianda*), the famous wartime university, in Kunming. *Yunnan Daily*, the provincial CCP newspaper, hailed *Lianda's* autonomy and broad liberal education. But outside Yunnan, the anniversary received little domestic press coverage. Among central media, only the overseas edition of the *People's Daily*, which was aimed at overseas Chinese communities, published an article on it.⁷³ From these examples, it is clear that in the 1980s, while the legacies of Republican-era universities were no longer taboos, they remained sensitive.

The re-introduction of cultural conservatism

In mid-1980s, the CPD started paying serious attention to the thinking of another group of pre-1949 intellectuals – the cultural conservatives. Though the rehabilitation of Chinese traditional culture began almost as soon as the reform era began - the first symposium on the studies of

⁷² Shi Jutao, '责任 奋斗 奉献——记韦钰校长在东南大学', in Zhu Yizhang & Zheng Yaoming (eds.), *东南大学校史研究 (Vol. 3)* (Dongnan Daxue Chubanshe, November 1998).

<http://history.seu.edu.cn/t97/72/99/c2648a29337/pagem.htm>

⁷³ John Israel, 'When is the Fiftieth Anniversary of Lianda? Observations on the Semicentennial of an Eminent University', *Republican China*, Issue 1, Vol 17, 1992. pp. 79-104.

Confucianism was held in 1978 at Shandong University,⁷⁴ Jing Wang observed that, during the first half of the 1980s, the Party seemed to be interested in nothing but a serious academic reappraisal of Confucianism, for whom the issue of critique was as crucial as that of heritage.⁷⁵ During the Cultural Discussions in the mid-1980s, Chinese traditional culture became a hot topic, but mainly in a negative way, because it was blamed for causing China's underdevelopment. At a time when reform met major barriers, political censorship banned any discourse that placed the burden of a thwarted reform on Deng's 'Four Cardinal Principles', which granted inviolable status to one-party rule and Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology. As Wang noted, pro-reform intellectuals made a well-calculated, albeit camouflaged, political discourse that ascribed the country's pressing socioeconomic problems to its traditional culture rather than to Chinese socialism itself.⁷⁶

But the negative view of Chinese traditions did not go unchallenged. Also in the mid-1980s, cultural conservatism, which rose in the early Republican era in reaction to the horrors of World War I and to the radicalism of the New Culture/May Fourth Movement but was suppressed after 1949,⁷⁷ was re-introduced to mainland China. According to Edmund Fung, modern Chinese conservatism was neither cultural fundamentalism nor anti-modernisation.⁷⁸ In contrast with the Westernisers who wanted to build Chinese modernity on the ruins of Confucianism and on the universal claims of Enlightenment modernism, the cultural conservatives sought to revitalise and harness traditional values to serve the purposes of modernisation.⁷⁹ When cultural conservatism was introduced to the PRC by overseas Chinese

⁷⁴ Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 68.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁷⁷ Fung, 2010, p. 64.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁷⁹ Edmund Fung, 'Nationalism and Modernity: The Politics of Cultural Conservatism in Republican China', *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 43, Issue 3, May 2009, pp. 777-813.

scholars such as Harvard professor Tu Wei-ming in the form of neo-Confucianism, it attracted some interest, but revival of traditions and Confucianism was not viewed as on the cutting edge in the 1980s.⁸⁰ In fact, according to Arif Dirlik, Tu Wei-ming ran into the greatest resistance to his ideas in mainland China, because Chinese intellectuals were concerned mainly about development and therefore were suspicious of a ‘feudal’ Confucianism.⁸¹

However, neo-Confucianism attracted positive attention from the propaganda authorities, who aimed to support an indigenous ideology to fend off the infiltration of foreign ideas.⁸² In 1985, the Planning Committee of the Academy of Chinese Culture obtained blessings from the Central Party Secretary and was formed under the aegis of the Party. The committee included Confucian celebrities who had been famous during the Republican era but who had been persecuted under Mao, such as Feng Youlan, Liang Shuming and Ji Xianlin.⁸³ In 1986, a national project on the ‘Studies on Modern Neo-Confucian Thoughts’ was launched as a key social sciences project in the seventh Five-Year Plan. The project would involve the collaboration of 47 specialists from 16 research institutes over 10 years. In a follow-up meeting held in September 1987, the research team decided to focus their studies on 10 neo-Confucian masters: Xiong Shili, Liang Shuming, Feng Zhiyou, He Lin, Zhang Junmai (the first generation); and Qian Mu, Fang Dongmei, Tang Junyi, Xu Fuguan, and Mou Zongsan (the second generation).⁸⁴

Compared with the positive reassessment the pre-1949 Western-oriented intellectuals received in the 1980s, the attention received by cultural conservatives in that decade was very limited.

⁸⁰ Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen (Second Edition)* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 121.

⁸¹ Arif Dirlik, *Culture & History in Postrevolutionary China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), p. 153.

⁸² Jing Wang, p. 68.

⁸³ Jing Wang, pp. 49-50.

⁸⁴ Jing Wang, p. 69.

However, as the next section explains, the political shock of 1989 led to a significant reversal of fortunes. As the party was faced with an existential crisis and the Maoist orthodoxy had been discredited, it was Chinese cultural traditions and cultural conservatism from the Republican era that were invoked to fend off the onslaught of ‘harmful’ Western ideas.

3. 1990s: Post-Tiananmen conservatism and the revival of Guoxue

The 1989 Tiananmen student movement led to a backlash against Western influences and academic programmes in both humanities and social sciences were systematically investigated for traces of ‘bourgeois liberalism’.⁸⁵ The People’s Daily again saw it necessary to clarify the official interpretation of Cai’s liberal thoughts. It published an article by CASS historian Zhou Tiandu on Cai’s view on freedom, criticising the ‘misunderstanding’ that Cai advocated ‘extreme freedom’. Zhou said that Cai opposed ‘extreme freedom’, which was in fact ‘indulgence’ and an ‘enemy of freedom’.⁸⁶ Propaganda chiefs also moved to stress the importance of Marxism, as opposed to liberalism, as part of China’s intellectual tradition. At a seminar on Li Dazhao studies, Hu Qiaomu said that Peking University had a ‘glorious revolutionary tradition’, which was ‘unshakable’. He said, ‘Peking University not only has the legacy of Cai Yuanpei, the great patriotic democrat and educationist, but also has the legacy of Li Dazhao, the great Marxist and revolutionary, as well as the legacy of researching and propagating Marxism and being one of the main birthplaces of Communism.’⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Hayhoe, 1996, p. 126.

⁸⁶ Zhou Tiandu, ‘蔡元培的自由观’, *People’s Daily*, 21 February, 1990.

⁸⁷ Liu Siyang (Xinhua reporter), ‘胡乔木在李大钊研究学术讨论会上说 北京大学光荣革命传统不可动摇’, *Xinhua News Agency*, 29 October, 1989.

In addition to efforts to re-impose the ideological orthodoxy, the authorities, driven by the desire to maintain stability, also supported a new agenda known as ‘neo-conservatism’. Amidst the heightened concerns over ‘bourgeois liberalisation’ and the dwindling credibility of Marxism-Leninism, this new agenda aimed to find a middle path between the Old Left and ‘radical reformers’, and its main themes included incrementalism and nationalism.⁸⁸ Promoting cultural nationalism, which drew from China’s cultural traditions, became one of the CCP propagandists’ strategy to counter Western influences.⁸⁹ As a result, the relevance of cultural conservatives who opposed the May Fourth Westernisers greatly increased.

As the regime blamed Tiananmen on Western infiltration, the CCP leadership saw an urgent need to step up propaganda against Western cultural and political influences. In 1991, the regime formally launched a Patriotic Education Campaign, a key part of which was the promotion of China’s national cultural heritage.⁹⁰ The state’s support for studies in New Confucianism was boosted. In 1992, NSSF made a further investment in funding a large-scale research project on New Confucianism, which signalled official support in the post-1989 era for the popular and scholarly interest in the topic.⁹¹

Shortly afterwards, the state started promoting another concept which thrived during the Republican era but became taboo after 1949 - *Guoxue*, or national studies.⁹² *Guoxue* refers to the systematic study of the Chinese tradition that emerged in late Qing as China was evolving from empire to nation-state.⁹³ During the Republican era, this field of learning was shaped by

⁸⁸ Fewsmith, 2008, pp. 88-89.

⁸⁹ See Yingjie Guo, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: The search for national identity under reform* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

⁹⁰ Suisheng Zhao, ‘A State-Led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in Post-Tiananmen China’, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 287–302, 1998.

⁹¹ Brady, p. 62.

⁹² Fewsmith, pp. 120-121.

⁹³ William A. Callahan, *Contingent States: Greater China and Transnational Relations* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 31-32.

the dynamic interplay of two paradigms. In Arif Dirlik's words, the nativist paradigm believed in the significance of traditional culture for perpetuating a national essence that is crucial to national existence and well-being, while the cosmopolitan paradigm sought to use Euro-modern tools to rewrite the past that produced that essence, because it had become an obstacle to national progress.⁹⁴

One of the first indications of official support for the revival of Guoxue came in the form of the publication of *Guoxue Dashi Congshu* (Masters of National Learning series). The book series was funded as a major project in the government's eighth Five-Year Plan, and was launched in February 1993 in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. A People's Daily report on the launch quoted 'experts' as commenting that introducing these Guoxue masters 'would be of great benefit to strengthening the education on national conditions and China's modern history and promoting the excellent culture of the Chinese nation'.⁹⁵

Several months later, official support for Guoxue was significantly upgraded. On 16 August 1993, the People's Daily published a full-page report on Guoxue studies in Peking University, which, according to veteran Chinese scholar Tang Yijie, was circulated among all members of the party leadership and was praised by top leaders.⁹⁶ Entitled 'Guoxue, rising again quietly in Peking University', the article praised PKU scholars for 'inheriting the fine tradition of Peking University' and 'investigating how to promote the excellent national traditional culture during the reform era in order to facilitate the progress of modernisation'. It mentioned that the term 'Guoxue' was abolished after 1950 and said it took 'immense courage' for contemporary

⁹⁴ Arif Dirlik, *Culture and History in Postrevolutionary China: The Perspective of Global Modernity* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011), pp. 247-8.

⁹⁵ Li Zhanji, '《国学大师丛书》开始出版', *People's Daily*, 6 February, 1993.

⁹⁶ Tang Yijie, "Some reflections on New Confucianism in mainland Chinese culture of the 1990s", in Gloria Davies (ed.) *Voicing Concerns: Contemporary Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), p. 127.

scholars to revive this concept and the legacy of ‘great masters in the previous generation’. The report quoted PKU leaders and scholars as saying that ‘the construction of socialist spiritual civilisation cannot be carried out without our country’s cultural traditions’, and that ‘the in-depth study of China’s traditional culture is a foundational project for enriching the socialist new culture, improving Chinese people’s self-respect and self-confidence, and strengthening national cohesion’.⁹⁷ It is clear that, while the article mentioned the need to study traditional culture to assist modernisation, which was consistent with the cosmopolitan paradigm of Guoxue, its focus was on using traditional culture to strengthen China’s national identity, which was closer to the nativist end of the spectrum. Just as William Callahan observed, while many Guoxue scholars in the 1920s such as Hu Shi took a dim view of Chinese traditions, the Guoxue that was revived in the 1990s has been much less critical.⁹⁸

Talking about PKU’s Guoxue tradition, the article mentioned Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu, founders of the CCP, saying that besides studying and spreading Marxism, the pair ‘also conducted in-depth studies in Guoxue’. The report then listed several ‘great masters’ in Guoxue, which included both Westernisers such as Cai Yuanpei and Hu Shi and left-wingers such Lu Xun, as well as cultural conservatives such as Liang Shuming, Qian Mu and Wang Guowei.⁹⁹ By listing Communists, liberals and cultural conservatives together as participants and supporters of Guoxue studies, the article not only boosted the prestige of Republican-era cultural conservatives, but also further legitimised the rehabilitation of liberals such as Hu Shi.

⁹⁷ Bi Quanzhong, ‘国学，在燕园又悄然兴起’ (The quiet rise of national studies at Peking University), *People’s Daily*, 16 August 1993.

⁹⁸ William A. Callahan, *China: The Pessoptimist Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 32.

⁹⁹ Bi Quanzhong, 1993.

The publication of this article was followed by many more articles in official publications on the promotion of Guoxue.¹⁰⁰ An intellectual trend called ‘Guoxue fever’ soon developed with official backing, which significantly contributed to the rehabilitation and even exaltation of pre-1949 intellectuals.¹⁰¹

However, even though the legacy of the cultural conservatives who were active during the Republican era was supposed to boost nationalism and support for the government, reviving their memories was not completely risk-free. For example, Chen Yinque¹⁰² (1890-1969), a famous historian with no apparent political preferences who chose to stay in mainland China after 1949, did not appear to be politically sensitive. In the ‘Guoxue fever’, Chen suddenly gained popularity as a ‘great master of Guoxue’ among Chinese intellectuals and university students, and a large number of books and articles were published on his life.¹⁰³ But what was most fascinating about him was not his history research, which was incomprehensible to most, but his intellectual integrity and independent thinking.¹⁰⁴ This became sufficiently problematic for the Propaganda Department to react. In June 1998, the People’s Daily published article by Sha Jiansun, a Marxist historian at Peking University, entitled ‘What should we learn from Mr Chen Yinque?’. Sha started by describing Chen’s rise as a hot topic of discussions in the media and in university lecture theatres and even dormitories, and acknowledging his status as a ‘veteran master of history with major achievements in various aspects’. He went on to describe what he saw was a wrong interpretation of Chen’s legacy:

¹⁰⁰ Just two days after the article was published, People’s Daily published a front-page article entitled ‘Long time no see, “Guoxue”!’ . See Wen Zhe, ‘久违了, “国学”!’ , *People’s Daily*, 18 August 1993, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ See Arif Dirlik (ed.), Special Feature: The National Learning Revival, *China Perspectives*, Vol. 1, 2011.

¹⁰² Chen Yinque’s name is spelt as Chen Yinke in some English-language books.

¹⁰³ Guo, p. 63.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 111.

‘However, to some commentators, the reason why Chen Yinque should be praised is not just his academic achievement, but especially his strength of character as a scholar, his independent personality and his spirit of freedom. A prominent manifestation of such strength of character, personality and spirit which has been repeatedly emphasised is the two conditions he made in his reply letter to Guo Moruo and Li Siguang when he was invited in 1953 by the Chinese Academy of Sciences to head the Institute of Medieval History. The conditions were: “Allow the institute not to follow Marxism-Leninism and not to study politics”; and “would Mr Mao (Zedong) and Mr Liu (Shaoqi) please give a certificate of permission which can be used as a shield”. Some commentators hold that, when Chen Yinque said these words at the age of 63, he exhibited the kind of “heroism” of traditional Chinese historians who insisted on telling the truth!’

In reaction to this view, Sha argued that Chen’s refusal to follow Marxism was ‘not his strength but his weakness, not a manifestation of his excellence but of his limitation’. He then challenged those who had praised Chen’s intellectual independence: ‘why raise Mr Chen’s weakness and limitation to unparalleled heights and immortalise it as noble character and heroism? Is this an act of respecting this master of history or mocking him? Is this inspiring the youth or misleading them? Is this promoting or hampering the social sciences?’¹⁰⁵ This episode highlighted the tension between cultural conservatism and the CCP orthodox. Though cultural conservatism was, like Western-oriented liberalism, in certain ways useful to the government’s contemporary agenda, it could also pose a challenge to the Party’s orthodox ideology.

¹⁰⁵ Sha Jiansun, ‘向陈寅恪先生学习什么?’, *People’s Daily*, 20 June, 1998.

This section shows that, after Tiananmen, the Central Propaganda Department's promotion of cultural nationalism led to positive coverage and reassessment of Republican-era scholars of 'national studies' or Guoxue, especially those who were seen as cultural conservatives. But it needs to be noted that the rise of the profile of these pre-1949 cultural conservatives did not come at the expense of liberal Westernisers, most prominently Hu Shi, for the following reasons. First of all, as discussed above, the official discourse on Guoxue did not focus on the differences between Westernisers like Hu Shi and cultural conservatives like Chen Yinke and instead praised scholars from different academic traditions for their studies of traditional culture. Secondly, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, incrementalism or anti-radicalism was part of the neo-conservative agenda supported by the post-Tiananmen regime. Hu Shi, whose advocacy of 'total Westernisation' drew official criticisms in the 1980s, was nevertheless credited for his empiricism and incrementalism in the 1990s.¹⁰⁶ Thirdly, after Tiananmen and especially after Deng's 1992 Southern Tour, Western-oriented modernisation continued to be a theme in Chinese political discourse, not least in the high-profile drive to build 'world-class universities' following the Western model, which I will discuss in the next section.

4. Since 1995: The drive to build world-class universities and nostalgia for pre-1949 universities

¹⁰⁶ Though the most authoritative media such as People's Daily did not actively hail Hu Shi for his anti-radical stance, Shanghai University scholar Xiao Gongqin's anti-radicalism writing, which cited Hu Shi and late Qing/early Republic scholar Yan Fu as positive examples, received a certain level of official backing. See Els van Dongen, *"Goodbye Radicalism!": conceptions of conservatism among Chinese intellectuals during the early 1990s*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Leiden University, 2009, pp. 57-58 & pp.118-119. https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/13949/fulltext.pdf?sequence=3&origin=publication_detail.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, China's pre-1949 university system began to be favourably reassessed in the early reform period, but while some localities and universities actively tried to revive the pre-1949 university legacy, in the 1980s the central authorities were ambivalent about such attempts. This situation changed in the 1990s. As the Republican-era intellectual legacy, both liberal and conservative, became politically acceptable and even useful, the legacy of pre-1949 universities began to be lauded openly by official media as valuable resources in China's drive to 'build world-class universities'.

After Tiananmen, the period of increased political control was relatively short. Following Deng's 1992 tour to the south, economic reforms took off again, which demanded a rapid expansion of higher education.¹⁰⁷ In addition, China was also keen to raise its national prestige by gaining international recognition for its educational establishments.¹⁰⁸ In 1993, the State Council issued the 'Outline for Education Reform and Development in China', clearly stating that the central government would invest in a few universities that would take a leading position in national development and international competition.¹⁰⁹ This new policy direction gave rise to Project 211, a national initiative launched in 1995 to strengthen some 100 top universities.¹¹⁰

In its bid to develop world-class universities, the Chinese government as well as university administrators openly embraced the international norms of research universities, which were based on the European and North American models of higher education.¹¹¹ The legacy of

¹⁰⁷ Hayhoe, 1996, p. 127.

¹⁰⁸ Kathryn Mohrman, 'The Emerging Global Model with Chinese Characteristics', *Higher Education Policy*, 2008, 21, (29–48).

¹⁰⁹ Wanhua Ma, 'The Flagship University and China's Economic Reform', in Philip G. Altbach & Jorge Balán (eds.), *World Class Worldwide: Transforming Research Universities in Asia and Latin America* (John Hopkins University Press: 2007), p. 33.

¹¹⁰ In her 1996 book, Hayhoe saw Project 211 as a 'remarkable reversal' of the 1952 reorganisation, which 'could well lead to the emergence of institutions that have some similarities in curricular ethos with the comprehensive institutions of the Nationalist period'. See Hayhoe, 1996, p. 259.

¹¹¹ Mohrman, 2008.

China's top universities in the Republican era, which were built on Western models, became all too relevant to this new endeavour. At the same time, this new phase began just as the legacies of most Republican-era intellectuals, both Westernisers and cultural conservatives, were desensitised and even promoted. As discussed in the two previous sections, whether to promote Western-oriented modernisation or stress China's own traditions as a way of countering Western influences, the CCP propaganda authorities had invoked the legacies of Republican-era intellectuals. The rehabilitation of these intellectuals reduced the political sensitivity of the pre-1949 academic institutions. As a result of the increased relevance and the reduced sensitivity, the legacy of Republican-era universities were discussed much more openly in official media than in the 1980s.

As mentioned before, when curricular reform was proposed in the 1980s, it was stressed that the 1952 reorganisation did have some merit and reforming the system was in no way intended to go back to the old system. But in 1995, a People's Daily article on curricular reform at Tsinghua University unequivocally said the reform had been inspired by Nationalist-era ethos and that Tsinghua was now inheriting its old traditions. The article, published on 11 December, 1995, said that the 1952 reorganisation, which removed humanities courses from Tsinghua, caused 'unspeakable regret' to Tsinghua faculty and students. It quoted Tsinghua's Republican-era president Mei Yiqi as saying that students should learn about nature, society and humanities and that the core of university education should be *tongshi* (general education) rather than specialist skills. The article specifically mentioned Tsinghua's School of National Studies, which operated from 1925 to 1929, saying, 'Starting with the Four Great Mentors of Tsinghua School of National Studies, all the academic masters instilled profound intellectual and moral meanings into their teachings'. The article introduced Tsinghua's effort to revive its

social sciences and humanities programmes, and quoted Associate Professor Ding Xia as saying, ‘Today’s humanities education at Tsinghua has inherited the excellent tradition’.¹¹²

In May 1998, at the centennial celebrations of Peking University, then CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin called for developing world-class universities. This was the beginning of Project 985, a scheme calling for the development of world-class research universities.¹¹³ After that, the legacy of China’s modern universities was cited in support of this central government initiative. The People’s Daily published an article by Yu Wen on 19 June, 1998, entitled ‘China should have world-class universities’, which argued that China had already got all the conditions needed for developing world-class universities. One of the reasons it gave was China’s ‘cultural and historical background’. The article said,

‘(O)ver two millennia, education has accrued and grown in China in a unique manner and has formed a unique Chinese academic tradition; though modern higher education has only a century-long history in China, its development has been deeply rooted in China’s national culture and educational traditions, giving rise to a university education with Chinese characteristics. This profound cultural and historical tradition has provided a profound historical and cultural foundation for our country’s effort to build world-class universities.’¹¹⁴

But the CCP leadership did not allow the discussions of PKU’s pre-1949 legacy to veer off the officially-sanctioned course. The centenary of the founding of Peking University came during a brief period of relaxed political control. From 1997 to 1998, following Deng’s death and as

¹¹² Yang Jian, ‘追求新时代的“大学之道”——人文教育在清华’, *People’s Daily*, 11 December 1995.

¹¹³ Rhoads, Shi, and Wang, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ Yu Wen, ‘中国应该有世界一流大学’, *People’s Daily*, 19 June, 1998.

Jiang Zemin directed his criticisms mainly at neo-Maoists and warned against anti-reform thinking, liberal ideas were allowed to be expressed in the open.¹¹⁵ Under such circumstances, the PKU centenary became an occasion to express liberal views. CASS political scientist Liu Junning published a book entitled ‘Peking University’s Tradition and Modern China: The Harbinger of Liberalism’, which was a selection of essays in support of democracy and human rights written before 1949 by PKU faculty. In his opening essay, Liu Junning attributed the end of PKU’s liberal tradition to the Communist revolution. The book was allowed to be published, but soon afterwards, Liu’s advocacy of liberalism came under attack from neo-Maoist journals and Jiang Zemin subsequently ordered him dismissed from the CASS.¹¹⁶

The recognition of the useful legacies of pre-1949 universities was most apparent in the academic and official interest in the history of Xinan Lianda.¹¹⁷ As mentioned earlier in this section, the legacy of Lianda did not attract much attention from the central authorities in the 1980s. But after 1998, as the drive began to build world-class universities, Lianda suddenly shot to national fame.¹¹⁸ In an effort to support the official objective, Chinese academics studied Lianda, which was seen as a world-class university which thrived in extremely difficult wartime conditions and even produced Nobel prize winners, to see what contemporary Chinese universities could learn from its experience.¹¹⁹ In 2003, CCTV’s Science and Education channel aired a documentary on Lianda entitled *The Revelations of Xinan Lianda (Xinan Lianda qishilu)*, which was jointly produced by the Yunnan provincial propaganda department,

¹¹⁵ See Merle Goldman, ‘The Flowering of Liberalism, 1997-1998’, in Goldman, *From Comrade to Citizen: The Struggle for Political Rights in China* (Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 128-160.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 155-157.

¹¹⁷ For a history of Xinan Lianda, see John Israel, *Lianda: A Chinese University in War and Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 1998).

¹¹⁸ Yuan Chunlin & Wang Guangzhao, ‘西南联大：谁在纪念 谁在遗忘’, *China Youth Daily*, 5 November, 2007. http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2007-11/05/content_1943881.htm

¹¹⁹ Yi Jidong and Feng Yongjun, ‘中国西南联大研究三十年(1978—2008)——一种词频计量分析’, *Journal of Tsinghua University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, April 2009.

Qiushi journal of the CCP Central Committee and Lianda's successor institutions and alumni association. A People's Daily review of the documentary summarised the spirit of Lianda as 'patriotism, the spirit of science and democracy, and the spirit of hard work'. It attributed Lianda's success in producing a large number of world-class scientists and scholars to its 'good mechanisms' characterised by 'a great concentration of great masters (*dashi*), professorial rule, creative spirit and freedom of thinking'.¹²⁰ In 2007, State Councillor Chen Zhili attended a meeting at Tsinghua University marking the 70th anniversary of Lianda's founding, in which she called Lianda 'a miracle', 'a monument' and praised its 'everlasting glory'. She said, 'Xinan Lianda's educational experience is a treasure trove for China's higher education from which we can draw valuable lessons in our current effort to develop higher education, improve educational quality, produce creative talent and build an innovative country. It is worthwhile that we should study it in-depth and learn from it conscientiously.'¹²¹

The official endorsement of Xinan Lianda's legacies led to a phenomenon called 'Lianda fever'. As John Israel, a historian of Lianda, noted in 2013, 'there had been a minor tsunami of books, articles, reviews, and commentaries identifying Lianda as a high point in modern Chinese higher education'. According to Israel, such publications highlighted the inadequacies of Chinese higher education in the 21st century and 'provided a Chinese pedigree for ideas, values, and institutions that might otherwise have been dismissed as bourgeois American intrusions'.¹²²

¹²⁰ Miu Junjue, '中兴业 须人杰——看历史文献片《西南联大启示录》', *People's Daily*, 18 April, 2003.

¹²¹ Li Jiangtao (Xinhua reporter), '西南联大建校 70 周年纪念大会举行 陈至立出席', *Xinhua News Agency*, 27 October, 2007.

¹²² John Israel, 'Found in Translation', *China Currents - A Journal of the China Research Center*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2013. http://www.chinacenter.net/2014/china_currents/12-2/found-in-translation/

The official press have criticised such feverish interest in pre-1949 universities. In May 2016, Beijing Daily, owned by the Beijing CCP Committee, published an article on Republican-era universities by Wang Xuebin, an associate professor at the Central Party School. Wang wrote,

‘Amidst the so-called “Republican fever” in recent years, there has been a trend in assessing the educational conditions of Republican-era universities - Republican-era universities have gradually been constructed as a kind of “great academic phenomenon”. For instance, some people say the Republican era was a golden era for the development of Chinese universities, during which the government respected scholars and knowledge, universities teachers were generously rewarded and academic achievements were extremely high. Some even compare it with today’s university education.’

Wang went on to dismiss such assessments as ‘wishful thinking’, ‘mental packaging’ and ‘deliberate construction’. He wrote, ‘University education during the Republican era did make some significant achievements, but those were just local phenomena that fell far short of benefiting the grassroots masses and could not satisfy the need for the development of a modern society. Historical research should take truthfulness, objectivity and balance as the basic principles. If one adopts a one-sided approach or even makes use of this subject to expound his own ideas, then this is really not a correct attitude in seeking true knowledge.’¹²³

Here, as in the case of the reassessments of pre-1949 intellectuals, the authorities have had to try to rein in the reassessment of Republican-era universities. Comparisons which put pre-

¹²³ Wang Xuebin, ‘民国大学教育称得上“盛景”吗？’, *Beijing Daily*, 16 May, 2016. <http://www.bjd.com.cn/a/202001/02/WS5e0b1235e4b0e6e583936910.html>

communist universities ahead of contemporary ones, either in terms of intellectual freedom or of academic quality, certainly make uncomfortable reading for the authorities. But this does not mean respect for and interest in Republican-era universities have diminished in the Xi era.

In January 2019, when visiting Nankai University in Tianjin to mark its centenary, Xi Jinping said, ‘Nankai University has a glorious patriotic tradition, which is its soul. Nankai was founded in order to train talents for the Chinese nation.’¹²⁴ On his inspection tour of Yunnan Province in January 2020, Xi visited the site of Xinan Lianda. He said, ‘At a time of national crisis, the cream of our educational elite went through a lot of difficulties and gathered here, creating a situation where a large amount of talent was concentrated in one place. It bloomed and bore fruits, and then spread the seeds around. The talent trained here played important roles in various historical periods, from revolution, construction to reform. This teaches us a profound lesson: Education must be closely connected to the destiny of the country and the future of the nation.’¹²⁵ Clearly, in Xi Jinping’s nationalistic drive to realise the ‘Chinese dream’, the patriotic legacies of pre-communist universities still feature prominently.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that China’s post-Mao government, driven by the need of both Western-oriented modernisation and cultural nationalism, rehabilitated and even promoted the legacies of Republican-era non-Communist intellectuals and pre-1949 universities.

¹²⁴ Zhang Xiaosong, Ju Peng, Ding Lin, ‘习近平寄语南开师生：只有把小我融入大我，才会有海一样的胸怀，山一样的崇高’, *Xinhua news agency website*, 18 January, 2019.

http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2019-01/18/c_1124006791.htm

¹²⁵ Zhang Xiaosong and Zhu Jichai, ‘习近平考察西南联大旧址：教育要同国家之命运、民族之前途紧密联系起来’, *Xinhua news agency website*, 21 January, 2020. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-01/21/c_1125489037.htm

As the Mao era came to an end in the late 1970s, the focus on class warfare gave way to a desire for Western-oriented modernisation. Under such circumstances, pre-1949 Chinese intellectuals such as Hu Shi and Cai Yuanpei were praised for their promotion of modernisation, though there were frequent leftist backlashes throughout the 1980s against the promotion of their ideas of Westernisation.

After Tiananmen, as the need to counter Western influences came to the fore, the CCP propagandists were drawn to China's cultural traditions as a resource to counter Western influences. As a result, the legacy of another group of Republican-era intellectuals, the cultural conservatives, attracted official endorsement and began to feature prominently in official media.

The newfound political acceptability of these intellectuals, plus the need to develop Chinese higher education to suit the need of economic development and national prestige, also led to a favourable assessment of pre-1949 universities. During the reform era, the Soviet and Maoist models of higher education came under criticism and Chinese universities were allowed, and in some cases even encouraged, to reconnect with their pre-1949 legacy, a process that gathered increased momentum during the Chinese government's drive to 'build world-class universities'.

Though these Republican-era figures and institutions received favourable attention from the authorities due to their usefulness to the official agenda, the new narrative also poses a challenge to the regime, i.e. the calls for reviving the Republican-era legacy of academic freedom and intellectual independence. Western thinking, academic freedom and intellectual independence were seen as a potential threat to one-party rule and social stability. Thus, over the past three decades, official propaganda line has been torn between the usefulness of

intellectual freedom to scientific development and economic growth and the danger it poses to one-party rule.

As Fung noted, the intellectual discourse of the post-Mao reform era shares striking similarities with that of the Republican era, because the questions and themes that informed the pre-1949 debates 'resonate with contemporary visions of modernity and with China's current conditions'.¹²⁶ Therefore, in the reform era, the Maoist focus on the revolutionary legacy of left-wing intellectuals has, to a large extent, given way to a new paradigm which focuses on the different views on modernisation held by two other groups of Republican-era intellectuals - liberal Westernisers and cultural conservatives.

¹²⁶ Fung, 2010, pp. 263-268.

Chapter 4: Towards Constitutionalism -

Reassessing the legacy of 1911 Revolution

This chapter argues that, while the Maoist historical narrative of the 1911 Revolution, which glorifies revolutionaries at the expense of reformers, has remained the official orthodox view during the reform era, the CCP, in an attempt to support reform and shore up regime stability, has allowed and even encouraged the development of a narrative of political modernisation, which saw gradualist reformers in the late Qing and early Republican era as being more effective than ‘radical’ revolutionaries in making progress towards their common goal of constitutional democracy. As an unintended consequence, however, this alternative narrative contributed to the revival of the Republican-era ideal of ‘constitutionalism’ (*xianzheng*) as a popular topic for debate in state-controlled media.

The 1911 Revolution overthrew the Qing Dynasty and led to the founding of Republican China. Three main political forces were at play in the run-up to the 1911 Revolution - the revolutionaries led by Sun Yat-sen, who aimed at overthrowing the dynastic system and establishing a democratic republic; the constitutionalists (*lixianpai*), who were pushing for political reforms to the Qing government and its transition to a constitutional monarchy; and the Qing court, which, under pressure from both the revolutionaries and the constitutionalists, had started limited constitutional reforms which were widely criticised as inadequate.¹

¹ See Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, ‘Reform and Constitutionalism at the End of the Ch’ing Period’, in *The Rise of Modern China* (Sixth Edition) (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 408-418.

Under Mao, who wanted to achieve the utopian vision of communism and thought ‘constant revolution’ was the means of achieving it, revolution was hailed as sacred whilst anything less radical, including any form of reform, was criticised for being weak or even reactionary. The 1911 Revolution was praised for paving the way for the communist revolution and Sun Yat-sen, the Republican revolutionary leader, was officially revered as a ‘forerunner of the revolution’. But even Sun’s revolutionaries, who the Communists saw as representatives of the ‘national bourgeoisie’ and a progressive force at the time, were criticised for being too weak and wavering to be able to lead the ‘old democratic revolution’ to victory. Other political forces who were active in the run-up to 1911 were condemned as reactionary and counterrevolutionary. The Qing court was, of course, the target of the revolution. Even the constitutionalists, who urged the Qing government to adopt constitutional reforms, were condemned as ‘enemies of the Chinese revolution’² and their advocacy for reform was said to have been intended to ‘resist the revolutionary movement that was just about to erupt’.³

During the post-Mao reform era, the legacies of both the 1911 revolutionaries and reformers have undergone major reassessments and have become a topic of heated discussions. According to Joseph W. Esherick, as political censorship in China prevents any serious questioning of the communist revolution, the 1911 Revolution, which is sufficiently distant in time, has provided ‘an ideal battleground for lively debates on the relative merits of reform and revolution’.⁴ As Rana Mitter observes, a century on, it still serves as a metaphor for contemporary political reform.⁵

² Liu Danian, ‘介绍辛亥革命运动中的君主立宪派’, *People’s Daily*, 10 October, 1949.

³ Cui Zhihai, ‘新中国成立以来的辛亥革命史研究’, *Jindaishi Yanjiu (Modern Chinese History Studies)*, Issue 3, 2015. http://www.xhgmw.org/html/zhuanjia/chengguo/2015/0611/19554_5.html

⁴ Joseph W. Esherick, ‘Introduction’, in Esherick and C.X. George Wei (eds.), *China: How the Empire Fell* (Routledge, 2014), p. 4.

⁵ Rana Mitter, ‘1911: The Unanchored Chinese Revolution’, *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 208, December 2011, pp. 1009-1020.

This chapter traces and analyses this debate by drawing on materials from the CCP's authoritative propaganda outlets such as the People's Daily and CCTV, as well as influential intellectual journals and the popular press. It is divided into three sections. Section 1 talks about how pre-1911 political reformers were reassessed positively in the 1980s in order to support reform. Section 2 investigates how, in the post-Tiananmen era, negative assessments of the 1911 Revolution by neo-conservative thinkers were allowed and even promoted by state media. Section 3 analyses how the neo-conservative turn in the political atmosphere paradoxically led to a revival of discussions about the Republican idea of constitutionalism.

1. 1978-1989: Supporting reform by rehabilitating pre-1911 reformers

In 1978, post-Mao China embarked on a path of reform and utopian communism was no longer the preferred direction of political change. At the Third Plenum of the 11th CCP Central Committee, convened in December that year, the party downgraded class struggle and turned its focus onto 'socialist modernisation construction'.⁶ Mao's extreme preference for revolution and his rejection of reform was no longer consistent with the new political needs of the reform era. The party's official post-mortem on Mao,⁷ a document titled 'Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China', rejected Mao's theory of 'continued revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat' as an 'erroneous leftist thesis'.⁸ The downgrading of revolution and the promotion of reform set the

⁶ '中国共产党第十一届中央委员会第三次全体会议公报（一九七八年十二月二十二日通过）' (Communique of the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (passed on 22 December, 1978)), *People's Daily*, 24 December 1978.

⁷ Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 134.

⁸ '关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议（一九八一年六月二十七日中国共产党第十一届中央委员会第六次全体会议一致通过）' (Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China' (passed unanimously at the Sixth Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on 27 June, 1981)), *People's Daily*, 1 July, 1981.

tone for the reassessment of the history of political change in late Qing and the early Republican era.

In the first decade of the reform era, supporting reform was the overwhelming priority. In an effort to reverse the anti-reform rhetoric, official propaganda outlets began to reassess positively reformers in Chinese history, including the constitutionalists who pushed for a constitutional monarchy in the pre-1911 period. At the same time, the legacy of the 1911 revolutionaries were reinterpreted in support of the goal of the reform, namely Western-oriented modernisation, including, admittedly to a much lesser extent, political modernisation.

Rehabilitating reformers

In the early reform era, as the idea of reform was being promoted in an ideological environment where only revolution was praised, reformers in late Qing got favourable reappraisals. At the beginning, the reassessment was mainly focused on the Hundred-Day Reform in 1898, a programme of drastic institutional reforms supported by the young Emperor Guangxu but eventually suppressed by Empress Dowager in a bloody coup d'état.⁹ Though the 1898 Reform Movement was seen in the early Mao era as an anti-feudal movement with some positive effect,¹⁰ it was subjected to heavy criticism during the Cultural Revolution, in which peasant uprisings such as the Boxers' Rebellion were glorified at the expense of 'bourgeois reformism'.¹¹ The negative view of reforms changed when the economic reforms began. In 1979, a People's Daily article by Li Bingqing, an editor of the newspaper, argued that 'the

⁹ See Hsü, pp. 355-386.

¹⁰ See, for example, Fan Wenlan, '戊戌变法的历史意义', *People's Daily*, 29 September, 1958.

¹¹ See, for example, Qi Benyu, '爱国主义还是卖国主义?——评反动影片《清宫秘史》', *Hongqi*, Issue 5, 30 March, 1967.

positive role of the 1898 Reform Movement should be recognised'. In the article, the author talked about reform movements in general. He wrote,

'How should we see reformism in history? Some articles argue that, in the past, because of the one-sided emphasis on violent revolution regardless of the specific historical conditions, reform was always belittled and reformism was even denounced entirely as reactionary. This is clearly incorrect. When the subjective and objective conditions for revolution were not yet mature, political reform and reformist thoughts in history did have progressive effects. In a sense, reformist movements were making preparations for revolution, just as quantitative change prepares for qualitative change.'¹²

Also talking about the assessment of 1898 and other historical reform movements, Peking University historians Deng Guangming and Zhang Xiqing wrote in *Guangming Daily* in August 1980, 'Reform is partial, slow and gradual, but it is progressive rather than retrogressive. Therefore, it is progressive and worthy of positive recognition.'¹³

Compared with the 1898 reforms, which took place in a period when there was no significant revolutionary movements, the constitutionalist movement in the run-up to 1911 was in direct competition with Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary movement. Therefore, while 1898 was praised by the CCP during the early Mao era, the constitutionalists had always been subjected to criticism under Mao. However, soon after the 1898 Reform Movement was back into the CCP's good books, the constitutionalists also became a topic for reassessment. According to CASS historian Cui Zhihai, though some scholars of the older generation stuck to the Mao-era views

¹² Li Bingqing, '戊戌变法的积极作用应当肯定', *People's Daily*, 14 November, 1979.

¹³ Deng Guangming and Zhang Xiqing, '论改革、改良与改良主义的区别', *Guangming Daily*, 26 August, 1980.

and remained negative about the constitutionalists, more and more scholars raised revisionist views. Still within the Marxist framework, they argued that the revolutionaries and the constitutionalists were just representatives of two different sections of the Chinese bourgeoisie, and that their differences were not differences between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries or between progressives and reactionaries. Though they disagreed over which path to take, they shared common interests and common objectives. At the same time, many scholars reassessed the contribution made by the constitutionalists, recognising their positive role in facilitating historical progress, saying the demise of the Qing was a result of the efforts made by both the revolutionaries and the constitutionalists.¹⁴

In the run-up to the 70th anniversary of 1911, a *People's Daily* article by Muzi, possibly a penname, published in January 1981, discussed the revolution-versus-reform question and suggested that the constitutionalists should not be negated completely and needed to be reassessed in an all-round way.¹⁵ The article cited East China Normal University historian Chen Xulu as writing in a journal article:

‘(D)uring the acute confrontation between revolutionary forces and reactionary rulers, reformers appeared on the stage as a third force which not only had conflicts with the reactionary rulers but also competed with the revolutionary forces. This was determined by their class status and political inclination. But we cannot negate them completely. We must first of all recognise that they were dissatisfied with the reactionary forces’ rotten rule and were actively seeking reform. Secondly, though they were hitting left and right, we must look at who their main target was. We need to conduct such analyses

¹⁴ Cui Zhihai, 2015.

¹⁵ Muzi, ‘如何看待历史上的革命和改良？’, *People's Daily*, 9 January, 1981.

on both the late Qing constitutionalists and the bourgeois reform thinking after May Fourth.’¹⁶

The positive turn in the assessment of the constitutionalists was not universally welcomed. From late 1980 to the spring and summer of 1981, there was a conservative backlash against reform. Conservatives successfully froze political and economic reforms in the early winter of 1980-1981,¹⁷ and in early 1981 launched the campaign against ‘bourgeois liberalism’.¹⁸ The People’s Daily published articles arguing against reassessing the constitutionalists. But even these articles accepted that the complete repudiation under Mao was not correct. Jin Chongji, a historian at the CCP Central Committee Party Literature Research Office, wrote in an April 1981 People’s Daily article about the 1911 Revolution, ‘It has been proven by facts that the revolutionaries’ direction was correct and the constitutionalists’ direction was wrong’. But he then wrote,

‘Then, should the constitutionalists be completely negated? No. It should be recognised that, in modern history studies in the past, the post-1898 constitutionalists were often written off with one stroke. Their positive contributions in enlightening people’s minds and participating in patriotic movements were not given due recognition. Detailed analyses of the complex situation within the constitutionalist faction were also lacking. These should be rectified.’¹⁹

Likewise, in a People’s Daily article in October 1981, Lin Zengping, a historian and vice-president of Hunan Normal College, repeated the orthodox Maoist views on the

¹⁶ Chen Xulu, ‘中国近代史上的革命与改良’, *Lishi Yanjiu (Historical Research)*, Issue 6, 1980.

¹⁷ Baum, p. 121.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 126-129.

¹⁹ Jin Chongji, ‘辛亥革命的历史评价’, *People’s Daily*, 13 April. 1981.

constitutionalists but refrained from completely repudiating their legacy. Lin wrote that ‘the constitutionalists, who opposed revolution, committed a historic mistake’ and therefore ‘the constitutionalist movement cannot be positively recognised’. But he admitted that some of their deeds were positive, such as the Railway Protection Movement, which he said was clearly ‘anti-imperialist and patriotic’, and their promotion of science, education, national salvation and democracy. Therefore he wrote, ‘though the constitutionalists should be sternly condemned for petitioning for constitutional rule, their other aspects should not be completely negated.’²⁰

In late summer of 1981, concerned that conservatives were endangering the entire reform effort, Deng softened his stance and the anti-liberalism drive was blunted.²¹ The reassessment of the constitutionalists continued and in January 1982, the People’s Daily reported a discussion held by the Historical Society of Hebei Province. One of the main topics at the discussion was the role of the reformers and revolutionaries in modern Chinese history. The report quoted discussants as arguing that ‘in previous studies of modern Chinese history, the assessment of reformers was too low’. They argued against the orthodox view that reformers stopped playing a positive role after 1898 and became reactionary by opposing the revolutionaries, saying ‘this statement needs to be questioned’.²²

Possibly because of repeated conservative backlashes against reform exemplified by the 1983 campaign against spiritual pollution and the 1987 campaign against bourgeois liberalisation, articles favourably reassessing the constitutionalists did not appear in the People’s Daily again until 1988. In a February 1988 People’s Daily article about Kang Youwei, a prominent advocate of constitutional reform in late Qing, Hu Bin, a historian at Qingdao University in

²⁰ Lin Zengping, ‘评辛亥革命时期的立宪派’, *People’s Daily*, 5 October, 1981.

²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 129-130.

²² Ji Fen, ‘河北省历史学会讨论了两个问题’, *People’s Daily*, 15 January, 1982.

Shandong, rejected the traditional view that the Constitutionalist Movement was ‘reactionary’ and that the constitutionalists were ‘accomplices’ of the Qing rulers and the ‘fiercest enemies’ of the revolution. According to Hu, the Constitutionalist Movement was actually ‘an ally of the democratic revolutionary movement led by Sun Yat-sen, fighting hard on another front’. Though the constitutionalists disagreed with the revolutionaries and advocated reforming the Qing regime in a peaceful manner, Hu wrote, their ultimate objective was no different, which was to ‘change China’s status as a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society and change China into an independent, rich and powerful capitalist country’.²³

These examples show a clear shift after 1978 in the official appraisal of political reformers and reformist movements in China’s modern history. While Chinese propaganda outlets used to slam reformers as opponents to the revolution, in the reform era they began rehabilitating them and praising their efforts in their common struggle with the revolutionaries.

Reinterpreting revolutionary legacy

As pre-1911 reformers were being reassessed, the legacy of Republican revolutionaries were also being invoked in support of reform. As in much of the Mao era, the official veneration of Sun Yat-sen in the reform era was still largely intended to shore up the CCP’s legitimacy as Sun’s true political heir. The CCP attempted to link the 1949 revolution, which was inspired by the foreign ideology of Marxism-Leninism, to China’s own tradition of revolution and modernisation.²⁴ But there was a subtle change in the interpretation of the legacy of the Republican revolution. Sun Yat-sen’s economic thinking was used to support economic

²³ Hu Bin, ‘关于康有为的评价问题’, *People’s Daily*, 29 February, 1988.

²⁴ Marie-Claire Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, Trans. Janet Lloyd. (Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 412-413.

reforms, a phenomenon that has already been discussed in Chapter 2. In the realm of political change, those who argued for democratisation also tapped into Sun's legacy and called for democratic reforms.

For example, in the early 1980s, Zhang Weiguo, who later became a well-known journalist for the Shanghai-based pro-reform newspaper *Shijie Jingji Daobao* (*World Economic Herald*), promoted Sun Yat-sen's democratic thinking in the campus of East China University of Political Science and Law, where he was studying law. He set up a Sun Yat-sen Research Society on campus and managed to get Song Qingling, Sun's widow, to inscribe the society's name in Chinese calligraphy. According to a biographical article published overseas after he was exiled to the United States after the Tiananmen incident, Zhang had chosen to promote Sun's democratic thinking because it was a relatively safe way to promote democracy in China. Promoting American democracy was risky in China, the article said, but it was safer to talk about Sun, who was officially revered also by the CCP.²⁵ This line of thinking was also reflected during student movements in the 1980s calling for democracy. In his book 'Political Struggles during China's Reform Era', veteran Chinese journalist Yang Jisheng recorded that, on 5 December, 1986, when thousands of students took to the streets in Hefei, Anhui Province, one of the pro-democracy slogans they shouted was 'Long live Sun Yat-sen'.²⁶

After the anti-liberalisation campaign subsided and the discourse of political reform was revived at the 13th Party Congress in the autumn of 1987, advocates of political reform became more vocal.²⁷ Under such circumstances, Sun's legacy was used to champion political reform

²⁵ Hu Nan, '張偉國：“沒坐過牢的記者不是好記者”', *Beijing Spring*, 1 July, 1992.

<http://www.64memo.com/b5/9669.htm>

²⁶ Yang Jisheng, *中國改革年代的政治鬥爭* (Hong Kong: Excellent Culture Press, 2004), p. 320.

²⁷ See Chapters 9-10 of Merle Goldman, *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China: Political Reform in the Deng Xiaoping Era* (Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 238-301.

in the official media. In September 1988, the People's Daily published an article on China's path of modernisation by Suzhou University historian Wang Xiang. According to the author, China's absorption of Western culture in the modern era went through three phases and developed from the technological level to the thought level, and then to the political level. The 1898 Reform Movement and the 1911 Revolution 'marked the transition of China's modernisation from the thought level to the political level', which Wang said was a 'major step forward'. While the 'failure' of the 1911 Revolution caused 'China's political modernisation to end abruptly', the author suggested that the process had resumed in the reform era and the three phases were also evident in the process of reform and opening up. Western technology and management know-how were the first to be introduced to China, and Western thinking and values soon followed. After the resultant 'thought liberation', Wang wrote, 'People have realised that, to make China stand independently among the nations of the world, (we) must implement political reform, strengthen socialist democracy, and guarantee and facilitate economic reform with political reform.'²⁸ It is noteworthy that this People's Daily article stressed the concept of 'political modernisation', which the author suggested was inspired not by Marxism-Leninism but by Western thinking and Western values.

But different people drew different lessons from the same history. On one hand, advocates of political reform invoked the attempts by Sun Yat-sen and others to modernise Chinese politics to call for renewed efforts towards 'political modernisation'. On the other, as I explain next, the failure of these attempts began to be cited as a reason for caution and gradualism on the path of reform.

²⁸ Wang Xiang, '关于中国近代化行程的思考', *People's Daily*, 30 September, 1988.

Emergence of anti-radicalism

As reform progressed, concerns over the government's potential loss of authority and its impact on social stability began to appear in intellectual and official circles. During the mid and late-1980s, an ideological trend called neo-authoritarianism, which called for a strong authoritarian government as the country reformed its economy, gained momentum in China and some of its proponents were close to Zhao Ziyang's camp.²⁹ Supporters of neo-authoritarianism were not opposed to democracy but argued that only a step-by-step, gradualist approach could ultimately achieve it.³⁰ Some of those who advocated neo-authoritarianism mobilised China's modern history to support it.

Xiao Gongqin, associate professor of Chinese history at Shanghai Normal University and one of the key proponents of the theory, said at a conference in the summer of 1988 that the rule of Yuan Shikai, a Qing military commander who brokered a deal between the Qing court and the revolutionaries, became president of the new Republic and subsequently ousted the revolutionaries from the government, was one of neo-authoritarianism and the period from the 1911 revolution to Yuan's rise to power as one of 'political romanticism'.³¹ The positive assessment of establishment figure Yuan and the negative view of Sun Yat-sen's revolutionaries was in stark contrast with the CCP's orthodox view of history. The negative view of revolution was even reflected in the People's Daily. In an article published in the paper in March 1989, He Xin criticised the May Fourth Movement for its 'radical anti-traditionalism', which he said was not conducive to modernisation. Referring to the revolutions in China's

²⁹ Baum, pp. 238-239.

³⁰ Fewsmith, p. 85.

³¹ Gu Xin and David Kelly, 'New Conservatism: Intermediate Ideology of a "New Elite"', in David S. G. Goodman and Beverley Hooper (eds.) *China's Quiet Revolution: New Interactions Between State and Society* (Longman Cheshire, 1994), p. 222.

recent history, he wrote, ‘We can see that since the nineteenth century, among all countries in the world, China has experienced social upheavals most frequently and most intensively, though there were objective historical reasons. As a result, China’s modernisation process has been stagnant and slow. Historical experiences from the past 100 years and more show that China has always suffered from radicalism and an impatient mentality.’³²

2. 1989-1997: Consolidating stability by opposing ‘radicalism’

After the 1989 Tiananmen student movement, as stability became the dominant theme in official propaganda, the official media outlets stressed the importance of incrementalism and opposed ‘radicalism’. In January 1990, the People’s Daily published an article authored by ‘Wen Di’, possibly a penname, entitled ‘Socialism can save China’. The article said, ‘At such an important period of historical transition, there is a great need to advocate a political incrementalism that is reformist, rational, and values both democracy and legality, and to oppose political adventurism that is extreme, fanatical and seeks instant success.’³³ Xiao Gongqin revealed soon afterwards that he had noticed the change in the political atmosphere. In an interview with Christian Science Monitor in May 1990, he said, ‘Before the Tiananmen incident, my voice was very faint. It was suppressed by the radicals. Now, my voice is stronger and stronger.’ The same report quoted Chinese sources as saying that General Secretary Jiang Zemin privately praised Xiao’s critique of Western democracy, and ‘princelings’ such as Deng Pufang, Deng Xiaoping’s son, and Chen Yuan, son of Chen Yun, shared Xiao’s political convictions.³⁴

³² He Xin, ‘“五四”精神的继承与超越——中国现代化问题的思考’, *People’s Daily*, 24 March, 1989.

³³ Wen Di, ‘社会主义能够救中国（续完）’, *People’s Daily*, 19 January, 1990.

³⁴ Ann Scott Tyson, ‘China’s Neoconservatives Step to the Fore’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 May, 1990. <http://www.csmonitor.com/1990/0515/otian2.html>

Neo-conservative criticism of China's 'radical' past

It was in such circumstances that the so-called 'neo-conservative' thought emerged on the political stage. In December 1990, at a conference sponsored by Ideological-Theoretical Section of China Youth Daily, Xiao Gongqin first used the term 'neo-conservatism'.³⁵ Though the December 1990 conference was an informal meeting, it had a degree of support from the ideology and propaganda departments.³⁶ According to Peter Moody, the neo-conservative thesis was supported by prominent princelings such as Chen Haosu, and its main high-level supporter was probably Zeng Qinghong, the closest advisor to Jiang Zemin.³⁷

According to Fewsmith, the most important idea associated with neo-conservatism was that political change in the future should be incremental rather than revolutionary.³⁸ This idea was routinely backed up with references to China's modern history and intellectual thinking at the turn of the twentieth century. Whilst the Marxist orthodox preferred revolution over reform and even criticised the 1911 Revolution for not being 'thorough enough', neo-conservatives condemned all revolutionary changes and even political reform as too 'radical'. Xiao found much in common with the evolutionary ideas of Yan Fu, the late nineteenth century translator of Western ideas who later became quite conservative during the Republican era.³⁹ In February 1991, the China Youth Daily published Xiao's essay titled 'Yan Fu's reflection on China's modernization and its lessons', which was the extended version of his speech at the informal

³⁵ Peter Moody, *Conservative Thought in Contemporary China* (Lexington Books, 2007), p. 156.

³⁶ Gu and Kelly, 1994.

³⁷ Moody, p. 156.

³⁸ Joseph Fewsmith, 'Neoconservatism and the End of the Dengist Era', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 35, No. 7 (Jul., 1995), pp. 635-651.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

discussion in late 1990.⁴⁰ In the article, Xiao praised Yan Fu for being an advocate of ‘incrementalist’ modernization.⁴¹

The pro-reform and anti-revolution thinking at the turn of the twentieth century, now dubbed ‘neo-conservatism from the history of reform in modern China’, attracted attention from China’s top leadership in the autumn of 1991, shortly after the failed coup in the Soviet Union. It was mentioned in an unpublished document entitled ‘Realistic Responses and Strategic Options for China after the Soviet Upheaval’, which was circulated internally within the party circles.⁴² It said,

‘The uniqueness of China’s national condition ensures that China can only take the path of gradual reform; this is a realistic option. Given the pressure of radical ideas, not only would we increase education regarding the national condition, we also should draw on new conservatism from the history of reform in modern China, and from Western rationalism.’⁴³

The article, which bore the by-line of the Ideological and Theoretical Board of China Youth Daily, had been planned by Pan Yue, then deputy editor-in-chief of China Youth Daily, and was submitted to the Central Committee.⁴⁴ It was widely reported to have been written under the guidance of leading members of the ‘princeling faction’.⁴⁵ Citing Hong Kong and Chinese

⁴⁰ Gu and Kelly, p. 223.

⁴¹ Xiao Gongqin, ‘严复对中国现代化的思考及其启示’ (Yan Fu’s reflection on China’s modernization and its lessons), *China Youth Daily*, 6 February, 1991, p. 3.

⁴² Fewsmith, 2008, pp. 109-112.

⁴³ China Youth Daily Ideology and Theory Department, ‘Realistic Responses and Strategic Options for China after the Soviet Upheaval’, trans. David Kelly, *Chinese Law and Government*, vol. 29, no. 2, March/April 1996, pp. 13-31.

⁴⁴ Chen Lei, ‘为政者潘岳’, *Nanfang Renwu Zhoukan (Southern People Weekly)*, 21 February, 2005. <http://business.sohu.com/20050221/n224370608.shtml>

⁴⁵ David Kelly, ‘Guest Editor’s Introduction, Realistic Responses and Strategic Options: An Alternative CCP Ideology and Its Critics’, *Chinese Law and Government*, vol. 29, no. 2, March/April 1996, pp. 3-12.

sources, Richard Baum reported that party patriarch Chen Yun approved the article for distribution to leading cadres in Beijing and even requested the Politburo to give advice on the possibility of revising it for incorporation into the general secretary's political report to the 14th National Party Congress in October 1992.⁴⁶

After Deng Xiaoping relaunched reform on his 'southern tour' in early 1992, the hard-line conservatives opposed to economic reform were marginalised.⁴⁷ Though the princelings failed to grab power at the 14th party congress, the influence of neo-conservatism persisted, possibly because Deng himself sympathised with its key tenets.⁴⁸ Neo-conservative articles continued to be published in official media. Some of these articles targeted the 1898 Reform Movement, which had been rehabilitated and praised in the early 1980s as a historical example of reform, as the starting point of 'radicalism' in modern Chinese history. For instance, on 13 May 1993, in an article published by the Beijing Youth Daily, Xiao Gongqin claimed that, since the 1898 Reform Movement, China had kept swinging between extreme conservatism and radicalism. He wrote, 'This is a historical phenomenon that has almost always been repeating itself during the history of change in China over the past nearly 100 years. A nation that cannot get out of this cycle even today cannot be a mature nation.'⁴⁹

In the relatively relaxed atmosphere after Deng's 'southern tour', dozens of privately-funded but officially-sanctioned intellectual periodicals emerged within just a couple of years. But

⁴⁶ Richard Baum, *Burying Mao*, p. 330.

⁴⁷ See Baum, pp. 341-376.

⁴⁸ A Hong Kong media outlet close to the Beijing government reported that, in 1988, when Zhao told Deng that neo-authoritarianism, the precursor of neo-conservatism, argued that what China needed in this stage was strong authoritarian rule rather than Western democracy, Deng said, 'This is also my idea.' See 'Deng Xiaoping on neo-authoritarianism', in Michel Oksenberg, Lawrence R. Sullivan, Marc Lambert (eds.), *Beijing Spring 1989: Confrontation and Conflict - The Basic Documents*, p. 125. This claim was confirmed by Zhao Ziyang himself in his interviews with Yang Jisheng, which were published in Yang Jisheng, *中國改革年代的政治鬥爭*, p. 546.

⁴⁹ Xiao Gongqin, '走向成熟——对中国当代政治改革的反省与展望', *Beijing Qingnian Bao (Beijing Youth Daily)*, 13 May, 1992. An extended version was published in *萧功秦集* (Heilongjiang Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1995), pp. 123-139.

these journals offered little space for liberal democratic ideas. Instead, many of these publications, such as *Zhanlüe yu guanli* (*Strategy and Management*) and *Dongfang* (*Orient*), became forums for neo-conservative writers.⁵⁰ In a 1994 article published in *Zhanlüe yu guanli*, Ma Yong, a historian China Academy of Social Sciences, argued that the 1898 reforms had failed because of its ‘radicalism’ which had resulted from China’s defeat in the First Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895). He said ‘romantic political idealism’ led China away from its normal development path onto ‘a wrong path with an uncertain future’. According to him, ‘A series of huge changes in modern China have provided us with innumerable lessons that are worth pondering and remembering.’⁵¹

As the above quotes show, these anti-radicalism articles attacking the 1898 Reform Movement suggested that it was the first of many outbursts of ‘radicalism’ in modern Chinese history. Considering the many years of revolution and warfare in China’s modern history, it was remarkable that a reform movement was singled out for criticism but the regime-changing 1911 and 1949 revolutions were not mentioned as cases of radicalism. The reason was, of course, that the CCP would never allow criticisms of the communist victory in 1949 and would not openly criticise Sun Yat-sen’s revolution, whose legacy it claims to have inherited. But as neo-conservative thinking developed, the 1911 Revolution did not escape criticism despite the hallowed place it occupied in the official historiography.

⁵⁰ Feng Chen, ‘Order and Stability in Social Transition: Neoconservative Political Thought in Post-1989 China’, *The China Quarterly*, No. 151 (Sep., 1997), pp. 593-613.

⁵¹ Ma Yong, ‘甲午战败与中国精英阶层的激进与困厄’, *Zhanlüe yu guanli* (*Strategy and Management*), Issue 4, 1994.

‘Farewell to revolution’

After 1989, and especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, ‘stability maintenance’ (*weiwen*) became a top priority for the government,⁵² and the regime increasingly used the stability discourse to re-legitimise its rule.⁵³ Vivienne Shue points out that the post-Tiananmen regime staked its legitimacy on ‘its political capacity to preserve a peaceful and stable social order’.⁵⁴ Robert Weatherley identifies stability as a new source of legitimacy for the CCP, as the party sought to play on public fears about social and national fragmentation in China and drew stark contrast with what it claimed to be the growing socio-political uncertainty in post-communist Eastern European countries.⁵⁵ The regime also adopted a new model of governance, characterised by Steve Tsang as ‘consultative Leninism’, which combines ruthless repressive capacity and some consultative elements to enhance its capacity to detect challenges as they emerge and remove them by either co-optation or repression.⁵⁶

Under such circumstances, the hallowed status of ‘revolution’ in modern Chinese historiography, once central to the CCP’s legitimacy, became problematic. On one hand, the party had to continue to defend its own revolutionary legacy, especially that of the 1949 Communist revolution. On the other hand, the CCP’s previous glorification of ‘revolutions’ in general was at odds with its new obsession with stability. Therefore, the 1911 Revolution,

⁵² Yuhua Wang and Carl Minzner, ‘The Rise of the Chinese Security State’, *The China Quarterly*, Vol 222, June 2015, pp. 339-359. See also Chongyi Feng (ed.) ‘Preserving Stability: Process, Dimensions and Ideological Exercise’, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, Issue 2 (Special Issue), June 2013, pp. 3–224.

⁵³ Peter Sandby-Thomas, *Legitimizing the Chinese Communist Party since Tiananmen: A Critical Analysis of the Stability Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁵⁴ Vivienne Shue, ‘Legitimacy crisis in China?’, in Peter Hays Gries & Stanley Rosen (eds.), *State and Society in 21st Century China: Crisis, Contention and Legitimation* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), pp. 24-49.

⁵⁵ Robert Weatherley, *Politics in China Since 1949: Legitimizing Authoritarian Rule* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 149-151.

⁵⁶ Steve Tsang, ‘Consultative Leninism: China’s new political framework’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Issue 62, Vol 18, 2009, pp. 865-880.

which was praised as a precursor to the Communist revolution but was not indispensable to the party's legitimacy, gradually became a topic that was open to re-interpretation.

In late 1994, in a conversation published in the *Dongfang* (Orient) magazine, Li Zehou, a distinguished Marxist philosopher, criticised the 'radicalism' of Tiananmen, saying 'political radicalism was pushed to the extreme at the end of the 1980s'. Despite the 'big losses' caused by the incident, however, Li said a good outcome was that it triggered reflections over 'political radicalism' during China's modern history. Li criticised 1898 reformer Tan Sitong for starting China's 'modern radicalism', and went on to criticise the 1911 Revolution as a result of radicalism:

'I think the Xinhai Revolution was messed up, and was a result of radicalism. The Qing had indeed become a rotten dynasty, but the existence of such a form was still very important. It would have been better if it had been dealt with slowly, forcing it to take the path of modernisation and "national salvation" through reform advocated by the constitutionalists at the time. But as it was suddenly and quickly gotten rid of, the situation became terrible and incessant fighting among warlords became inevitable. Therefore, after the Xinhai Revolution, there were constant revolutions – "The Second Revolution", "The National Protection War", "The Constitutional Protection War", "Northern Expedition", and finally the revolution of 1949. Even after that, Mao Zedong wanted constant revolution. Even now, "revolution" is still a good word, a commendatory term, while "reform" (*gailiang*) has become a derogatory word. Now

we should clearly reverse this notion. “Revolution” is not necessarily a good thing in China.’⁵⁷

In a 1995 book published in Hong Kong, which was titled ‘Farewell to Revolution’, Li and literary critic Liu Zaifu made very similar arguments attacking the 1911 Revolution, attracting international attention.⁵⁸ On one hand, Li was using these unorthodox interpretations of China’s modern history to discredit the 1989 student movement and calls for democratic reforms, which was consistent with the regime’s contemporary priority of maintaining stability. On the other, by directly targeting 1911 and even naming the 1949 communist revolution as one of the outcomes of radicalism, Li was challenging some of the CCP’s most fundamental propaganda lines.

As Els van Dongen observes, because Li Zehou went further than other anti-radicalism authors in his explicit condemnation of revolution, his work drew fire from state media.⁵⁹ For example, in July 1995, the People’s Daily published an article by Li Wenhai, a historian who was president of Renmin University, criticising the growing tendency to ‘praise Yuan Shikai and criticise Sun Yat-sen’, calling such arguments ‘untrue’.⁶⁰ In March 1996, party journal Qiushi published an article by Beijing Normal University professor Gong Shuduo and doctoral student Wu Xiaoma, who criticised Li Zehou’s remarks (without mentioning Li’s name) from the

⁵⁷ Li Zehou and Wang Desheng, ‘关于文化现状道德重建的对话（上）’ (A Dialogue on the Cultural Status Quo and Moral Rebuilding (Part 1)), *Dongfang (Orient)*, Issue 5, 1994, pp. 69-73.

⁵⁸ Li Zehou and Liu Zaifu (eds.), *告别革命：回望二十世纪中国* (*Farewell to revolution: Looking back upon twentieth-century China*) (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 1995).

⁵⁹ Els van Dongen, “Goodbye Radicalism!”: *Conceptions of conservatism among Chinese intellectuals during the early 1990s*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Leiden University, p. 180.

https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/13949/fulltext.pdf?sequence=3&origin=publication_detail

⁶⁰ Li Wenhai, ‘从“扬袁抑孙”想到学术创新’, *People’s Daily*, 28 July, 1995.

Dongfang article for being ‘irresponsible to history’ and ‘causing ideological chaos’.⁶¹ In the same month, a Guangming Daily article also criticised Li’s work without mentioning his name for ‘distorting historical truth’ and ‘causing negative influence in society’.⁶² According to Chinese author Fu Guoyong, the row over the 1994 Dongfang article was possibly one of the contributing factors to the magazine’s forced closure in 1996.⁶³

Though Xiao Gongqin and Li Zehou were making similar anti-radicalism arguments, the contrast between their official treatments was striking. In his analysis of contemporary conservative thought in China, Xie Wujun, a scholar at the CCP’s Central Party School, praised Xiao’s neo-conservatism for stressing stability and development and ‘sharing some commonalities with the CCP’s current policies’, but blasted ‘Farewell to Revolution’ as an attempt to sabotage the legitimacy of the Chinese revolution and communist rule.⁶⁴ What made Li less acceptable to the regime was his outspokenness on revolutions, especially the 1911 Revolution. This highlighted the continuing sensitivities surrounding the reassessment of the 1911 Revolution in the 1990s. As Feng Chen observed, ‘from the neoconservative perspective, radical mentality and revolutionary traditions have to be rejected if China wants to avoid any radical movements or chaos in the future, including a 1989 one. In the official view, however, revolution must be defended, since renouncing revolution means the denial of the regime’s legitimacy.’⁶⁵ Despite the counterattacks from state media, however, as Yingjie Guo and

⁶¹ Gong Shuduo and Wu Xiaoma, ‘革命是褒词还是贬词？——从对辛亥革命的评价谈起’, *Qiushi*, Issue 6, 1996.

⁶² Wei Zhaogai, Jin Chongji, Hu Shengwu and Lin Huaguo, ‘正确认识中国近代史上的革命与改良’, *Guangming Daily*, 12 March, 1996, p. 5.

⁶³ Fu Guoyong, ‘1996年：《东方》是如何停刊的？’, *author’s blog*, 21 January, 2010. http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_48fe46d90100gytq.html

⁶⁴ Xie Wujun, ‘评中国当代的保守主义思潮’, *Dangdai Sichao (Contemporary Thought)*, Issue 4, 2001, pp. 13-29.

⁶⁵ Feng Chen, ‘Order and Stability in Social Transition: Neoconservative Political Thought in Post-1989 China’, *The China Quarterly*, No. 151 (Sep., 1997), pp. 593-613.

Baogang He pointed out, the anti-revolution trend continued to develop steadily.⁶⁶ This shows that, driven by the need to stress stability in the post-Tiananmen era, the authorities allowed the neo-conservative view to develop and spread despite the challenge it posed to the orthodox revolutionary narrative and the party's revolutionary legitimacy.

It is important to note that, though anti-radicalism thinkers disapproved the 'radicalism' of the 1898 Reforms and the 1911 Revolution, they did not oppose the eventual goal of these movements, which was a Western-style constitutional democracy. Analysing the debate over neo-authoritarianism in the late 1980s, Barry Sautman observed, 'What is perhaps most striking about the positions staked out by the "democrats" and "neoauthoritarians" in the debate is not their differences, but their agreement that the proper goal is a political system that secures "freedom", i.e., a privatized economy, and "democracy", i.e., inter-elite political competition.'⁶⁷ Neo-conservatism, which rose in the 1990s, preserved neo-authoritarianism's deep structural concession to liberal values.⁶⁸ According to Feng Chen, whilst in the official ideology, 'maintaining Leninist style authoritarian rule (the party's power) is an end in itself and there is no commitment to eventual democratisation', the logic of neo-conservatism 'implies a democratic evolution of the current polity as the ultimate outcome'.⁶⁹

As Barrett L. McCormick and David Kelly noted, 'even as "new conservatism" purports to defuse the threat of liberalism, it makes crucial concessions to liberal values and practices that in turn shift the locus of debate in ways that create more opportunities for others to make liberal

⁶⁶ Yingjie Guo and Binggang He, 'Reimagining the Chinese Nation: The "Zeng Guofan Phenomenon"', *Modern China*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Apr., 1999), pp. 142-170.

⁶⁷ Barry Sautman, 'Sirens of the Strongman: Neo-Authoritarianism in Recent Chinese Political Theory', *The China Quarterly*, No. 129 (Mar., 1992), pp. 72-102.

⁶⁸ Gu Xin and David Kelly, 'New Conservatism: Intermediate Ideology of a "New Elite"', in David S. G. Goodman and Beverley Hooper (eds.) *China's Quiet Revolution: New Interactions Between State and Society* (Longman Cheshire, 1994), p. 230.

⁶⁹ Feng Chen.

arguments.’⁷⁰ In fact, the next section will show that, the official support for anti-radicalism and neo-conservative thought was part of the reason why the Republican ideals of democracy and constitutionalism gradually became a popular subject of discussions in mainland Chinese media.

3. Since 1997: Reviving the ‘dream of constitutionalism’

Eight years after Tiananmen, the issue of political reform re-emerged in Chinese political discussions. After Deng Xiaoping’s death in 1997, Jiang Zemin moved to secure power, promote his own plan for enterprise reform and create a better atmosphere for relations with the United States.⁷¹ In his report to the 15th Party Congress in September 1997, Jiang stressed the need for ‘political system reform’ (*zhengzhi tizhi gaige*) and used the word ‘democracy’ 32 times.⁷² As he allowed more space for political expression, liberal-leaning intellectuals, who had been silenced after Tiananmen, resumed their calls for political reform,⁷³ and some of them invoked the democratic ideal of the Republic. In an article published in March 1998 in the intellectual journal *Fangfa (Method)*, which had become a major forum for liberal views,⁷⁴ CASS historian Lei Yi argued that as the first two goals of Sun Yat-sen’s ‘Three Principles of the People’, namely national independence and people’s livelihood, had been basically achieved, and that it was therefore time to make progress towards Sun’s third goal – democracy.⁷⁵ But the party’s tolerance of liberal views proved short-lived. In late 1998, at an

⁷⁰ Barrett L. McCormick and David Kelly, ‘The Limits of Anti-Liberalism’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (August, 1994), pp. 804-831.

⁷¹ Fewsmith, p. 204.

⁷² Jiang Zemin, ‘高举邓小平理论伟大旗帜，把建设有中国特色社会主义事业全面推向二十一世纪——在中国共产党第十五次全国代表大会上的报告（1997年9月12日）’, *People’s Daily*, 22 September, 1997.

⁷³ Merle Goldman, *From Comrade to Citizen: The Struggle for Political Rights in China* (Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 128-160.

⁷⁴ Goldman, p. 136.

⁷⁵ Lei Yi, ‘民族、民生、民权’, *Fangfa (Method)*, March 1998. Cited by Fewsmith, p. 205.

event marking the 20th anniversary of the Third Plenum, Jiang said the issue of political reform could not be raised for a few years and the ‘Four Cardinal Principles’ guaranteeing the primacy of one-party rule and Marxist-Leninist ideology must be upheld. Public discussions of political reform was banned.⁷⁶

As discussions on democratic reform were suppressed, another principle stressed at the 15th Party Congress – rule of law – became a popular concept among liberal intellectuals and human rights activists.⁷⁷ In 1999, ‘rule of law’ was added to the Chinese constitution.⁷⁸ According to Yu Xingzhong, from that year on, there was a sudden rise of constitutional consciousness, which was a product of diverse forces in China’s political and social arena. Government officials wanted to strengthen official party ideology, judges wanted to expand the judiciary’s sphere of influence, scholars saw constitutionalism as a way of modernising and improving governance, and private citizens wanted to use it to fight against injustice.⁷⁹ More specifically, Tong Zhiwei argued that the sudden increase in academic interest in constitutionalism at the turn of the century was partly due to the emergence of key social problems relating to the local governments’ expropriation and demolition of urban housing and the corresponding scope of citizens’ property rights protections.⁸⁰

In the first few years of the twenty-first century, constitutional discourse in China witnessed unprecedented prosperity and diversity.⁸¹ According to He Li, constitutionalism subordinates

⁷⁶ Goldman, p. 183.

⁷⁷ See Jiang, 1997.

⁷⁸ Tian Jiyun, ‘关于中华人民共和国宪法修正案（草案）的说明——一九九九年三月九日在第九届全国人民代表大会第二次会议上’, *People’s Daily*, 10 March, 1999.

⁷⁹ Yu Xingzhong, ‘Western constitutional ideas and constitutional discourse in China, 1978-2005’, in Stéphanie Balme & Michael W. Dowdle (eds.), *Building Constitutionalism in China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 111-113.

⁸⁰ Tong Zhiwei, ‘China’s Constitutional Research and Teaching: A State of the Art’, in Balme & Dowdle (eds.), p. 109.

⁸¹ Yu, p. 113.

political leaders to pre-established legal rules and principles which limit the public power. Unable to challenge one-party rule and call for multi-party democracy, the liberals called for constitutionalism, as they saw the rule of law as a basic prerequisite of liberal democracy.⁸² For example, in an interview published by BBC Chinese, liberal scholar Wu Si, who once served as the editor-in-chief of liberal journal *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, said he became interested in constitutionalism in the post-Tiananmen era because he felt it would take a long time to achieve democracy in China and he saw constitutionalism as a ‘substitute for constitutional democracy and a second-best choice’.⁸³

The official stance on the concept of constitutionalism was not clear-cut. Though key leaders voiced support for the constitution in 2003, with Supreme People’s Court president Xiao Yang saying the authority of the Constitution must be upheld, and the new party leader Hu Jintao demanding government officials act within the constitution, the word ‘constitutionalism’ (*xianzheng*) was not used in either official statements or the party’s most authoritative newspapers and journals. However, according to Qian Gang, director of Hong Kong University’s China Media Project, while constitutionalism was not generally welcomed within the official discourse, the term was not sensitive enough to be a taboo and generally lingered in the ‘not promoted but not prohibited’ category.⁸⁴

The anti-radicalism and neo-conservative rhetoric, which had already been in fashion since the early 1990s, contributed to the popularity of the constitutionalist narrative in the 2000s. As mentioned earlier in this section, neo-conservatism recognises democracy as the ultimate goal

⁸² He Li, ‘Chinese Discourse on Constitutionalism and Its Impact on Reforms’, *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, May 2017.

⁸³ I-Chung Chen (Chen Yizhong), ‘中国学者吴思访谈录（3）：宪政民主与《炎黄春秋》’, BBC Chinese, 22 April, 2015. http://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/china/2015/04/150422_iv_wusi3

⁸⁴ Qian Gang, ‘The Uncertain Death of “Constitutionalism”’, *China Media Project*, 2 September, 2013. <http://chinamediaproject.org/2013/09/02/the-uncertain-death-of-constitutionalism/>

and creates more opportunities for others to make liberal arguments. At the same time, constitutionalism was popular partly because it was a compromised ‘substitute’ for democracy and was consistent with the idea of gradualism. Therefore, propaganda work promoting anti-radicalism often contained positive references to constitutionalism, a fact illustrated by the television drama *Towards the Republic*.

Towards the Republic

In April and May 2003, CCTV broadcast a high-profile drama series called *Towards the Republic (Zouxiang Gonghe)*,⁸⁵ which dramatised the history of reform and revolution in the late Qing and early Republican era. What was remarkable about this series was that, while it was carried on one of the most authoritative and effective propaganda outlets in China, it nevertheless turned official views of historical characters on their heads and offered radically different reinterpretations of history from the official orthodox.⁸⁶

Though its version of history was in many ways the opposite of the orthodox interpretation, it was clearly endorsed by the Central Propaganda Department. According to a report in the *Southern Weekend* newspaper, China’s top propaganda officials were involved in the process of drafting and editing the script of *Towards the Republic*. The drama’s producers invited Li Mu, deputy head of the Central Propaganda Department’s Literature and Art Bureau, and Wen Xuande, deputy secretary of the Hunan provincial CCP Committee, to act as advisors. Every time the scripts for five episodes had been completed, they would be sent to Zhong Chengxiang

⁸⁵ While the drama’s title is usually translated as *Towards the Republic*, it needs to be noted that the Chinese word in the title for ‘republic’ is not *Minguo*, which refers to the Republic of China, but *gonghe*, which refers to the form of government of a modern republic as opposed to that of a hereditary monarchy.

⁸⁶ Ying Zhu, Chapter 3: ‘TV drama as political discourse II: Marching towards the Republic and the Great Emperor Hanwu’, in Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-Reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership and the Global Television Market* (Routledge, 2008), p. 42.

and Li Zhun, deputy heads of the Leading Group on the Production of Films and TV Dramas of Important Revolutionary and Historical Themes, a body under the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television that operated under the guidance of the Central Propaganda Department. The script was eventually approved after going through four rounds of revisions.⁸⁷ The series was well publicised by state media, with the People's Daily reporting on it when shooting began in 2001⁸⁸ and again in April 2003, when it was about to be broadcast.⁸⁹ CCTV began to air the drama in early April 2003 during prime time on its flagship channel CCTV-1. Two episodes were screened every night, with daily reruns of two episodes. In addition, it was rebroadcast on the state broadcaster's drama channel CCTV-8 on a delayed basis. It was the first time CCTV ever aired a drama in this fashion.⁹⁰

The historical interpretations in the drama was not particularly new. In fact, what the drama did was to popularise the kind of historical revisionism that had been propagated since the late 1980s by the likes of Xiao Gongqin and Li Zehou.⁹¹ Political reformers of 1898 such as Kang Youwei were presented as opportunists and political rookies pushing for radical and unrealistic changes.⁹² Sun Yat-sen, the revolutionary leader officially revered by the CCP, was portrayed as naïve, confused and often comical. In the show, Sun appeared to be always in search of money, willing to ruin half of his family in pursuit of his goals, but was taken seriously neither abroad nor in his own country. Though the portrayal became more serious over the course of

⁸⁷ Zhang Ying, '《走向共和》的内幕故事', *Nanfang Zhoumo (Southern Weekend)*, 9 May, 2003.

⁸⁸ Wenyi, '《走向共和》在京开机', *People's Daily*, 12 October, 2001.

⁸⁹ Beichuang, '历史风云激荡荧屏 央视推出《走向共和》', *People's Daily*, 4 April, 2003.

⁹⁰ Ying Zhu, 2008, p. 43.

⁹¹ See Gotelind Muller, *Representing History in Chinese Media: The TV Drama Zou Xiang Gonghe (Towards the Republic)* (LIT Verlag Münster, 2007), p. 4. Xiao Gongqin predictably welcomed the show, hailing it as a sign of a 'paradigmatic shift' in history studies. See Xiao Gongqin, '从《走向共和》人物形象看历史范式的转换', *Tansuo yu Zhengming (Exploration and Free Views)*, Issue 6, 2003.

<http://history.news.163.com/09/0629/01/5CUJCU4U00013FM3.html>

⁹² Ying Zhu, p. 49.

the drama, his quixotic image was upheld throughout the instalments.⁹³ According to Ma Shaohua, the actor who played Sun in the series, he portrayed Sun as a rash, good-for-nothing and ungrateful ‘angry youth’ under the instruction of the production team, who told him that Sun was nothing but a trouble-making ‘shit-stirrer’.⁹⁴

By contrast, members of the Qing establishment were given positive portrayals as sincere and effective modernisers who were opposed to radical change but committed to gradual reform. In the orthodox version of history, Empress Dowager Cixi, the de facto ruler of China for much of the late Qing period who suppressed the 1898 Reform Movement, did so because she was a conservative ruler opposed to reform and only cared about her power. But in the drama, she was depicted as someone with refined taste, a caring mother, and was given credit for directly engineering the Self-Strengthening Movement, which introduced Western technology to China, and establishing modern institutions.⁹⁵ The drama stressed that there was no alternative to Cixi in the government and that her death inevitably brought about collapse and chaos.⁹⁶ Li Hongzhang, a key figure in the Qing government who was branded a traitor in party orthodox for signing treaties ceding territories, was depicted as an economic reformer who introduced Western finance and technology and a patriotic diplomat who engaged with the West and did his best to control damages.⁹⁷ Yuan Shikai, a Qing military leader-turned president of the Republic who was also condemned by orthodox history as a traitor and a conservative opposed to progress, was played by a popular and attractive actor and was shown as a brilliant strategist who was able, clever and close to the people.⁹⁸

⁹³ Muller, p. 9.

⁹⁴ Deng Yu, ‘马少骅“戏痴”不讨好’, *Nanfang Renwu Zhoukan (Southern People Weekly)*, 7 January, 2015. http://www.nfpeople.com/m_story_view.php?id=6241

⁹⁵ Ying Zhu, p. 45.

⁹⁶ Muller, p. 7.

⁹⁷ Ying Zhu, pp. 45-46.

⁹⁸ Muller, pp. 10-11.

As Anne-Marie Brady observed, television had become ‘the main organ for Party thought work directed at the masses’ and ‘China’s primetime TV dramas and documentaries always feature an underlying educational message.’⁹⁹ While similar historical interpretations had been allowed in some sections of the press, beaming it onto the TV screens in every Chinese household was a completely different matter. Though the Central Propaganda Department endorsed the drama’s radical reinterpretation of history, it is important to note that, at the same time, its endorsement of the official orthodox still stood. Soon after the broadcast began, party theorists and historians began expressing disapproval at its deviation from the orthodox. For example, Zhang Haipeng, a veteran CASS historian, discussed with several other Beijing scholars and decided that ‘the drama series’ inclination was wrong’. They then filed a report to the CCP Central Committee about it.¹⁰⁰ According to Tian Xinming, then director of the Higher Education Institutions Social Sciences Development Research Centre in the Education Ministry, a few episodes into the series, he began feeling ‘uneasy’ and, after consulting like-minded university historians such as Gong Shuduo, organised a seminar to criticise it.¹⁰¹ According to a report several years later by Guangzhou-based *Southern People Weekly*, the row over the drama reached high-level leaders in the Central Committee.¹⁰² One month into the broadcast, the government eventually pulled the plug on the show, banned reruns, and stopped the sale of airing rights to provincial television stations, though videos of the drama could still be legally sold in China.¹⁰³ Opposition from the more orthodox-minded party

⁹⁹ See Brady, ‘Conclusion: the velvet fist in the velvet glove: political and social control in contemporary China’, in Brady (ed.), *China’s Thought Management*, (Routledge, 2012), p. 194

¹⁰⁰ Zhang Haipeng, ‘学术人生——我的理想与追求’, *Guangming Net*, 29 April, 2015.
http://theory.gmw.cn/2015-04/29/content_15521557_8.htm

¹⁰¹ Tian Xinming, ‘学者兼战士的楷模——纪念龚书铎先生’, *Gaoxiao Lilun Zhanxian (Theoretical Front in Higher Education)*, pp. 14-17.

¹⁰² Yu Nan, ‘张黎 一场革命一场梦’, *Nanfang Renwu Zhoukan*, 21 October, 2011.

http://www.nfpeople.com/story_view.php?id=2030

¹⁰³ Ying Zhu, p. 43.

historians and propagandists, the guardians of the orthodox historiography, was most probably part of the reason for the ban.¹⁰⁴

The producers of *Towards the Republic* might have underestimated the controversy the drama would cause, but according to Peking University scholar Shao Yanjun, they did expect opposition and did take precautions. On all its posters and other publicity materials, Sun Yat-sen, who received cartoonish treatment in the drama, always stood in the middle, while Cixi, Li Hongzhang and Yuan Shikai, the real heroes of the show, were juxtaposed beneath him.¹⁰⁵ The producers' dilemma might also be the reason for the ambivalence in its character building and its historical verdict. Though Sun Yat-sen was deliberately depicted as a 'shit-stirrer', his image did improve towards the end, giving an impression that the producers were endorsing the 1911 Revolution after all.¹⁰⁶ As Qinghua University scholar Qin Hui observed, the drama attempted to reconcile the new anti-radicalism line and the old revolutionary orthodox but ended up appearing inconsistent and self-contradictory.¹⁰⁷

Towards the Republic is a very good example of the compromise between neo-conservatism and constitutionalism. Zhang Jianwei, senior journalist at China Youth Daily and one of the script writers, told the media that the theme of the series was 'searching for a way out', as 'whether in opposition or in the court, and no matter what motive they had, people of the time were all searching for a way out for China'.¹⁰⁸ In other words, the empress, the court officials,

¹⁰⁴ There were also rumours that the portrayal of Cixi governing from behind the scenes during Emperor Guangxu's reign, which could potentially be seen as a metaphor for Jiang Zemin's continued influence during Hu Jintao's tenure, was a key reason for the ban. Some said Jiang ordered the ban because of this, whilst others said Hu felt provoked and turned against the drama. See Stanley Rosen, 'Foreword', in Ying Zhu, p. xvii; and Muller, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Shao Yanjun, "'新保守主义'的集体无意识——解读《走向共和》", *Wenyi Lilun yu Piping (Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art)*, Issue 3, 2004.

¹⁰⁶ Ying Zhu, p. 53.

¹⁰⁷ Qin Hui, "'演员"越来越清晰, "剧本"越来越模糊', *Nanfang Zhoumo*, 22 July, 2011.

¹⁰⁸ Tong Fengyan, '《走向共和》: 为反面人物翻案? 将历史教材重写?', *Beijing Chenbao (Beijing Morning News)*, 7 May, 2003. <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/CU-c/325823.htm>

the reformers and the revolutionaries shared a common purpose, though they chose different strategies. According to the drama's chief producer Zheng Jiaming, who was also deputy head of the Hunan Provincial Propaganda Department, building a 'republic' represented such a way out. But the republic was still unfinished business, because, he said, 'in fact even now we are still marching in big strides towards a republic'. He said that, when he started planning the drama in 1999, he highlighted its political significance by stating, 'the biggest issue we will face in the next century will be political reform'.¹⁰⁹ This shows that, in its attempt to berate radicalism and advocate incrementalism, the drama nevertheless recognised the necessity of political reform and constitutionalism.

Though *Towards the Republic* provoked a backlash from Marxist orthodox historians, neo-conservative views of modern Chinese history continued to be allowed in Chinese media. As in the case of *Republic*, while some of these articles blamed Sun Yat-sen's 'radicalism' for blocking China's progress, at the same time they describe 'constitutionalism' as an unfinished business and an ultimate ideal to be fulfilled.

In an interview with Southern Weekend in 2006, Zhongshan University historian Yuan Weishi called part of Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary and constitutional thinking 'fantasies' and criticised the Nationalists for dedicating themselves to building a republic without having carried out 'specialised and systematic studies on the issue of constitutional rule'. Yuan said, 'In conclusion, for a country, gradualist reform is the lowest-cost option. Reform should be carried out in a gradual and accumulative way, and sudden change should be avoided as far as possible.' After making this classic anti-radicalism statement, however, Yuan warned against allowing

¹⁰⁹ Lu Xingsheng, '探讨历史观照现实——《走向共和》总策划郑佳明', *Xinmin Zhoukan (Xinmin Weekly)*, 14 May, 2003.

political reform to stagnate indefinitely. He claimed that the Nationalists' refusal to shift from 'political tutelage' to democracy in the 1930s eventually 'triggered an even larger revolution', and said, 'procrastinating and refusing to reform even when the time is ripe can also bring about unsalvageable disaster.'¹¹⁰ Here, though Yuan criticised what he saw as revolutionary radicalism, he nevertheless made it clear that, for him, constitutional rule and democracy were the desired objective, which could not be delayed indefinitely.

In an article published by Guangzhou-based magazine *Nanfeng Chuang* in 2008, Xiao Han, a law professor at the China University of Political Science and Law, argued that constitutional monarchy was 'an appropriate compromise for China' and blamed the revolutionaries of 1911 for causing chaos by getting rid of the monarchy. He also accused Sun Yat-sen of violating constitutional principles and sabotaging peace by launching wars against Yuan Shikai and Chen Jiongming, and criticised student activists in May Fourth and other student movements for being irrational. Having enumerated the above reasons for China's failure to adopt 'constitutional rule', the author said that these offered lessons for the present, because 'in this turbulent era of transition, constitutional rule has become the only way forward'.¹¹¹ Xiao might not have been a fan of the politics in the Republican era, but he clearly approved of the ideal of 'constitutional rule'. These examples show that, by allowing anti-radicalism thinkers to attack the 1911 revolutionaries for their 'radicalism' and to express their approval of incremental progress towards constitutionalism, the censors had effectively allowed 'constitutional rule' to be hailed as China's ultimate political direction.

¹¹⁰ Xiao Shu, '回望百年共和路——袁伟时教授访谈录', *Nanfeng Zhoumo*, 17 November, 2006.

¹¹¹ Xiao Han, '风雨百年说共和', *Nanfeng Chuang*, Issue 5, 2008.

http://news.ifeng.com/history/zhongguojindaishi/special/songjiaoren/detail_2012_06/14/15294897_0.shtml

As mentioned before, the neo-conservative view of history met with opposition from orthodox historiography, which defended the 1911 Revolution as a necessary revolution that laid the groundwork for the communist revolution. The orthodox view saw the communist victory of 1949 as the endpoint of China's Marxist evolution to socialism, and did not recognise 'constitutionalism' as an objective. But the 1911 Revolution was also defended by scholars and commentators calling for political reform and constitutionalism, who argued that the Qing, not the revolutionaries, were responsible for causing the revolution. For example, in an article in the March 2010 issue of *Zhongguo Gaige (China Reform)*, a magazine under the State Council Development and Research Council, CASS historian Lei Yi characterised the political situation in the run-up to 1911 as 'a race between reform and revolution'. According to Lei, even country squires and businessmen, who favoured peace, stability and order, were alienated by the Qing government's rejection of political reform and backpedalling in economic policy. 'When even they had dramatically changed their attitude and had become increasingly militant, how could one accuse revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen of being radical in overthrowing the Qing Dynasty?' The lesson Lei drew from the history of 1911 was that 'the most effective way for those in power to dissolve "radicalism" is for them to reform of their own accord'.¹¹²

As the Qing court had been widely used by neo-conservatives as a metaphor for the CCP regime, the same metaphor was also used by supporters of political reform in the run-up to the centenary of the 1911 Revolution. In November 2010, *Xiaoxiang Chenbao (Xiaoxiang Morning Herald)*, a newspaper based in Hunan's provincial capital Changsha, was punished for publishing a supplement on the 1911 Revolution. A front page editorial claimed that China and its people had been longing for 'constitutional rule' since the nineteenth century, and said the revolution broke out because the Qing regime had frustrated people's aspirations. Though the article was

¹¹² Lei Yi, '改革与革命赛跑', *Zhongguo Gaige (China Reform)*, Issue 3, March 2010.

ostensibly about history, it made obvious references to contemporary China. It said, ‘The more the Qing court built walls everywhere, the better the people got at leapfrogging the walls.’ This sentence contained an obvious reference to China’s internet control, as ‘leapfrogging the wall’ is an expression frequently used to refer to Chinese internet users’ effort to circumvent the Great Firewall.¹¹³ The main article in the supplement talked about the Manchu ruling class as a special ‘interest group’, and it had a provocative title with a clear contemporary flavour - ‘Before the heavenly dynasty collapsed, the interest group had lost its face completely’. Here ‘heavenly dynasty’ was commonly used by Chinese internet users to refer to the CCP regime, and ‘interest group’ was frequently mentioned by Chinese media as obstacles to reform.¹¹⁴ These contemporary references provoked the censors and led to punishment. According to overseas Chinese media reports, the paper had planned to run the supplement for a whole year in the run-up to the centenary of 1911, but the Hunan provincial propaganda department, acting on an order from Beijing, ordered the series to be cancelled.¹¹⁵

The authorities were clearly concerned about unauthorised interpretations of the 1911 Revolution, and the unrest and revolutions that broke out in the Middle East in early 2011, as well the online calls for a ‘jasmine revolution’ in mainland China, probably added to these concerns. In April 2011, an inter-university debate competition on the 1911 Revolution, which aimed to encourage students to review the revolution and reflect on contemporary China, was cancelled by the Beijing Municipal Committee of the Communist Youth League, which gave no reason for the ban.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Gong Xiaoyue, ‘所谓天下大势’, *Xiaoxiang Chenbao*, 25 October, 2010.

<http://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/2010/11/龚晓跃：辛亥革命100年启示录——转自潇湘晨报/>

¹¹⁴ Zeng Ming, ‘天朝垮台前，利益集团已丢尽了它的脸’, *Xiaoxiang Chenbao*, 25 October, 2010.

¹¹⁵ Xu Bo, ‘借古讽今，潇湘晨报遭整肃’, *VOA Chinese website*, 3 November, 2010.

<https://www.voachinese.com/a/article-20101103-china-media-freedom-106601038/771994.html>

¹¹⁶ Minnie Chan, ‘Beijing Bans Inter-college Debates on 1911 Revolution’, *South China Morning Post*, 10 April, 2011.

The fear of potential revolutionary agitation was also reflected in the state media. Though the CCP's official statements and state media commentaries were mostly repeating the old orthodox hailing 1911 as a glorious precursor to 1949, *Huanqiu Shibao (Global Times)*, a tabloid owned by the People's Daily, adopted a neo-conservative stance in its editorial on the centenary, which was entitled 'Commemorate the 1911 Revolution, farewell to revolutionary complex'. It blamed the 1911 Revolution for decades of chaos and 'countless deaths', and even suggested the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s was partly a result of the 'chaos' brought about by the revolution. The editorial recognised that 'democracy and rule of law is a long-term ideal of the Chinese people', but stressed that 'they cannot be "installed" through a revolution and the creation of a perfect system'.¹¹⁷

In liberal-leaning or market-oriented media, neo-conservative criticisms of 1911 also featured prominently around the centenary. For example, in an interview with *Caijing* magazine, Xiao Gongqin said that, if the revolution had not happened and the Qing court's constitutional reform had been allowed to continue, the Chinese society 'would have been able to progress in an orderly manner'.¹¹⁸ Li Zehou also wrote in the magazine that, 'Had it not been for the 1911 Revolution, China would have realised constitutionalism a long time ago.'¹¹⁹ As in previous neo-conservative statements, though these critics condemned the 1911 Revolution, they recognised 'constitutional rule' as a good thing.

Interestingly, not all anti-radical intellectuals agreed with the argument of Xiao and Li that 1911 was the source of all China's troubles in the modern era. In a book published in May

¹¹⁷ Editorial, '社评：纪念辛亥百年，告别革命情结', *Huanqiu Shibao (Global Times)*, 10 October, 2011. <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/1152/2011-10/2067356.html>

¹¹⁸ Ma Guochuan, '萧功秦：革命的乌合之众摘了清王朝的烂桃子', *Caijing magazine website*, 10 October, 2011. <http://politics.caijing.com.cn/2011-10-10/110889034.html>

¹¹⁹ Li Zehou, '革命不易，改良更难', *Caijing magazine*, 18 October, 2011. <http://comments.caijing.com.cn/2011-10-18/110900188.html>

2011, Ma Yong, who had in the 1990s condemned the ‘radicalism’ of the 1898 Reform Movement, praised what he saw was the lack of radicalism during the 1911 Revolution. To Ma, the 1911 Revolution was better than the French Revolution in that it overthrew the monarchy and founded a republic without a bloody civil war.¹²⁰ In an interview on the book with Guangzhou Daily, Ma said, ‘I think what should be given the strongest emphasis about the 1911 Revolution is that the Qing court, generals of the New Army and the revolutionaries all kept the war within a controllable limit and shifted their political struggle to negotiations.’ Ma also vaguely talked about its contemporary implications: ‘And while I was writing, I had a vague feeling that this serves as a cautionary note for the change that may happen in Chinese politics in the future. I think China should inherit our national tradition which dictates that one should “know when to advance and when to retreat”.’¹²¹ Ma appeared to be suggesting that all political forces in China should avoid radicalism, and that included the government, which should know ‘when to retreat’ from power like the Qing court wisely did.

Similarly, in a book published in July 2011,¹²² Gao Quanxi, then a law professor at Beihang University,¹²³ stressed the fact that, though the 1911 Revolution started as a violent uprising, it ended with the peaceful transfer of power from the Qing court.¹²⁴ In an interview with economic newspaper *Jingji Guancha Bao (Economic Observer)*, Gao called 1911 ‘the Chinese version of the Glorious Revolution’. He praised the Qing abdication decree for its spirit of peaceful political change and the constitutionalists for their conservatism and spirit of

¹²⁰ Ma Yong, *1911 年中国大革命* (Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, May 2011).

¹²¹ Wu Bo, ‘辛亥革命超越法国大革命？’, *Guangzhou Ribao (Guangzhou Daily)*, 9 July, 2011. <http://www.zhongdaonet.com/Newsinfo.aspx?id=2400>

¹²² Gao Quanxi, *立宪时刻：论《清帝逊位诏书》* (Guangxi Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, July 2011).

¹²³ In 2016, Gao moved to the law school of Shanghai Jiaotong University.

¹²⁴ Albert H. Y. Chen, ‘The Discourse of Political Constitutionalism in Contemporary China: Gao Quanxi’s Studies on China’s Political Constitution’, *The China Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Special Issue: Doing Sinology in Former Socialist States (Fall 2014), pp. 183-214.

compromise, to which he attributed the ‘peaceful transition from a traditional monarchical system to a modern republic’.¹²⁵

When the centenary came, some liberal-leaning media were able to use the occasion to call for political reform and ‘constitutional rule’. In a commentary published on 8 October, 2011, in the liberal-leaning *Caixin Weekly*, editor-in-chief Hu Shuli wrote, ‘it was the delay in the late-Qing political transition that facilitated the success of the 1911 Revolution.’ Hu blamed the lack of ‘constitutional rule’ in China on the political model which had dominated China, namely ‘large-scale mass mobilisation under centralised political authority’. She concluded by saying the revolution should best be commemorated by pushing forward political reform:

‘What is gratifying is that, today, after over 30 years of reform and opening up, the framework of a market economy has been set up, and the modernisation of the Chinese society is nearing completion on the material level. Obviously, the next step that should be taken is to implement the basic spirit of a democratic republic on the systemic level and to solidly push forward political reform. Only then can we console the revolutionary pioneers and complete their unfinished cause.’¹²⁶

In its editorial on the centenary, Beijing newspaper *Xin Jing Bao (Beijing News)* said, ‘The ideals of freedom, equality, democracy and rule of law, which were pursued by Dr Sun Yat-sen and China’s first generation of modernisers, remain to be realised a hundred years on.’ The editorial said that with improved education and the development of the internet, Chinese people’s understanding of ‘modern political civilisation’ had reached ‘unprecedented breadth

¹²⁵ Hao Yu, ‘高全喜：宪法出场，革命退场’, *Jingji Guancha Bao (Economic Observer)*, 11 October, 2011. <http://www.eeo.com.cn/2011/1011/213170.shtml>

¹²⁶ Hu Shuli, ‘辛亥百年 怎样纪念’, *Caixin Zhoukan (Caixin Weekly)*, 8 October, 2011. <http://opinion.caixin.com/2011-10-08/100312473.html>

and height'. It stressed, 'Continuing to push forward reforms in economy, politics and culture is the only way for China to further its modernisation.'¹²⁷

The 2013 constitutionalism debate and its aftermaths

A little more than a year later, advocates of constitutionalism saw reasons for optimism from the utterances of Xi Jinping, who had just become China's top leader. In a speech on 4 December 2012 at an event marking the 30th anniversary of China's 1982 Constitution, Xi called for 'implementing the constitution in the all-round way', and said 'the life of the Constitution lies in its implementation, the authority of the Constitution also lies in its implementation'.¹²⁸ Xi's call for implementing the constitution triggered a major debate between pro- and anti-constitutionalist voices,¹²⁹ in which the late Qing and Republican-era ideal of constitutionalism was evoked to support the contemporary calls for the adoption of constitutionalism.

Perhaps the most high-profile incident during this constitutionalism debate was a row surrounding the 2013 New Year's message of the Guangzhou-based liberal-leaning *Southern Weekend* newspaper. The original draft, written by Dai Zhiyong, editor of the paper's commentary department, was titled 'Chinese dream, the dream of constitutionalism'.¹³⁰ Calling Xi's call for implementing the constitution a 'strong note of constitutionalism', the article said, 'We expect the constitution to grow its teeth and constitutionalism to be born at an early date.'

¹²⁷ Editorial, '从辛亥百年的历史节点继续出发 推动民族复兴', *Xin Jing Bao (Beijing News)*, 10 October, 2011. <http://news.sohu.com/20111010/n321632425.shtml>

¹²⁸ Xi Jinping, '习近平：在首都各界纪念现行宪法公布施行 30 周年大会上的讲话', *Xinhua Net*, 4 December, 2012. http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-12/04/c_113907206.htm

¹²⁹ See Rogier Creemers, 'China's Constitutionalism Debate: Content, Context and Implications', *The China Journal*, No. 74, July 2015, pp. 91-109.

¹³⁰ Dai Zhiyong, '中国梦，宪政梦', *BBC Chinese website*, 4 January.

https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/chinese_news/2013/01/130104_nanfangzhoumo_newyear.shtml?c

Having suffered the ‘nightmare of the Cultural Revolution during which constitutional rule was missing’ and spent 30 years ‘gradually returning to reason and sense’, according to the article, China was at last able to ‘embark once again on our forefathers’ long march to constitutionalism and relive our forefathers’ great dreams’. The author went on to review the ‘long march to constitutionalism’ in China’s modern history, which he suggested began as a response to China’s defeat during the Opium War some 170 years earlier and culminated in 1911:

‘Over 170 years ago, we began to awake from the pipe dream of the Celestial Empire. We were first defeated by Britain, and then by Japan. The common people were increasingly reduced to destitution, and a sense of humiliation deeply stung the scholars of China. Defend the country! Defend the race! From Self-Strengthening to a constitutional monarchy, from constitutional enactment to revolution, from instruments to institutions and to culture, these indignant people did not hesitate to overthrow “the Confucius shop” completely and uproot their own civilisation.

‘After the 1911 Revolution, the Qing emperor abdicated, and our ancestors finally established the first republic in Asia. But a free, democratic and strong constitutional china did not come in the wake of this.’¹³¹

The author suggested that the contemporary Chinese people had re-started this ‘long march’, saying, ‘The ancestors endured great hardships and worked hard for their righteous cause, for which they were willing to die. Today, their descendants have inherited their ideal and have lit the lamp to advance.’ Playing on Xi’s freshly-minted slogan ‘Chinese dream’, the author wrote

¹³¹ Ibid.

that ‘Chinese dream’ should be ‘a dream of freedom’ and ‘a dream of constitutionalism’.¹³² But this interpretation of ‘Chinese dream’ did not pass the censors. Guangdong’s provincial propaganda chief Tuo Zhen reportedly made significant changes to the article, removing all references to constitutionalism in the final version, an act that triggered protests by Nanfang Zhoumo editors and journalists and a debate on constitutionalism that attracted international attention.¹³³

While the *Southern Weekend* editors attempted to evoke China’s own legacy of constitutionalist thought, those who were opposed to constitutionalism denied any link between China and the idea of constitutionalism and insisted on calling constitutionalism ‘Western’.¹³⁴ Under Xi’s tightened ideological control, attempts to use China’s modern history to support constitutionalism have been suppressed. In December 2014, less than a month after China marked its first ‘National Constitution Day’, a film director named Shen Yongping was jailed for one year after he made a documentary entitled *A Hundred Years of Constitutionalism*, which was about the history of failed attempts to establish constitutional rule in China, including the 1911 Revolution.¹³⁵ According to Shen’s lawyer, the government harassed Shen throughout the filming process and repeatedly discouraged him from making the documentary. He persisted regardless and was subsequently convicted of ‘illegal business activities’, though he had distributed DVDs of the film for free and had planned to post it online as a free download.¹³⁶ In November 2015, the authorities banned a book by Qinghua University

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ David Bandurski, ‘A New Year’s Greeting Gets the Axe in China’, *China Media Project*, 3 January, 2013. <http://chinamediaproject.org/2013/01/03/a-new-years-greeting-gets-the-axe-in-china/>. Full texts of the New Year messages in Chinese carried by BBC Chinese website at http://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/chinese_news/2013/01/130104_nanfangzhoumo_newyear.shtml

¹³⁴ Creemers, 2015.

¹³⁵ The documentary is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2kujYiLuF8>

¹³⁶ ‘Film director jailed in China for making documentary about the constitution’, *Agence France-Presse*, 30 December, 2014. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1670695/film-director-jailed-china-making-documentary-about-constitution>

professor Qin Hui,¹³⁷ which examined how China broke free from the Qing imperial order only to see the promise of constitutional democracy fall apart in the early twentieth century.¹³⁸ Despite the crackdown, however, as He Li observed in 2017, debate on constitutionalism among Chinese intellectuals have continued on the internet.¹³⁹

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, in the post-Mao era, to support the government's reforms, incremental or gradualist reform projects in China's modern history, such as those advocated by the constitutionalists and even the Qing court in the run-up to the 1911 Revolution, have been cast in an increasingly positive light. At the same time, and especially in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen pro-democracy movement, the authorities have shown an increasing tolerance of negative reassessments of revolutionary or 'radical' political change, especially that of 1911.

Though the anti-radicalism view, dubbed 'neo-conservatism' by some of its proponents, was opposed to 'radical' political change, it nevertheless recognised democratisation and constitutionalism as the correct direction and eventual goal of political change, contributing to the revival of the Republican ideals of democracy and constitutionalism as topics of debate in mainland Chinese media. Of course, recognition of constitutionalism as the eventual goal is not necessarily what the propaganda officials have intended. Rather, it is an unintended product of an attempt to promote reform and discourage future revolutions against the regime itself.

¹³⁷ Qin Hui, *走出帝制——从晚清到民国历史的回望* (Qunyan Chubanshe, October 2015).

¹³⁸ Kiki Zhao, 'On China's Constitution Day, Book on Constitutionalism Largely Disappears', *New York Times website*, 4 December, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/05/world/asia/china-constitution-qin-hui-book.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=mini-moth®ion=top-stories-below&WT.nav=top-stories-below&_r=0

¹³⁹ Li, 2017.

In stark contrast to the old, revolutionary paradigm, in which ‘progressive’ and ‘reactionary’ forces were seen as pulling China in opposite directions, the new view of history represents a shift to a paradigm of political modernisation, in which both reformers and revolutionaries are seen as striving for China’s political modernisation towards the common goal of ‘constitutionalism’, albeit through different means. Orville Schell once wrote that the national conversation in China during the late Qing and early Republican era ‘has clear relevance for the challenges of China’s current need for political self-reinvention’. Though it is not what the CCP has intended, what Schell termed ‘China’s hidden democratic legacy’ has clearly been revived as a relevant topic for discussions in contemporary China.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Orville Schell, ‘China's Hidden Democratic Legacy’, *Foreign Affairs*, Jul/Aug 2004, Vol. 83, Issue 4, pp. 116-124.

Chapter 5: Patriotism and great power status – reassessing the War against Japan

(part 1)

Chapters 5 and 6 argue that, during the reform era, the CCP positively reassessed the Nationalist contribution in the War against Japan (1937-1945) in order to develop a more inclusive, pan-Chinese nationalism that boosts national unity and prospects of unification with Taiwan. Also, in its attempt to reorient its diplomacy towards the West and justify China's 'great power status', the party stressed the Nationalist government's wartime cooperation with Western allies so as to portray China as a historical ally of the West and a founder and defender of the post-war international order.

The Maoist orthodox view of history saw the struggle between the CCP and the KMT as the overarching narrative of China's modern history. The War against Japan was treated as part of the context of the communist revolution. The focus was not on China's conflict with imperial Japan, but on the CCP's class struggle against the KMT. The official history insisted that it was the CCP that led China's war effort and made little mention of any part the KMT played. Any positive mention of the KMT's role in the victory over Japan was unacceptable, as it would go against the official narrative that it was the CCP that saved China from imperialist aggression.¹ As a result, the conventional wisdom was that Chiang Kai-shek's troops were led by corrupt

¹ Rana Mitter and Aaron William Moore, "China in World War II, 1937–1945: Experience, Memory, and Legacy", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 45 (Special Issue 02) (March 2011), pp. 225 -240

generals and were ill-trained and ineffective. By contrast, the communist troops were supposed to have been at the vanguard of the anti-Japanese resistance.²

In the reform era, as the Deng-ist regime worked towards peaceful reunification with Taiwan, the propaganda authorities downgraded the CCP's historical struggle against the KMT and gradually shifted the focus onto China's resistance against foreign aggression and struggle for national independence. In this narrative, China's War of Resistance against Japan, which was neglected for decades in the PRC, gradually gained prominence, and the history of the CCP and the KMT fighting together against Japanese aggressors became an important propaganda theme. As this chapter will show, this process was boosted by high-level support from top leaders of the CCP propaganda system, most notably Hu Qiaomu, a veteran conservative ideologue who wielded considerable influence during the early reform era.

Also, reform-era CCP propagandists used the Nationalist government's participation in World War II on the Allied side to emphasise China's historical cooperation with the West. As China's rise on the international stage aroused suspicion of Chinese intentions, the CCP sought to use the war history to argue that China's great power status was obtained by fighting shoulder to shoulder with Allied powers such as the United States and Britain and that China had always acted as a 'responsible great power' defending the post-war international order.

I use two chapters to discuss the CCP's reassessment of the Nationalist war effort. This chapter focuses on the period between 1978 and 1999, and is divided into three sections. Section 1 details the gradual process of recognising the KMT's war effort during the first few years of

² Rana Mitter, "Old Ghosts, New Memories: China's Changing War History in the Era of Post-Mao Politics", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 38(1) (2003) pp. 117-131

the reform era, as the CCP actively sought to woo the KMT regime in Taiwan in order to facilitate unification. Section 2 details how the 40th anniversary of the war victory in 1985 marked a turning point in the reassessment and how the reassessment was nevertheless controlled from the highest level of the CCP hierarchy. Section 3 talks about the scaling back of the reassessment during the 1990s, when cross-strait relations significantly cooled under KMT leader and Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui, and the continued significance of war history as a result of the regime's desire to maintain and improve relations with the United States.

1. 1979-1985: Initial recognition of KMT war contribution

In the early reform era, the CCP's very limited recognition of the KMT's war effort was part of the regime's efforts to deal with the legacy of the Cultural Revolution. At a time when the CCP was trying to work towards reunification with Taiwan, memories of the severe persecution of former KMT officers and their descendants during the Cultural Revolution was detrimental to the united front work and had to be dealt with. It was in this context that the KMT's contribution to the War against Japan began to be recognised.

Soon after the reform era began in 1978, as part of the drive to rectify the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, the new leadership rehabilitated a small number of KMT officers killed during the War against Japan who had previously been honoured by the CCP but were later neglected and eventually condemned under Mao's ultra-leftist policy.³

³ On the CCP's pre-1982 commemoration of KMT officers killed during the War against Japan, see 'Chapter 3: The Necessity of Commemorating the War: Honouring the Martyrs', in Chan Yang, *World War Two Legacies in East Asia: China Remembers the War* (Routledge: 2017), pp. 66-103.

During the War against Japan, when the CCP was part of an anti-Japanese united front with the KMT, CCP leaders sometimes issued messages of condolences eulogising KMT generals who had been killed in action. For instance, in 1938, Mao Zedong praised General Tong Linge and General Zhao Dengyu, who had been killed during the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in July 1937, when the Japanese attacked Beijing, among others, for having ‘set a lofty and great example for all people of China’.⁴ Similarly, after the death of KMT general Zhang Zizhong in 1940, the highest ranking Chinese officer to be killed during the war, the CCP convened a memorial service for him and top party leaders, including Mao, calligraphed memorial inscriptions.⁵ In 1952, shortly after the CCP came into power, the new PRC government issued certificates signed by Mao to the families of Tong, Zhao and Zhang recognising them as ‘revolutionary martyrs’.⁶ However, during the Cultural Revolution, Tong and Zhang were rebranded as ‘warlords’ and their families were persecuted,⁷ and Zhao’s tomb was destroyed and his remains were desecrated.⁸

After Mao’s death, Tong’s son wrote to Deng Xiaoping about his family’s plight. In August 1979, at Deng’s instruction, the Beijing municipal CCP Committee issued a new certificate to the family recognising Tong as a ‘revolutionary martyr’.⁹ Less than a year later, on 7 July, 1980, the anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, an article on the heroic deeds of Tong and

⁴ Mao Zedong, ‘在纪念孙中山逝世十三周年及追悼抗敌阵亡将士大会上的讲话（一九三八年三月十二日）’, *Mao Zedong Xuanji* (Selected Works of Mao Zedong), Volume 2.

<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/8198/30446/30452/2208144.html>

⁵ Arthur Waldron, ‘China’s New Remembering of World War II: The Case of Zhang Zizhong’, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4, Special Issue: War in Modern China (October 1996), pp. 945-978

⁶ Zhu Xiaoping, ‘北京张自忠路的由来’, *Beijing Ribao*, 23 July, 2014.

<http://history.people.com.cn/n/2014/0723/c372327-25327723.html>

⁷ See Tong Bing & Zhou Haibin, ‘佟麟阁：从抗日英雄到“反动军阀”’, *Tongzhou Gongjin*, Issue 8, 2013.

<http://history.people.com.cn/n/2013/1014/c198307-23195488.html>; and Zhang Lianyun & Zhou Haibin, ‘扬壮烈之志铸军人之魂——怀念父亲张自忠’, *Jianghuai Wenshi*, Issue 3, 2016.

⁸ Sa Su, ‘新发现有关赵登禹的日方档案’, *Wenshi Cankao*, Issue 59, 1 June, 2012.

<http://dangshi.people.com.cn/GB/18103634.html>

⁹ Tong and Zhou, 2013.

Zhao, written by Tong's relative Xiong Xianjue, was published in *Beijing Wanbao* (Beijing Evening News).¹⁰ The article sparked considerable interest both in China and overseas, as it was the first time since 1949 for Tong and Zhao's heroism during the war to get any publicity.¹¹

However, this did not seem to be a result of a coordinated shift of official stance, as different government departments adopted measures that seemed to go in opposite directions. An official document issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs on 3 September, 1980, stipulated that, while KMT servicemen killed during the War against Japan who had been recognised as 'revolutionary martyrs' by the PRC government would keep their status, no more such recognitions would be granted in the future.¹² This appeared to be an attempt by the ministry to limit further recognition of the KMT's contribution.

But in the same month, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) did almost exactly the opposite by taking the recognition further in one of its official publications. In September 1980, a lengthy non-fiction novel, or reportage (*baogao wenxue*), entitled 'Generals Fight Decisive Battles Not Only on the Battlefield' (*Jiangjun Juezhan Qizhi zai Zhanchang*), began being serialised in an official journal of the College of International Politics (*Guoji Zhengzhi Xueyuan*), a training institution of the Ministry of Public Security.¹³ The novel, published in Reports of the Times (*Shidai de Baogao*), the official journal of the college's Journalism Department, was mainly about the post-1949 experiences of senior KMT military officers taken prisoner in the Civil War, but it contained favourable accounts of their contributions in the War

¹⁰ Xiong Xianjue, '佟麟阁与赵登禹', *Beijing Wanbao*, 7 July, 1980.

¹¹ Luo Xuepeng, '佟麟阁将军殉国之后', *Nanfang Zhoumo*, 3 August, 2001.
<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/junshi/60/20010803/527522.html>

¹² PRC Ministry of Civil Affairs, '民政部关于贯彻执行《革命烈士褒扬条例》若干具体问题的解释' (3 September, 1980), *Ministry of Civil Affairs website*, 18 December, 2007.
<http://sy.mca.gov.cn/article/lsby/fgzc/200712/200712000059659.shtml>

¹³ Li Li, Liu Fanzhou and Zhang Zhi, '《将军决战岂止在战场》首涉禁区', *Chongqing Wanbao*, 25 April, 2008, p. 16. http://news.ifeng.com/history/zhongguoxiandaishi/detail_2012_04/28/14214774_0.shtml

against Japan.¹⁴ In terms of the reassessment of the KMT, this was much more significant than the rehabilitation of Tong, Zhao and Zhang Zizhong, who had died before the Civil War and had been previously honoured by the CCP. In contrast, this novel, published in a police journal, was positive about the war contributions made by KMT officers who fought the CCP in the Civil War and consequently branded ‘war criminals’.

According to the novel’s author Huang Jiren, the publication of his novel was arranged by top officials of the Ministry of Public Security for propaganda purposes.¹⁵ Huang, a college student and an aspiring writer at the time, wrote the novel because his father was a KMT officer taken prisoner during the Civil War and he had family connections with many former KMT officers incarcerated by the CCP as ‘war criminals’. He interviewed them on their experiences in Gongdelin, a special prison for ‘war criminals’ in Beijing, and wrote the novel. After completing it in 1979, Huang sent the manuscript to the Ministry of Public Security for approval. Soon afterwards, to his surprise, he was summoned to Beijing and was received by four high-level officials of the ministry, including three vice-ministers, who saw his book as a believable and therefore useful account to counter allegations by Duan Kewen, a former KMT ‘war criminal’ who moved to the United States after his release and later published a book in Taiwan accusing the CCP of torturing KMT prisoners.¹⁶ Senior police officials saw Duan’s account as unfair, because they held that torture only took place during the Cultural Revolution but Duan had painted the whole post-1949 era with the same brush.¹⁷

The novel’s publication might have helped the ministry counter Duan’s accusations, but its account of the War against Japan differed so starkly from the orthodox propaganda line that it

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Duan Kewen, *Zhanfan’ zishu* (The Personal Account of a ‘War Criminal’) (Taipei: Shijie ribao she, 1978).

¹⁷ Li, Liu and Zhang, 2008.

provoked a backlash within the ranks of the People's Liberation Army. For example, a PLA unit collectively wrote to Huang, calling him a descendant of the KMT and accusing him of 'using his pen to continue fighting against us'.¹⁸

Had it not been for high-level approval from both the party and the government, the novel might not have been allowed to be published in book form. When Wu Zhenlu, an editor at the PLA Art Publishing House, expressed an interest in publishing the book, he encountered strong opposition within the editorial department. Other editors asked how a PLA publishing house could sing praise for the KMT, and senior leaders of the publishing house were worried that it could cause problems for them. However, both the Ministry of Public Security and the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD) approved of the book and, with the signatures of three MPS vice-ministers and three deputy heads of the UFWD, Wu managed to get the book through the strictest censorship procedures.¹⁹

Judging from the different reactions to Huang's book from different quarters within the CCP establishment, and from the different measures taken by government departments on the recognition of KMT 'martyrs', there did not seem to be a centrally agreed guiding principle on reassessing the KMT's war effort. However, as Huang's book was awaiting publication, the political context had evolved further. On 30 September, 1981, Ye Jianying, chairman of the National People's Congress and the titular head of state, released 'Nine Points', which offered party-to-party talks and promised Taiwan that, if it agreed to reunify with the mainland, it could keep its capitalist economic system, retain control of its own armed forces, and even invited

¹⁸ Yang Chun, '《将军决战岂止在战场》背后的故事', *Renmin Zhengxie Bao* (CPPCC Daily), 19 December, 2013. <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/n/2013/1219/c85037-23891016.html>

¹⁹ Li, Liu and Zhang.

KMT leaders to participate in the PRC government.²⁰ These were unprecedented concessions, showing that Beijing saw improving its relations with the KMT as a bigger priority than it had ever been.²¹

Huang's book was finally published in 1982.²² Though Huang Jiren denied suggestions that the book's publication was timed to coincide with the policy shift, it was undeniable that the book received official promotion and official awards in this context. The People's Daily reported on the publication,²³ and the book later won numerous awards, including a 'PLA art award'.²⁴ It turned out to be a highly successful book, selling 2 million copies altogether.²⁵ The publication and official promotion of the book, despite the sensitivity of the subject and the backlash from within CCP ranks, showed that the need of united front work towards Taiwan had begun to trump concerns of its potential impact on the CCP's historical legitimacy.

In the new policy environment, the recognition of KMT war effort gathered pace. In April 1982, Zhang Zizhong was named a 'revolutionary martyr' by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, despite the 1980 edict from the same ministry, mentioned earlier in this section, ruling out further such recognitions.²⁶ In October that year, Sichuan Province's Taiwan Work Office published an article by Zhang's daughter Zhang Lianyun in a compilation of propaganda texts aimed at Taiwan. The article, entitled 'In profound memory of my father Zhang Zizhong', said, 'The

²⁰ *Xinhua News Agency*, '叶剑英委员长进一步阐明台湾回归祖国实现和平统一的方针政策 建议举行两党对等谈判实行第三次合作', 30 September, 1981.

²¹ Lowell Dittmer, 'China in 1981: Reform, Readjustment, Rectification', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 1, A Survey of Asia in 1981: Part I (Jan., 1982), pp. 33-46.

²² Huang Jiren, *将军决战岂止在战场* (Generals Fight Decisive Battles Not Only on the Battlefield), Beijing: Jiefangjun Wenyi Chubanshe (PLA Art Publishing House), 1982.

²³ Wu Zhenlu, '《将军决战岂止在战场》一书出版', *People's Daily*, 2 May, 198.

²⁴ *People's Daily*, '荣获“中国人民解放军文艺奖”作品', 29 July, 1983.

²⁵ Wang Jingjing, '黄济人，写有血有肉的国民党将领', *Huanqiu Renwu* (Global People), Issue 17, 2013.

http://paper.people.com.cn/hqrw/html/2013-06/26/content_1267322.htm

²⁶ Waldron.

first and second periods of KMT-CCP cooperation in history pushed forward the democratic revolution. I look forward to the third period of KMT-CCP cooperation, during which we can work together to develop our great motherland.’²⁷ The article was later used by the official news agency China News Service and the Central People’s Broadcasting Station.²⁸

In May 1983, the Ministry of Civil Affairs formally reversed its 1980 edict and instructed in a new document that KMT members who had been killed in the War against Japan could now be recognised as ‘revolutionary martyrs’ if their relatives applied for such recognition with reliable evidence. The document made it clear that the purpose of this new position was to ‘facilitate Taiwan work and unite people from all sides’. However, it also stipulated that this new position was not to be publicised in the media, possibly in order to avoid a rush of applications from the descendants of the millions of KMT war dead.²⁹

There were signs that the using war history to boost united front work were becoming a centrally championed propaganda strategy. From June 1982 to September 1983, the People’s Daily’s Theory Department, in collaboration with the Republican History Office of the CASS’s Institute of Modern History, ran a year-long column entitled ‘Learn Some Republican History’. According to Li Xin, head of the Institute of Modern History, this column was intended to teach readers about the ‘old China’ so that they could understand ‘New China’ better.³⁰ Though most of the column’s interpretation of China’s modern history was a repetition of the old Maoist line, what was new about it was that it mentioned the KMT’s contribution to China’s

²⁷ Zhang Liyun, ‘深切怀念我的父亲张自忠’, in *四川对台宣传稿选 (第一期)* (Sichuan Provincial CCP Committee Taiwan Work Office, October 1982), pp. 13-14.

²⁸ Luo Haiyan, ‘近百年来张自忠研究的审视与思考’, *Sheke Zongheng* (Social Sciences Review), Issue 6, 2017, pp. 139-144.

²⁹ Ministry of Civil Affairs, ‘关于对辛亥革命、北伐战争、抗日战争中牺牲的国民党人和其他爱国人士追认为革命烈士问题的通知’, 30 May, 1983. http://www.njnz.gov.cn/33712/201111/t20111103_1922684.shtml

³⁰ Li Xin, ‘《学点民国史》序言’, *People’s Daily*, 14 October, 1983, p. 5.

resistance against Japanese aggression, including the 1932 Battle of Shanghai,³¹ the 1933 campaign in defence of the Great Wall,³² the 1937 Marco Polo Bridge Incident,³³ the Battle of Taierzhuang³⁴ and the 1938 Battle of Wuhan.³⁵ Though the column followed the Maoist line in accusing Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist government of constantly seeking compromise with Japan while focusing on fighting the Communists, it did give considerable credit to some KMT generals such as Li Zongren,³⁶ Cai Tingkai and Jiang Guangnai,³⁷ who did not belong to Chiang's faction and later collaborated with the CCP.

It was in this context that a national museum of the War against Japan began to be considered.³⁸ According to Guo Jingxing, one of the founders of the Memorial Museum of the Chinese People's War of Resistance to Japan, the initial idea of building such a museum was triggered by a comment by a visitor with KMT links.³⁹ In May 1982, Song Jingxian, daughter of late KMT general Song Zheyuan, who headed the KMT's 29th Army during the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, visited Beijing from the United States. When meeting Deng Yingchao, Zhou Enlai's widow and one of the leaders of the CCP's Central Leading Group for Taiwan Affairs, Song complained that the exhibition hall displaying historical items from the 1937 battle was too shabby and was not enough to show the significance of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. She said it should be expanded, and Deng Yingchao immediately agreed.⁴⁰

³¹ Liu Jingkun, ““一·二八”淞沪抗战”, *People's Daily*, 6 December, 1982, p. 5.

³² Jiang Shaozhen, ‘长城抗战与《塘沽协定》’, *People's Daily*, 31 December, 1982, p. 5.

³³ Xiong Shanghou, ““七七”芦沟桥事变”, *People's Daily*, 4 May, 1983, p. 5.

³⁴ Han Xinfu, ‘台儿庄会战’, *People's Daily*, 13 June, 1983, p. 5.

³⁵ Ren Zequan, ‘武汉会战’, *People's Daily*, 18 July, 1983, p. 5.

³⁶ Han Xinfu.

³⁷ Liu Jingkun.

³⁸ See Rana Mitter, ‘Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Nationalism, History and Memory in the Beijing War of Resistance Museum, 1987–1997’, *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 161, March 2000, pp 279–293.

³⁹ Zhang Ting, ‘抗战纪念馆创始人：习仲勋等中央领导批示建馆’, *Xin Jing Bao* (Beijing News), 6 July, 2015. <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2015/0706/c70731-27256998.html>

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Following Deng Yingchao's instruction, Beijing's municipal authorities set out planning the expansion project.⁴¹ But the project was soon upgraded both in scope and in significance as a result of high-level intervention. In late 1983, Hu Qiaomu, a top CCP leader in charge of ideological and propaganda affairs, decided that the planned museum should not be just about the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, but should be a museum of the entire War against Japan. In June 1984, Hu proposed that, because of its significance, the project should be organised by the Ministry of Culture rather than the Beijing municipality.⁴² Hu, who actively participated in the design of the display, stressed that the KMT's war contribution should be described in a 'truthful' manner, neither negating the good side nor whitewashing the bad.⁴³

To sum up, when the reform had just begun, there did not appear to be a clearly defined guiding principle on how to reassess the history of the War against Japan, and initial attempt at reassessment provoked backlash in official circles, showing that it was not easy to adjust decades-old propaganda line. However, as the Taiwan issue became more and more salient in government priorities, a clearly defined propaganda line began to emerge.

2. 1985-1988: Recognising KMT contribution as part of national war effort

In the last section, I mentioned Hu Qiaomu's crucial role in the planning and establishment of the War against Japan museum. Hu's view of the war and its usefulness to CCP propaganda at the time was very influential and, as a result of his intervention, the reassessment of the war constantly gathered momentum. The 40th anniversary of China's victory in the war, which was marked in 1985, became an important historiographical turning point.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Lu Shuyue, '胡乔木与中国人民抗日战争纪念馆', *Bainianchao* (Hundred Year Tide), Issue 12, 2012.

⁴³ Ibid.

Marking the 40th anniversary of Victory over Japan

The 1985 anniversary became an important propaganda event largely because of Hu Qiaomu's support. According to Zhang Xianwen, head of the Research Centre on the History of Republican China at Nanjing University, Hu played a crucial role in boosting the research and propaganda on the history of the war.⁴⁴ According to his secretary Qiu Dexin, Hu Qiaomu was the first to propose to make the 40th war anniversary an important propaganda event. He said, on one hand, marking the event could show China's willingness to safeguard world peace; on the other, the history of the war was perfect material for patriotic education for the Chinese people. He also proposed that the commemoration should 'truthfully' reflect the contribution of both the KMT and the CCP.⁴⁵

The anniversary was marked in accordance with Hu's instructions. According to Zhang, in early 1985, the Central Propaganda Department issued a document to all provincial governments on how to manage the commemorations. It said, 'The War of Resistance against Japan was a national war against Japanese imperialist aggression, waged under the Chinese Communist Party's banner of the anti-Japanese national united front, on the foundation of the KMT-CCP cooperation, and by all ethnic groups, all classes, all political parties, all social groups, workers, peasants, merchants, students, soldiers and overseas Chinese working together.' It also said, 'KMT officers and men who sacrificed themselves during the War against Japan deserve our commemoration, too.' Zhang noted that this document began talking

⁴⁴ Wang Fucong and Zhang Xianwen, '张宪文：抗日战争是一场全民族的抗争', *Tuanjie Bao*, 13 August, 2015, p. 7. http://jds.cass.cn/ztlm/jnkzsl70zn/zxbd/201605/t20160506_3329579.shtml

⁴⁵ Qiu Dexin, '忆乔木同志', in Editorial Group of Hu Qiaomu's biography, *我所知道的胡乔木* (Dangdai Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1997), p. 546.

about a ‘national war’, which he said was of extraordinary strategic value and had great political implications.⁴⁶

One of Hu Qiaomu’s proposals was that the Military Museum of the Chinese People’s Revolution in Beijing, which had exclusively focused on the CCP’s military exploits, should put up exhibitions that included references to the KMT’s war effort.⁴⁷ In February 1985, the official Xinhua News Agency reported that the Military Museum was to ‘make major adjustments to the content of its displays’. While displays in the past ‘mainly focused on the anti-Japanese war efforts behind enemy lines led by our party’, the museum was going to set up a ‘Hall of the Anti-Japanese War’, which would display ‘comprehensive historical materials on the whole nation’s efforts in the Anti-Japanese War, including on the centre stage battlefield (*zhengmian zhanchang*), which was mainly shouldered by KMT-led forces, and the anti-Japanese struggle by people in the enemy-occupied areas’.⁴⁸ According to a ‘responsible person’ at the museum, the adjustment was made ‘in accordance with opinions of the leading comrades of the Party Central Committee and the Central Military Commission’. The Xinhua report quoted ‘experts’ as saying that ‘displaying comprehensive historical facts about the whole nation’s war effort against Japan meets the requirements of history and was conducive to facilitating the third KMT-CCP cooperation’.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Wang and Zhang.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *Xinhua News Agency*, ‘军博抗战馆陈列内容作重大调整 将展出全民族的抗日战争史料，包括以国民党领导的军队为主体所担负的正面战场、敌占区人民抗日斗争等内容’, 27 February, 1985. Also published by *People’s Daily*, 28 February, 1985.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

On 13 August, the ‘Hall of the Anti-Japanese War’ was opened by Wang Zhen, an influential party elder and president of the Central Party School, and Zhang Aiping, the defence minister.⁵⁰ It was a major propaganda event, with the People’s Daily reporting on the exhibition on its front page for two consecutive days.⁵¹ While still emphasising the CCP’s ‘mainstay’ role in the resistance, the exhibition gave considerable recognition to the KMT forces whose role had scarcely been mentioned for decades.⁵²

The same month also saw the high-profile publication of one of the PRC’s first books on the major battles fought by the KMT during the war.⁵³ The book, published by Sichuan People’s Press and entitled ‘An Introduction to the Major Battles of the War of Resistance Period on the Kuomintang Main Battle Fronts’,⁵⁴ was compiled by the Museum of the Chinese Revolution, one of China’s top official museums located at the Tiananmen Square, to mark the war anniversary.⁵⁵ The book’s title was inscribed by PLA Marshal Xu Xiangqian, who was vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission and head of the Alumni Association of Huangpu Military Academy, a united front organisation dedicated to forging ties with KMT top brass. In its foreword, Nie Rongzhen, also a PLA marshal and an advisor to the Alumni Association, recalled the ‘mutual cooperation and mutual support’ between the KMT and the CCP during the war and said the best way to commemorate the war was to ‘actively push for the third KMT-

⁵⁰ Wang Jin and Zhai Qiyun, ‘全面反映中华民族抗日战争伟大历史的壮丽画卷 军事博物馆“抗日战争馆”开馆 王震、张爱萍和八路军新四军老战士、原国民党爱国将领参加开幕式’, *People’s Daily*, 14 August, 1985, p. 1.

⁵¹ In addition to the 14 August report on the opening ceremony, see also Ma Heqing, Ou Qinglin and Zhai Qiyun, ‘反法西斯东方战场的光辉篇章——“抗日战争馆”巡礼’, *People’s Daily*, 13 August, 1985, p. 1.

⁵² Waldron.

⁵³ Parks M. Coble, ‘China’s “New Remembering” of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance, 1937–1945’, *The China Quarterly*, Volume 190, June 2007, pp. 394–410.

⁵⁴ Guo Xiong et al (eds.), *抗日战争时期国民党正面战场重要战役介绍* (An Introduction to the Major Battles of the War of Resistance Period on the Kuomintang Main Battle Fronts) (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1985).

⁵⁵ Nie Rongzhen, ‘历史的召唤——《抗日战争时期国民党正面战场重要战役介绍》序’, *People’s Daily*, 12 June, 1985.

CCP cooperation and realise reunification of the motherland and the regeneration of China as soon as possible'.⁵⁶

The Central Propaganda Department was explicit about the purpose of the commemorations. On 13 August, Gao Liang, head of the CPD's External Propaganda Bureau, told an international press conference that the commemoration would 'arouse the Chinese people's patriotic fervour and fighting spirit for regenerating China' as well as 'push forward the realisation of the reunification of the motherland'.⁵⁷

On 3 September, a grand meeting was convened in the Great Hall of the People to commemorate the anniversary. The meeting was attended by senior CCP leaders including General Secretary Hu Yaobang.⁵⁸ Addressing the meeting, Peng Zhen, Politburo member and the chairman of the National People's Congress, emphasised that China's victory in the War against Japan was a 'victory of the united resistance by the whole nation'. After stressing the CCP's role as an 'important pillar' in the resistance, he acknowledged the KMT's role, saying:

'In the centre stage battlefield in the KMT-ruled areas, the masses of patriotic KMT forces, including the officers and men of the Northeastern Army, the Northwest Army and other local forces, as well as patriotic KMT government officials, also did their best and made important contributions to the defence of the motherland and the resistance against the enemy. In particular, during the initial stages of the war, KMT forces fought bravely in the clashes at Lugouqiao and the battles of Shanghai, Xinkou and

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Zou Aiguo, '隆重纪念抗日战争和反法西斯战争胜利四十周年 从八月中旬至九月上旬我国将举行一系列活动', *Xinhua News Agency*, 13 August, 1985. Also published in *People's Daily*, 14 August, 1985.

⁵⁸ Ou Qinglin and Gong Yongquan, '首都隆重集会纪念抗战和世界反法西斯战争胜利四十周年', *People's Daily*, 4 September, 1985.

Taierzhuang, etc., which inspired the fighting spirit of the servicemen and people across the whole country and broke the enemy's myth that they could destroy China in a matter of months.'⁵⁹

The lesson Peng drew from the KMT-CCP cooperation during the war was that 'cooperation between the two parties is consistent with the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation'. He asked, 'Today, for the great cause of peaceful reunification of the motherland, for the new regeneration of the Chinese nation, why can't the KMT and the CCP hold hands once again and cooperate for a third time?'⁶⁰

The commemoration in 1985 was very significant for the reassessment of war history, because, as a result of political and ideological needs, the political environment for the reassessment improved dramatically. The reassessment soon began to have an impact on popular culture.

The Battle of Taierzhuang - A ground-breaking film

In 1986 and 1987, a ground-breaking film on the War against Japan was shown in cinemas across China. While previous PRC war dramas had focused almost entirely on the CCP's role in the resistance, this film, entitled *The Battle of Taierzhuang* (*Xuezhuan Taierzhuang*), depicted a major battle fought by the KMT forces and cast the KMT army in a heroic light.

The Battle of Taierzhuang, which took place in April 1938, was a rare Chinese victory in the early months of the war.⁶¹ It was hailed not only by the Nationalist government but also by

⁵⁹ Peng Zhen, '在首都各界人民纪念抗日战争和世界反法西斯战争胜利四十周年大会上的讲话（一九八五年九月三日）', *People's Daily*, 4 September, 1985.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Hans van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China 1925-1945* (London: RoutledgeCurson, 2003), pp. 221-224.

Communist leaders such as Mao at the time,⁶² but was rarely mentioned after 1949.⁶³ In the reform era, as the preceding paragraphs have shown, Taierzhuang began to be mentioned as an example of KMT resistance in specialist historical materials, newspaper articles and official speeches. However, as Geremie Barmé points out, making it into a film was a watershed in terms of the mass media.⁶⁴

How did this watershed moment come about? In fact, the idea of dramatizing the battle in cinematic form had been proposed two decades ago, during the Mao era. In 1965, when Li Zongren, the main Chinese commander of the battle, came back to mainland China from exile in the United States, Premier Zhou Enlai told Cheng Yin, a renowned film director and president of the Beijing Film Academy, ‘Today Mr Li came back from overseas. I think two things related to him can be made into films in the future. One is the Battle of Taierzhuang, part of the Battle of Xuzhou, in which Mr Li led KMT factional troops to victory. The other is Mr Li’s return today.’⁶⁵ Clearly, the proposed film was intended to be a propaganda project aimed at wooing other former KMT politicians to follow Li’s footsteps and return to the mainland.

But, with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution shortly afterwards, the film project never materialised. In 1982, Cheng Yin told this story to a playwright from Guangxi Film Studio named Chen Dunde, who was studying at the Beijing Film Academy. Cheng suggested that, as

⁶² In his 1938 speech ‘On Protracted War’, Mao said, ‘If each month we could win one sizeable victory like that at Pinghsingkuan or Taierhchuang, not to speak of more, it would greatly demoralize the enemy, stimulate the morale of our own forces and evoke international support.’ See Mao Tse-Tung, ‘On Protracted War’, in Mao, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung, Volume 2* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), p. 159.

⁶³ Mitter, 2003.

⁶⁴ Geremie Barme, ‘History for the Masses’, in Unger (ed.), *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China* (M.E. Sharpe, Inc., Armonk, NY, 1993), p. 278.

⁶⁵ Ding Xiaoping, ‘一部电影打破海峡坚冰——《血战台儿庄》的拍摄和上映’, *Bainianchao* (Hundred Year Tide), Issue 5, May 2008, pp. 49-51.

Li Zongren was the leader of the KMT's Guangxi Clique, the Guangxi studio could help produce the Taierzhuang film. Cheng Yin died in 1984, but Chen Dunde remained dedicated to the project. Chen, who became head of the Literature Department of the Guangxi studio in 1985, managed to win support for the film project from Guangxi governor Wei Chunshu and the Huangpu Alumni Association.⁶⁶

Unbeknownst to Chen and his Guangxi studio, two young men in Beijing had already written a script entitled '*The Battle of Taierzhuang*'. In 1981, Tian Junli, a staff member of the Ministry of Culture and head of the ministry's Communist Youth League unit, and Fei Linjun, an editor at the Television Video Office of the Ministry of Electronic Industry, read Li Zongren's memoir and decided to write a film script on the battle.⁶⁷ Tian later told the People's Daily that they wrote the script because they were angry with foreign assessments of China's contribution in World War II, which often 'cited materials on the KMT-CCP confrontation to write off China's great contribution to the World Anti-Fascist War', and saw it as their responsibility to set the record straight.⁶⁸

In 1983, their script was published in *Bayi Films*, a journal published by the PLA's Bayi Film Studio.⁶⁹ The next year, the authors approached Yang Guangyuan, a veteran director at the Bayi studio who had worked on films on the CCP's role in the War against Japan such as the 1965 film *Tunnel Warfare (Didao Zhan)*.⁷⁰ Yang recommended the script to leaders of the Bayi studio and suggested that it should be made into a film. However, as the KMT's war effort

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Yuan Chengliang, '电影《血战台儿庄》拍摄的台前幕后', *Dangshi Bolan* (General Review of the Communist Party of China), Issue 3, March 2009, pp. 36-40.

⁶⁸ Ding Lang, '重现历史的真实——访《血战台儿庄》编剧之一田军利', *People's Daily*, 3 June, 1987.

⁶⁹ Tian Junli and Fei Linjun, '血战台儿庄', *Bayi Dianying* (Bayi Films), Issue 4, 1983.

⁷⁰ Yang Guangyuan, '《血战台儿庄》闪回录', *Dianying Yishu* (Cinematic Art), Issue 6, 2003, pp. 67-69 and 53.

remained a sensitive subject, the Bayi management did not respond positively to Yang's suggestion.⁷¹ In March 1985, Yang recommended the script to Chen Dunde,⁷² because he knew that the Guangxi studio was relatively open and adventurous.⁷³ Chen, who had been thinking about such a film project for years, immediately decided to purchase the script on behalf of the Guangxi studio and invited Yang to direct the film.⁷⁴

But Yang and Chen suggested that major revisions were needed. Instead of putting the spotlight on Li Zongren, the main commander, the authors had made Zhang Zizhong the main protagonist, because, though he only played a minor role in the battle, he had been praised by Mao and had died before the Civil War, and focusing on him was therefore less risky.⁷⁵ But this was not only inconsistent with history, but also at odds with the Guangxi studio's intention to make a film about Li Zongren, a major Guangxi politician, according to Zhou Enlai's instruction. So Chen and Yang instructed the authors to revise the script and change it from an account of Zhang's personal experience during the battle to a documentary-style account of the entire battle, in which Li was the main protagonist.⁷⁶

The ambition to reflect the true scale of the battle inevitably brought about the difficult issue of how to depict Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the Nationalist government and armed forces and the CCP's archenemy for much of the twentieth century. Yang Guangyuan and his co-director Zhai Junjie later admitted that the depiction of Chiang was a 'difficult problem'.⁷⁷ After much

⁷¹ Yuan Chengliang.

⁷² Yang Guangyuan, 2003.

⁷³ Xu Chunliu.

⁷⁴ Ding Lang.

⁷⁵ Xu Chunliu, '一场展览，还原一段抗战史', *Xin Jing Bao* (Beijing News), 26 February, 2008. <http://news.hexun.com/2008-02-26/104048444.html>

⁷⁶ Yang Guangyuan and Chen Dunde, '《血战台儿庄》艺术对话录', *Dangdai Dianying* (Contemporary Films), Issue 2, February 1987, pp. 99-105.

⁷⁷ Yang Guangyuan and Zhai Junjie, '《血战台儿庄》导演艺术总结', *Dianying Tongxun* (Film Communications), December 1986, pp. 12-17.

deliberation, the crew decided to respect history and depict Chiang as an ‘anti-Japanese general’, which they said was ‘both risky and hard’.⁷⁸ How could the crew respect history but at the same time avoid risks? In script writer Tian Junli’s words, ‘the key was to grasp the sense of proportion’ (*zhangwo hao fencun*).⁷⁹ Chiang was shown to be genuinely committed to defeating the enemy and sincerely moved by the sacrifices of Chinese troops, even to the point of shedding tears at the memorial service for a dead general.⁸⁰ When Japanese warplanes approached, Chiang was shown to remain composed and continue with his speech.⁸¹ But at the same time, according to Tian, the film ‘used numerous scenes and details’ to show that Chiang’s commitment to the resistance was limited and that he tried to protect his Central Army while sending factional troops to the front line.⁸²

Another major revision was made to the depiction of General Chi Fengcheng, commander of the 31st Division. Though his heroism and brilliance in the battle was praised by General Stilwell,⁸³ Chi, who was jailed by the Communist government in 1949 and died in prison, was depicted in the original script as a coward who attempted to flee the battlefield under cover, leaving his troops behind.⁸⁴ But Yang found that Chi had already been rehabilitated by the government, not only for his role in the War against Japan but also for his contribution to the ‘peaceful liberation’ of Beijing by the CCP. Therefore, the film crew no longer felt restrained by political considerations and recast Chi as a heroic general.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Yang Guangyuan and Zhai Junjie, ‘新题材 新领域 新尝试 导演《血战台儿庄》随笔’, *Dianying Yishu* (Cinematic Art), August 1987, pp. 20-23.

⁷⁹ Ding Lang.

⁸⁰ Yang and Zhai, 1987.

⁸¹ Ding Xiaoping.

⁸² Ding Lang.

⁸³ Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Wuhan, 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 128.

⁸⁴ Yang and Zhai, 1986.

⁸⁵ Yang and Zhai, 1987.

In addition to taking extra caution when showing KMT figures in more positive light than was customary, the crew also did their best to add references to the CCP's war effort to the film, though the CCP was not involved in the battle at all. Communist forces' victory in an ambush at Pingxingguan, one of the few battles in the war with CCP involvement, was mentioned not only in the narration at the beginning of the film but also by Li Zongren himself. In another attempt to 'squeeze some red colour' into the film, Yang added a conversation between Li Zongren and Bai Chongxi, another senior Guangxi general, in which Li said the CCP had provided very important intelligence which was immensely helpful to winning the battle, and Bai said Zhou Enlai had given him advice on battle strategy and CCP forces were helping KMT forces in Taierzhuang by tying up Japanese forces which could otherwise be sent to the battlefield as reinforcements.⁸⁶

All those involved in the film, from script writers to directors and planners, were propaganda workers of the CCP state. As the preceding paragraphs have shown, they knew the censorship rules and propaganda red lines and practised self-censorship accordingly. As a result of thorough discussions with various departments, the script went through 17 rounds of revision.⁸⁷ In addition, they managed to win support from Shi Fangyu, head of the Film Bureau of the Ministry of Culture, Cheng Siyuan, CPPCC vice-chairman and former secretary of Li Zongren, etc.⁸⁸ However, as this was a sensitive subject that had not been given cinematic treatment in the PRC before, the crew was still very worried about whether the film could eventually pass the censors. Yang and Zhai later wrote that, while they believed the film could facilitate national reunification, they feared that this costly film might be abruptly derailed before it could be shown.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Xu Chunliu.

⁸⁷ Ding Xiaoping.

⁸⁸ Ding Xiaoping.

⁸⁹ Yang and Zhai, 1986.

The high-profile commemoration of the 40th war anniversary, especially the positive reassessment of the KMT's war effort, to some extent alleviated their concerns. According to Yang Guangyuan, when he saw a large photograph of Chiang Kai-shek giving a speech in Lushan vowing to resist Japanese aggression displayed in the Military Museum in Beijing, a heavy load was lifted off his mind and he became more confident.⁹⁰ The morale of the crew was further boosted by a seminar on the script organised by Shi Fangyu, head of the Film Bureau, and attended by 'responsible people' from the Central Propaganda Department, the Ministry of Culture and the Academy of Military Science. At the seminar, convened on 1 November, 1985, Cheng Siyuan commented, 'This film will create two images – one is the on-screen image of the KMT officers and men fighting the War of Resistance, and the other image, which appears behind the screen, is that of the magnanimous, far-sighted and truth-seeking Chinese Communist Party.'⁹¹ Yang Shaoyi, deputy head of the Guangxi studio, said he found this seminar 'inspiring'. Two weeks later, on 15 November, the CCP Committee of the Guangxi studio finally decided to go ahead with the production.⁹²

The production team was formally established on 5 February, 1986, and on-site production soon began in Shandong.⁹³ The team got crucial support from the military. As mentioned before, the PLA's Bayi studio initially had concerns about the project. But Bayi did allow Yang Guangyuan to direct the film for the Guangxi studio, which did not have experience in producing war films, and also allowed Yang to borrow experienced Bayi staff. Chi Haotian, then political commissar of the Jinan Military Region, supplied the team with some of his best

⁹⁰ Xu Chunliu.

⁹¹ Gu Yubao, '《血战台儿庄》是怎样拍成的', *Renmin Zhengxie Bao* (CPPCC Daily), 27 May, 2010. <http://www.chinanews.com/cul/news/2010/05-28/2311286.shtml>

⁹² Gu Yubao and Liang Lijie, '电影《血战台儿庄》诞生记', *Dazhong Ribao*, 9 April, 2008. http://dzrb.dzwww.com/dazk/ws/200804/t20080409_3383382.htm

⁹³ Gu Yubao, 2010.

troops, who played both Chinese and Japanese soldiers.⁹⁴ Support also came from the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television, with minister Ai Zhisheng visiting the team in their production site in Hebei's Huailai County in June 1986.⁹⁵

Shooting ended in July 1986 and the censorship process soon started.⁹⁶ At the time, the environment for artistic expressions was relatively benign, as the hard-line Deng Liqun had been replaced by the liberal Zhu Houze as head of the Central Propaganda Department in the previous year.⁹⁷ However, even though the whole production process, from script revision to shooting, had been conducted in coordination with and with the support from various party and government departments, as director Yang Guangyuan admitted, the production team remained worried about censorship, because censorship decisions were being made 'on an unusually high level', with not just the Central Propaganda Department but also Politburo members involved.⁹⁸

But while they had feared that their reassessment of history would be seen as having gone too far, some initial responses were that it had not gone far enough. On 9 August, 1986, the film crew invited officials from relevant departments and some former KMT figures to watch the first print of the film. According to Zhang Mingyu, who acted as Tang Enbo, a Chiang loyalist who had always been criticised by CCP propaganda, a vice-chairman of the CPPCC raised objections to the representation of Tang in the film.⁹⁹ In the original film, Tang had been painted as being reluctant to send reinforcements to Taierzhuang for fear of suffering losses. In the film, Li Zongren led an execution squad to Tang's command centre to force him to send

⁹⁴ Ding Xiaoping.

⁹⁵ Gu Yubao, '电影《血战台儿庄》诞生纪实', *Dang'an Tiandi* (Archives World), Issue 6, 2008.

⁹⁶ Xie Bin, "'汤恩伯'谈影片《血战台儿庄》的删改', *Dianying Pingjie* (Movie Review), Issue 1, January 1987, p. 10.

⁹⁷ Richard Baum, *Burying Mao*, pp. 189-190.

⁹⁸ Yang Guangyuan, 2003.

⁹⁹ Xie Bin.

his troops into battle. But former KMT generals said this simply could not have happened.¹⁰⁰ In another scene, when another Chinese unit asked Tang for support, Tang simply said he was unable to help.¹⁰¹ The CPPCC vice-chairman said this representation was not accurate, as Tang played a crucial role in the battle and the victory could not have been won without him. Therefore, the CPPCC suggested that the film should respect facts and present a ‘positive image’ of Tang. The production team agreed and deleted Li’s angry confrontation with Tang, and changed Tang’s reaction to pleas for help from being indifferent to being eager to help.¹⁰²

But the film’s positive reassessment of the KMT’s war effort did provoke concerns within party ranks, with some critics saying that it ‘glorifies the KMT and Chiang Kai-shek’ and therefore ‘should never be shown publicly’.¹⁰³ According to Yang Guangyuan, at a meeting attended by leaders of the Central Propaganda Department, United Front Work Department, and Ministry of Culture, some leaders raised questions about Chiang Kai-shek’s relatively benign depiction. Some asked, ‘Why is this film full of the KMT’s party flag and army flag? Why is there not a single red flag?’ But this row was eventually put to rest when Yang Shangkun, Politburo member and vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission, said, ‘This was a battle fought by the KMT. How could there be red flags?’¹⁰⁴

On 26 September, at a special meeting on the film the CCP’s Central Propaganda Department, the United Front Work Department and the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television made a collective decision to grant approval for the film to be released. According to Yang Guangyuan,

¹⁰⁰ Yang and Chen, 1987.

¹⁰¹ Xie Bin.

¹⁰² Xie Bin.

¹⁰³ Yu Dong, ‘台儿庄：合作之战·人民之战’, *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend), 9 April, 2015.

<http://www.infzm.com/content/108795>

¹⁰⁴ Xu Chunliu.

the production team were overjoyed at the ‘unexpectedly smooth’ approval.¹⁰⁵ However, the political atmosphere changed abruptly just two days later. On 28 September, 1986, the Sixth Plenum of the 12th CCP Central Committee was convened in Beijing, at which Deng Xiaoping sided with party conservatives and criticised ‘bourgeois liberalisation’.¹⁰⁶ Under such circumstances, the Taierzhuang film was subjected to another round of censorship process on an even higher level.

On the evening of 22 October, Xi Zhongxun, father of Xi Jinping and then secretary of the CCP’s Central Secretariat who was in charge of ideological issues, Cheng Siyuan, deputy chairman of the CPPCC, and Yan Mingfu, head of the United Front Work Department convened a meeting in the Film Bureau on the film. Fearing that his film was going to be banned, director Yang Guangyuan took a copy of Mao’s Little Red Book to the meeting, hoping to deflect criticism with Mao’s praise for the victory in Taierzhuang in his 1938 speech ‘On Protracted War’.¹⁰⁷ But Yang’s worries seemed to have been unnecessary. According to Shao Honglai, who acted as Li Zongren, though a deputy head of the Central Propaganda Department was critical of the film, his criticism was drowned out by a chorus of praise.¹⁰⁸ The film was approved, and according to Yang Guangyuan, Xi Zhongxun shook hands with him and said, ‘Thank you for making this good film.’¹⁰⁹

Praise also came from other top party leaders. According to Shao, when the film was screened in Zhongnanhai, the CCP leadership compound in Beijing, several important central leaders attended. Hu Qili, Politburo member and a secretary of the Central Secretariat, attended on

¹⁰⁵ Yang Guangyuan, 2003.

¹⁰⁶ Baum, pp. 197-199.

¹⁰⁷ Mao Tse-Tung, ‘On Protracted War’.

¹⁰⁸ Zhao Jiaxun and Yu Yingxun, ‘邵宏来口述:从戏剧舞台到人生舞台’, *Qingdao Wenxue* (Qingdao Literature), Issue 12, December 2015, pp. 97-105.

¹⁰⁹ Gu Yubao, 2010.

behalf of General Secretary Hu Yaobang and praised the film for ‘showing the backbone of this nation’.¹¹⁰ According to Yang Guangyuan, Yan Mingfu, the United Front chief, later told him, ‘Thank you for making this good film. Your film is equivalent to many years of our United Front work. I will definitely send this film to Taiwan.’¹¹¹

In late December 1986, the premieres of the film were held in Nanjing and Guilin, the two main cities of Guangxi, and received a warm reception.¹¹² But high politics in Beijing intervened again. Following nationwide student demonstrations in December 1986, Deng sided with party conservatives and blamed Hu Yaobang for the ‘disturbances’. Hu was forced to step down on 16 January, 1987, for tolerating ‘spiritual pollution’ and ‘bourgeois liberalisation’, and a campaign against ‘bourgeois liberalisation’ was launched, in which the liberal-leaning propaganda chief Zhu Houze was replaced by hard-liner Wang Renzhi and censorship was tightened.¹¹³

On 17 January, one day after Hu stepped down, the Guangxi studio received a notice telling it to stop making copies of the Taierzhuang film and distributing them.¹¹⁴ Fortunately, the anti-liberalisation campaign was short-lived and its scope and intensity was very limited, because Zhao Ziyang, who replaced Hu as general secretary, worked hard to reassure the country and the world that China’s reform and opening-up was not being reversed.¹¹⁵ Banning the Taierzhuang film, which had been made mainly for external propaganda purposes, would have sent a negative message to Taiwan and overseas Chinese communities. On 18 February, the Guangxi studio received a message from the Film Bureau relaying instructions made by the

¹¹⁰ Zhao Jiaxun and Yu Yingxun.

¹¹¹ Xu Chunliu.

¹¹² Yang Guangyuan and Chen Dunde, 1987.

¹¹³ Baum, pp. 206-211.

¹¹⁴ Gu and Liang, 2008.

¹¹⁵ Baum, p. 211.

CCP Central Secretariat. According to Yang Shaoyi, then deputy head of the studio, it contained three points:

1. This year will see the 49th anniversary of the Battle of Taierzhuang. This film can be distributed and shown nationwide.
2. Some people suggested that a Mao quote should be added to the beginning of the film. It does not have to be done.
3. Some people suggested that the clip on ‘Chiang Kai-shek being unafraid of Japanese air raid’ should be deleted. It is up to the artists themselves whether they want to delete it or not.¹¹⁶

Though the film was allowed to be shown, it was not actively promoted on the mainland. According to Shao Honglai, there was an instruction from a ‘relevant department’ saying that the film should not be promoted and should only be shown in a ‘semi-public’ manner.¹¹⁷

After the film was shown in mainland China in the spring of 1987, China’s propaganda organs made sure it was also seen by the audience it was intended for in the first place – the KMT leadership in Taiwan. In the run-up to the 50th anniversary of the Lugouqiao Incident in July, the Hong Kong branch of China’s official Xinhua news agency gave a copy of the film to staff of Taiwan’s official Central News Agency, who then took it to Taiwan.¹¹⁸ According to Chen Dunde, Cheng Siyuan was later told by sources in Taiwan that both Chiang Ching-kuo and Soong Mei-ling, Chiang Kai-shek’s widow, saw the film. He was told that, from the film, Chiang saw changes in the mainland’s policy on Taiwan and decided to react by making

¹¹⁶ Gu Yubao, 2010.

¹¹⁷ Zhao Jiaxun and Yu Yingxun.

¹¹⁸ Xu Chunliu.

changes to Taiwan's mainland policy. Shortly afterwards, Taiwan began to allow KMT veterans in Taiwan to visit their families on the mainland. Cheng attributed Taiwan's policy change partly to the film and wrote a calligraphic inscription praising the film crew, which read 'Careful planning facilitates unification' (*Jingxin cehua, cujin tongyi*).¹¹⁹

To sum up, the CCP leadership allowed the Taierzhuang film, which depicts KMT war effort without showing almost any apparent CCP role, to be made primarily because of its propaganda value towards the KMT in Taiwan. At the same time, the Central Propaganda Department was divided over the film's potential impact on the CCP's traditional propaganda line on war history. It was eventually allowed to be shown in public despite conservative criticisms largely because of the dominance of liberal leaders such as Xi Zhongxun in the ideological and propaganda sphere. But, as mentioned, the short-lived liberal opening of 1986 was brought to a jarring halt in early 1987.¹²⁰ As the following sections will show, this film turned out to be the high point of the historical reassessment for nearly two decades.

Hu Qiaomu's warning against 'intolerable' trend of praising KMT

The reason why Taierzhuang film caused such controversy within the CCP propaganda establishment and only narrowly escaped being banned probably lies in the difference between its portrayal of the KMT's war effort and the limited recognition championed by CCP ideologues such as Hu Qiaomu. In articles on the making of the film published during the three decades after it was initially shown, Hu Qiaomu, who had championed limited reassessment of war history, was noticeably never mentioned as a supporter of this film. In fact, in subsequent

¹¹⁹ Ding Xiaoping.

¹²⁰ Baum, p. 206.

articles and speeches, Hu reiterated his own view of the extent to which the KMT's performance in the war should be reassessed and expressed serious reservations over the way the reassessment was going.

In a July 1987 article published in both the PLA Daily and the People's Daily, Hu gave his carefully worded verdict on the contribution made by the KMT vis-à-vis that of the CCP:

‘Both in the run-up to the war and during the whole course of the war, the Chinese Communist Party always held the political initiative. We fully recognise the contribution made by all the patriotic officers and men of the KMT government forces, especially those who were killed in action. But in the early stages of the war, the Chiang Kai-shek government implemented the wrong policy of partial resistance (relying only on the army but not on the people). From 1939 onwards, it adopted the reactionary policy of being passive in resistance whilst being active in opposing the CCP and the people, which caused most of its army to lose nearly all their fighting strength.’¹²¹

Just three weeks later, when addressing a national seminar on party history in Beijing on 1 August, Hu severely criticised the ‘erroneous tendencies’ in the research and propaganda on the War of Resistance.¹²² He said, ‘The most serious problem in this area is that, the more some comrades study the War of Resistance, the more they stand on the KMT's standpoint.’ He said this problem was no longer limited to a small number of people, but had already become a ‘trend of thought’ (*sichao*). Emphasising the seriousness of the problem, Hu expressed disbelief that such ideological deviation could have happened among the ranks of senior party and

¹²¹ Hu Qiaomu, ‘略谈八年抗战的伟大历史意义’, *People's Daily*, 8 July, 1987, p. 1.

¹²² Zhang Sutang and Mao Lei, ‘胡乔木谈中共党史中国革命史研究 记录党的历史就应该从实际出发’, *People's Daily*, 2 August, 1987.

military officials, most of whom work in institutions under the direct control of the Central Military Commission:

‘This is definitely not a small matter, not a small problem. It is a very big problem. Strictly speaking, it could be a very serious problem. Communist Party members and senior cadres of the People’s Liberation Army, when studying the history of the War of Resistance, have walked onto such a path that they think that the KMT was the mainstay of the War of Resistance, that the Military Commission of the Nationalist government, the officers and men of the National Revolutionary Army from Generalissimo Chiang downward, who were responsible for the centre stage battlefield, were the mainstay of the War of Resistance. Such things, to be frank, as I might be too ignorant, when I saw it I found it startling. I really couldn’t understand it.’¹²³

According to Hu, the KMT government’s wrongdoings, such as its military clashes with CCP forces during the War of Resistance and its contact with Japan, had been played down, because ‘it seems mentioning such history would hinder our current attempt to win over the Taiwan authorities and to reunite the motherland peacefully’.¹²⁴ Hu stressed that ‘such propaganda is fundamentally wrong and cannot be tolerated’, because,

‘if such a propaganda line is followed, we will find it impossible to write our party history or our military history. Why did we fight a Liberation War afterwards? Wasn’t

¹²³ Hu Qiaomu, ‘在中共党史、中国革命史讲习班的讲话（一九八七年八月一日）’, in Editorial Group of Biography of Hu Qiaomu (ed.), *胡乔木谈中共党史* (Hu Qiaomu on CCP History) (People’s Publishing Houses, September 1999), pp. 256-263.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

the CCP trying to make trouble for the KMT after the War of Resistance? This version of events is currently circulating among young people.’¹²⁵

Hu had said he had asked around who had made the decision on such a propaganda line, and found out that ‘no comrades in the Central Military Commission or the Central Committee had made such a decision’. Hu said he had reported what he saw to Yang Shangkun, vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission, who told him he would talk to Yu Qiuli, head of the PLA’s General Political Department, about what appropriate measures should be taken to reverse this trend.¹²⁶

Despite Hu Qiaomu’s anger and disbelief at what he saw as historical reassessment gone too far, the limited recognition of the KMT’s war effort championed by himself was accepted as part of the official narrative formalised in the Memorial Museum of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance to Japan.¹²⁷ On 6 July, 1987, the day before the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the war, the War of Resistance Museum was opened in a ceremony attended by top party leaders including Yang Shangkun, Wan Li, Wang Zhen, Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun.¹²⁸ The exhibits on display emphasised ‘China’s contribution to the world anti-fascist war’ and portrayed the CCP as leader of the united front against Japanese aggression. Within this narrative, the KMT government, seen as part of the CCP-led united front, received limited praise, with one display saying that it ‘did in the political, economic, cultural and foreign relations fields carry out some effective policies relating to resistance to Japan and the establishment of reforms’.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Mitter, 2000.

¹²⁸ Yang Lianghua, ‘卢沟桥畔永世吊忠魂 中国人民抗日战争纪念馆昨揭幕 党政军领导和首都各界群众出席落成典礼’, *People’s Daily*, 7 July, 1987, p. 1.

¹²⁹ Mitter, 2000.

The thinking behind the recognition of the KMT's role was elaborated by Hu Qiaomu at a seminar on war history held at the museum in July 1988. He said, 'Correctly studying the history of the War of Resistance against Japan is very important for China's national unity. The War of Resistance was fought under the condition of national solidarity and the cooperation of the KMT and the CCP. Realising the peaceful reunification of the motherland and the third KMT-CCP cooperation remains the top priority of the Chinese nation. In this sense, studying the history of the War of Resistance is especially important.'¹³⁰

What set the establishment of the museum apart from official statements and artistic representations of the war was that the narrative embodied in a museum is more likely to persist. As Mitter observed, whilst 'a rapid change in the political climate can lead to films and television series being withdrawn and condemned', 'to close down such a massive undertaking as the War of Resistance Museum would involve such a large effort that it would make a much more definitive statement about the boundaries of permitted politics than the suppression of broadcast or cinematic material.'¹³¹ Therefore, the opening of the War of Resistance Museum was an indication that the partial recognition of the KMT's war effort had become an established propaganda policy of the CCP.

3. 1989-1999: War memory in era of rising nationalism, growing cross-strait tension and volatile Sino-US ties

The 1989 Tiananmen Incident triggered an anti-liberalisation ideological backlash,¹³² but the positive reassessment of the KMT's war effort carried on. After all, limited recognition of the

¹³⁰ Liu Jianye, '胡乔木同志与中国人民抗日战争纪念馆', in *我所知道的胡乔木*, p. 277.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Joseph Fewsmith, 'Chapter 1: Tiananmen and the conservative criticism of reform', *China Since Tiananmen (Second Edition)*, pp. 21-47.

KMT's role in the war had been supported by Hu Qiaomu, one of the CCP's top conservative ideologues who remained influential after Tiananmen, and wooing the KMT government in Taiwan remained important as peaceful reunification was still one of the CCP's top priorities.

Momentum continued after Tiananmen

Cross-strait relations had been developing rapidly in the run-up to Tiananmen. Under Lee Teng-hui, who became chairman of the KMT and president of the Republic of China after his predecessor Chiang Ching-kuo died in 1988, constructive cross-strait interaction continued and seemed to culminate just one month before the Tiananmen crackdown, with Taiwan's first official delegation since 1949 attending the Asian Development Bank's annual meeting in Beijing.¹³³ After the massacre, relations thawed unexpectedly quickly, with ROC Foreign Minister Lien Chan announcing the end of open animosity towards Beijing in December 1989.¹³⁴

Under such circumstances, literary works and dramas that included favourable depictions of the KMT forces conceived before Tiananmen were allowed to proceed and continued to win praise in official propaganda outlets. Shortly after the Tiananmen crackdown, a six-episode TV series depicting the Battle of Xinkou, a 1937 battle fought by both KMT and CCP forces in Shanxi, was broadcast by CCTV and was positively reviewed by official media.¹³⁵ A People's Daily commentary praised the drama for propagating the 'national spirit', 'reviewing the history of KMT-CCP cooperation and calling on Taiwan to return to the Motherland'.¹³⁶

¹³³ Chong-Pin Lin, 'Beijing and Taipei: Dialectics in Post-Tiananmen Interactions', *The China Quarterly*, No. 136, Special Issue: Greater China (Dec., 1993), pp. 770-804.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Dong Yaozhang, '文艺旅踪', *Shanxi Wenshi Ziliao*, Issue Z1, 1998, pp. 217-230.

¹³⁶ Su Hua, '革命历史题材的新探索——评电视剧《忻口战役》', *People's Daily*, 9 August, 1989, p. 8.

Compared with cross-strait relations, Sino-US relations were more seriously affected by the Tiananmen crackdown. However, though there were conservative voices urging the government to reorient its foreign policy away from the West, reformist leaders such as Deng Xiaoping worked with US government to mend bilateral ties.¹³⁷ In this subtle diplomatic situation, a number of literary works on the Chinese Expeditionary Force, which fought with both British and American forces against the Japanese army in Burma, were published. In July 1990, a book titled *Burma: The Great Sino-Japanese Rivalry*, which was written by PLA author Chen Liren, was published by the PLA Arts Publishing House.¹³⁸ Just a few months later, in December 1990, another lengthy account of the same history, titled *The Soul of a Great Nation* and written by Deng Xian, a young literature lecturer in his thirties whose father had been a member of the Expeditionary Force, was published in the *Dangdai* magazine.¹³⁹

But the publication of such works, which dealt with subjects still deemed sensitive, was not always without controversies. The *Dangdai* magazine commissioned Deng Xian to write about the Expeditionary Force in the documentary style in the spring of 1988, after *Dangdai* editor Hong Qingbo met the aspiring writer in Yunnan. But when Deng submitted the first draft at the end of 1989, the political and diplomatic situation had changed due to the Tiananmen crisis. According to He Qizhi, executive deputy editor of the People's Literature Publishing House and editor of *Dangdai*, there were some major reservations and concerns among leading editors. One of the questions asked was whether the work had depicted Chiang Kai-shek too positively and had ignored the CCP's contribution. Editors eventually decided that this was not a problem, because though Deng was positive about Chiang's historical role, he also pointed out his

¹³⁷ Fewsmith, pp. 45-47.

¹³⁸ Chen Liren, 缅甸, 中日大角逐 (Burma: The Great Sino-Japanese Rivalry) (Jiefangjun Wenyi Chubanshe, July 1990).

¹³⁹ Deng Xian, '大国之魂——第二次世界大战滇缅印战区纵横', *Dangdai*, Issue 6, December 1990, pp. 52-151.

‘egoism, selfishness, obstinacy, and commanding errors’. Another question was whether the work was too positive about the United States. Justifying his decision to dismiss this concern, He wrote several years later, ‘In 1990, at a time when Sino-US relations were tense, only by discarding the myopic, utilitarian thinking could we see history in a calm and rational manner. Only by doing so could we have the necessary wisdom and courage to make a worthy contribution and truly safeguard and develop the great friendship between the American and Chinese peoples.’¹⁴⁰ Clearly, in addition to the need to promote cross-strait ties, the desire to use the history of wartime Sino-US cooperation to promote Sino-US relations was also behind the interest in reviving the memories of the Chinese Expeditionary Force to Burma.

Apart from cross-strait and international considerations, domestic ideological shifts also contributed to the continued interest in war history. After Tiananmen, in an attempt to counter Western plots of ‘peaceful evolution’, the CCP elevated patriotism to a position of utmost importance and launched a nation-wide ‘Patriotic Education Campaign’ in 1991.¹⁴¹ History of the War of Resistance was an important part of this initiative to promote patriotism. When the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences launched *The Journal of Studies of China's Resistance War Against Japan*, China’s first specialised journal on the war, in September 1991,¹⁴² The People’s Daily said the journal was intended to ‘provide an academic foundation to the patriotic education aimed at the masses of servicemen, civilians and the youth’.¹⁴³

As the nationalist narrative eclipsed the class struggle narrative in CCP ideology, it created a more favourable propaganda environment for recognising the KMT’s role. According to Zheng

¹⁴⁰ He Qizhi, ‘从《古船》到《白鹿原》’, *Lijiang*, Issue 1, 1997.

¹⁴¹ Suisheng Zhao, ‘A State-Led Nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in Post-Tiananmen China’, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1998, pp. 287–302.

¹⁴² Parks Coble, 2007.

¹⁴³ ‘《抗日战争研究》杂志创刊’, *People’s Daily*, 16 September, 1991.

Wang, in the new middle school history textbooks published by the People's Education Press in 1992, the narrative of the Anti-Japanese War was revised. The textbooks, which emphasised the international conflict between China and Japan and downplayed the internal and class conflict between the CCP and the KMT, gave the KMT considerable credit for its military resistance and reduced criticisms of its purported 'corruption and impotence along with its non-resistance policy', which were described at lengths in previous PRC textbooks.¹⁴⁴ Writing in the mid-1990s, Arthur Waldron noted that the PRC's 'enormous shift' from its traditional dismissal of the KMT's war effort was evident in hundreds of news items in the Chinese press, along with 'a profusion of books, memoirs, television serials, documentaries, new monuments, and so forth'.¹⁴⁵

The positive trend seemed set to lead to a boom year for the reassessment in the run-up to the 50th anniversary of the end of the War against Japan. But, as detailed in the following paragraphs, this trend was to be reversed abruptly due to high-level intervention.

Ding Guan'gen's intervention to rein in reassessment

Though, as mentioned earlier, cross-strait relations developed rapidly in the early 1990s, tensions were also building up. As the diplomatic contest between Beijing and Taipei intensified and pro-independence forces grew in Taiwan, Beijing was increasingly critical of the KMT government's attempt to seek international recognition and its alleged 'tacit encouragement' of separatist forces. Beijing also claimed that Taipei had tried to foment unrest on the mainland by supporting exiled dissidents and sending spies to the mainland.¹⁴⁶ As

¹⁴⁴ Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 101-102.

¹⁴⁵ Waldron, 1996.

¹⁴⁶ Chong-Pin Lin, 1993.

President Lee Teng-hui's visit to the United States in June 1995 infuriated leaders in Beijing, the growing tension eventually led to a major crisis, with the PLA launching a series of military exercises near Taiwan, which lasted from August 1995 to March 1996.¹⁴⁷

As cross-strait tension rose, praising the KMT for its historical patriotism naturally became less desirable for CCP propagandists. In the run-up to the 50th anniversary of the end of the war in 1995, at a Central Propaganda Department meeting in Shijiazhuang, CPD chief Ding Guan'gen asked all provincial propaganda departments to report how they had prepared for the commemoration activities. After finding that a lot of the planned publications and activities were about the 'centre stage battlefield', where the KMT played the main role, Ding criticised the situation and blamed it on a 'loss of control on the macro level'. He then instructed all provinces to 'clean up' quickly.¹⁴⁸ China's National News and Publication Administration issued an official letter urging publishers to 'lower the temperature' of the reassessment of the KMT's war role, and later instructed the mass media to speak less of the KMT's war effort, avoid highlighting the achievements of Western Allies and focus on Soviet contributions.¹⁴⁹

According to Professor Zhang Xianwen, a veteran historian of Republican China at Nanjing University, at Ding's instruction, 180 books about the War against Japan, which had been planned by publishing houses in various provinces, were cancelled. A book project organised by Zhang himself was also affected. The book, titled 'China's War of Resistance against Japan: 1931-1945', was about to be published by the Shanxi People's Publishing House. But after the

¹⁴⁷ See Suisheng Zhao (ed.), *Across the Taiwan Strait: Mainland China, Taiwan, and the 1995-1996 Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁴⁸ Zhang Xianwen, *江苏社科名家文库：张宪文卷* (Jiangsu People's Publishing House, June 2015), p. 35.

¹⁴⁹ Chang Jui-te, 'The Politics of Commemoration: A Comparative Analysis of the Fiftieth-Anniversary Commemoration in Mainland China and Taiwan of the Victory in Anti-Japanese War', in Diana Lary and Stephen McKinnon (eds.), *Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Modern China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001), pp. 150-151.

Shijiazhuang meeting, a deputy editor-in-chief of the publisher asked Zhang to reduce the content on the KMT's role and argue that the KMT did not fight the war. Zhang refused and the book was shelved for years.¹⁵⁰

As a result of Ding's intervention, said Zhang, the commemoration of the war anniversary focused almost exclusively on the CCP's contributions and television programmes about the KMT's war effort disappeared from TV screens.¹⁵¹ Authors and filmmakers who had, in the preceding decade, created successful works on the KMT's performance in the war, saw their work banned in the new propaganda environment. In early 1995, Deng Xian, who had made a name for himself with his work on the Chinese Expeditionary Force five years before, published another long reportage on the Battle of Shanghai in *Dangdai*.¹⁵² But Deng was criticised for being overly sympathetic towards Chiang Kai-shek and belittling guerrilla warfare,¹⁵³ and the authorities ordered the magazines in which the work was published to be retrieved and destroyed.¹⁵⁴ Likewise, in 1995, Yang Guangyuan, director of the film *Battle of Taierzhuang*, produced a new film entitled *Iron and Blood at the Kunlun Pass*, which depicted a 1939 battle fought by KMT forces in Guangxi, which he intended to dedicate to the 50th war anniversary. According to Yang, though the film had gone through the censorship process and got approval from the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television, it was later banned because one central party leader expressed disapproving views.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Zhang Xianwen, p. 36. The book was eventually published in 2001, after the political situation changed again. See Zhang Xianwen, Chen Qianping & Chen Hongmin (eds.), *中国抗日战争史 (1931~1945)* (Nanjing University Publishing House, 2001).

¹⁵¹ Zhang, p. 36.

¹⁵² Deng Xian, '淞沪大决战', *Dangdai*, Issue 1, 1995, pp. 4-115.

¹⁵³ See, for example, Yan Jin, '对《淞沪大决战》某些观点的商榷', *Hongyan Chunqiu*, Issue 1, 1996, pp. 51-54.

¹⁵⁴ Wu Zhaoyu, '意识形态话语与文本生产——以《当代》长篇小说为例', *Wenyi Zhengming*, Issue 1, 2014, pp. 110-115.

¹⁵⁵ Yang Guangyuan, 2003.

Under the new propaganda policy, the research on war history shifted focus. In an article published in the *Journal of Studies of China's Resistance War against Japan*, Li Kan, a veteran propaganda official then working as an editor at the Zhonghua Book Company, called attention to the fact that, whilst books and articles on the centre stage battlefield had been increasing in recent years, those focusing on the CCP-controlled base areas appeared to have decreased. Li therefore urged historians to 'strengthen the research' on base areas.¹⁵⁶ Li's comment was later carried by the *People's Daily*, showing official support for this view.¹⁵⁷ Also, according to historian Zhang Xianwen, after 1995, Japanese war atrocities became a major focus of research by Chinese historians.¹⁵⁸ This was consistent with the narrative of China's sufferings during the 'Century of Humiliation', which was a major theme of the ongoing Patriotic Education Campaign.

Using wartime alliance to improve troubled Sino-US ties

Though the setback in cross-strait relations removed a key motive for the CCP to praise the Nationalist war effort, some other motives for reassessing war history remained valid and had become even stronger as a result of the new geopolitical situation China was faced with. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 had undermined China's role as a Cold War ally of the United States, and Taiwan's progress towards democratisation had boosted its popularity and support in the US.¹⁵⁹ Chinese leaders feared that the US, now the world's only superpower, was going to treat the PRC as its chief rival and opponent.¹⁶⁰ The 50th anniversary of the end

¹⁵⁶ Li Kan, '对抗日战争史研究略陈管见', *Kangri Zhanzheng Yanjiu* (*Journal of Studies of China's Resistance War against Japan*), Issue 1, 1995, pp. 1-4.

¹⁵⁷ '应加强敌后抗日根据地的研究', *People's Daily*, 26 April, 1995, p. 11.

¹⁵⁸ Zhang Xianwen, '抗战史研究的检视与评述', *Jianghai Xuekan*, Issue 4, 2015, pp. 18-23.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Sutter, *Foreign Relations of the PRC: The Legacies and Constraints of China's International Politics since 1949* (Rowman & Littlefield: 2013), p. 163.

¹⁶⁰ John W. Garver, *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (Oxford University Press: 2018), p. 531.

of the war was commemorated at a time when Sino-US relations were particularly tense, as in May 1995, the US State Department announced that it was issuing a visa for Taiwan's President Lee Teng-hui to pay a 'private visit' to his alma mater Cornell University. From Beijing's perspective, it was an unacceptable violation of the US pledge to have no official contact with Taiwan.¹⁶¹ Under such circumstances, in addition to lodging diplomatic protests, Chinese leaders and propaganda mouthpieces also used the history of Sino-US cooperation during the Second World War to stress that China had been a friend of the United States and a contributor to the post-war international order.

During the 1995 commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the end of the war, a new concept was adopted in official propaganda which emphasised the importance of the China Theatre as 'the main Eastern battlefield' (*Dongfang Zhu Zhanchang*) of World War II. In his speech at the main memorial meeting held on 3 September, CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin said,

'China's War of Resistance against Japan was an important component of the World Anti-Fascist War and was the main Eastern battlefield of the World Anti-Fascist War. China's protracted resistance, especially the resistance behind enemy lines led by the Chinese Communist Party, resisted and pinned down two thirds of all the manpower of the Japanese army and forced the Japanese army to give up its planned Northern Expansion and weakened the strength of its Southern Expansion, giving support to the US-British Allied Forces in the Pacific Theatre.'¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Garver, pp. 627-628.

¹⁶² Jiang Zemin, '在首都各界纪念抗日战争暨世界反法西斯战争胜利五十周年大会上江泽民同志的讲话（一九九五年九月三日）', *People's Daily*, 4 September, 1995, p. 1.

There was clearly an emphasis on China's contribution to the Allied war effort, and such an emphasis made it sometimes difficult to avoid mentioning, in positive terms, the performance of China's then government forces. But this priority came into direct conflict with the CCP's above-mentioned attempt to scale down positive portrayal of the KMT's role in the war. These conflicted priorities were reflected in propaganda articles commemorating the war anniversary.

For example, a joint article produced by the Xinhua News Agency, the PLA Daily and the People's Daily first condemned the KMT for not resisting and then hailed its contribution to the Allies.¹⁶³ Following the orthodox Maoist view of history, the article criticised Chiang Kai-shek's policy of 'Resisting Foreign Aggression after Stabilizing the Country', saying it 'created an immense catastrophe for the Chinese nation'. It admitted that KMT forces 'actively resisted' Japanese attacks at Lugouqiao, Shanghai and Taierzhuang, but said Chiang's 'incompetence' resulted in the loss of half of China's territories. The article said KMT forces were 'retreating like falling tides' while the CCP was 'challenging the arrogant Japanese aggressors head-on'. However, in the section touting the importance of the 'main Eastern battlefield', the authors gave considerable credit to the Chinese Expeditionary Force to Burma:

'In late 1941, the Japanese army launched fierce attacks on the British army in Burma in an attempt to open a second front. At the British government's request, the Chinese army organised an Expeditionary Force, which went to Burma to resist the aggressors together with the Allied forces. During the arduous operation, which lasted over three years, [China] dispatched over 160,000 servicemen there, rescued over 7,000 people of Britain's 1st Burma Division, who had been surrounded by the Japanese army,

¹⁶³ Jia Yong (Xinhua reporter), Cao Ruilin (PLA Daily reporter) and Guo Jia (People's Daily reporter), '中华民族的胜利——纪念抗日战争胜利五十周年展览巡礼', *People's Daily*, 7 July, 1995.

recovered over 60 fallen cities and towns in north Burma, and destroyed over 50,000 Japanese soldiers.’¹⁶⁴

The article called the Expeditionary Force part of the ‘Chinese army’ without mentioning its party affiliations. But it was still extraordinary that, in an article that gave almost all credit to the CCP’s alleged ‘leading’ role and was condemnatory of the KMT’s performance throughout, the authors gave positive mention to this crucial episode of the war, in which KMT forces fought shoulder to shoulder with Allied forces.¹⁶⁵ Also notable was the fact that Chinese Defence Minister Chi Haotian, while on a visit to Burma on 11 July, paid homage at a cemetery of the Chinese Expeditionary Force. According to a Xinhua report, he laid a wreath to ‘pay respects to the martyrs of the Chinese Expeditionary Force who gave their lives during the War of Resistance against Japan’.¹⁶⁶ At a time when the CCP was backtracking from its previous praise for Nationalist war efforts, the attention the Chinese Expeditionary Force was getting was quite extraordinary. This is clear indication of the importance of the KMT’s war effort to the CCP’s narrative about the war’s implications for China’s relations with the West.

Shortly after the war anniversary, on 29 September, Chinese vice-premier and veteran diplomat Qian Qichen, who was attending the 50th UN General Assembly in New York, gave an ‘important speech’ on Sino-US relations at the Foreign Policy Association, in which he referred to the war-time cooperation between the two countries.¹⁶⁷ Qian blamed the tension between the two countries on the US government’s decision to issue Lee Teng-hui a visa, but said China

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Zhang Yunfei (Xinhua reporter), ‘迟浩田向中国远征军烈士墓献花圈’, *People’s Daily*, 13 July, 1995.

¹⁶⁷ Xu Shiquan and He Hongze, ‘钱副总理在美外交政策协会午餐会上就中美关系发表重要讲话’, *People’s Daily*, 30 September, 1995.

was 'positive' about the US side's reaffirmation of the 'one China' policy. When talking about the prospects for bilateral ties, he said,

'This year marks the 50th anniversary of the victory of the World Anti-Fascist War. This is not only a time to review history, but is also, more importantly, a time to look into the future. Fifty years ago, as allies, China and the United States supported each other and fought shoulder to shoulder in the joint resistance against Fascism. Now, after 50 years, though the international situation has undergone immense changes, there still exists wide-ranging common interests between China and the United States.'¹⁶⁸

The fact that the US was allied with the KMT government during the war did not prevent CCP leaders from praising that relationship and appropriating it for their own use.

Qian's relatively conciliatory tone was not appreciated by the PLA, which demanded a hawkish stance over Lee's US visit. This resulted in a dangerous confrontation between China and the US in the Taiwan Strait from late 1995 to early 1996, which shocked leaders in both Beijing and Washington and made both sides realise the importance of building a more cooperative relationship.¹⁶⁹ In their attempt to improve relations, the wartime cooperation between the two countries became a useful fact to mention. In December 1996, while on a visit to Washington, Chinese Defence Minister Chi Haotian concluded his speech at the National Defense University with a reference to the war:

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Garver, pp. 636-638.

‘During the Second World War, in order to resist the common enemy, China and the United States carried out sincere cooperation. I hope that today’s Sino-US relations can still manifest a healthy and positive spirit of cooperation. I hope, in particular, that the Chinese and US armed forces can make important contributions to the constant development of bilateral relations of the two countries.’¹⁷⁰

In order to return bilateral ties to normal, the two sides arranged an exchange of summit visits - Jiang to the US in 1997 and Clinton to China in 1998.¹⁷¹ On both visits, the history of the Second World War was mentioned. On Jiang’s US visit in October 1997, he stopped over in Hawaii to lay a wreath at the Pearl Harbor memorial, underlining the wartime Sino-US alliance against Japan.¹⁷² Jiang attended separate banquets with the mayor of Honolulu and the governor of Hawaii, and at both banquets he mentioned war history, saying that the two countries ‘fought shoulder to shoulder against Fascism’ in the past and now have ‘common responsibility for the peace and development of the world’.¹⁷³ When President Clinton welcomed Jiang on the South Lawn at the White House, he also made references to the war, saying: ‘When you laid a wreath at Pearl Harbor, you paid tribute to the alliance between our people that brought victory in World War II. Now, on the verge of a new century, our two great nations must join our strength again.’¹⁷⁴ In June 1998, on his return visit to China, Clinton mentioned the war again. At a state banquet, he said Nixon’s 1972 visit to China ‘changed history’. ‘It reminded us of the warmth each nation felt for the other, long before the Cold War.

¹⁷⁰ Li Yunfei and Song Xiaogang, ‘迟浩田在美国防大学发表讲演着重阐述中国的防御性国防政策’, *People’s Daily*, 12 December, 1996.

¹⁷¹ Garver, p. 643.

¹⁷² Garver, p. 645.

¹⁷³ Chen Te’an, ‘江主席抵檀香山受到热烈欢迎 参观珍珠港亚利桑那纪念馆并献花圈 夏威夷州长檀香山市市长分别设宴欢迎江主席一行’, *People’s Daily*, 28 October, 1997.

¹⁷⁴ The White House Office of the Press Secretary, ‘Remarks by President Clinton and President Jiang Zemin at Arrival Ceremony’, *US Department of State website*, October 29, 1997. https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eap/971029_clinton_china1.html

It recalled our alliance in World War II and our long history of commercial relations dating back to the infancy of the United States,' said Clinton.¹⁷⁵ His remarks were duly published in the *People's Daily*.¹⁷⁶

To sum up, despite the Central Propaganda Department's sudden reversal of reassessment of the KMT's war effort, aspects of the war history, especially the wartime cooperation between the KMT government and the Western Allies, were emphasised in official propaganda to improve the troubled Sino-US relations in the aftermaths of the Cold War. The past can be sometimes inconvenient, but it is inescapable after all.

Conclusion

As this chapter made clear, almost immediately after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the CCP began adjusting its traditionally condemnatory appraisal of the Nationalists' role during the War against Japan. Driven by the desire to achieve peaceful unification with Taiwan, the regime started giving limited recognition to the KMT's war contribution. However, from the very beginning, such attempts at reassessment were seen by some within the party and military ranks as damaging to the CCP's legitimacy and therefore met with resistance and backlash.

During the 1980s and the early 1990s, when wooing the Taiwan-based KMT was a priority for Beijing, the positive reassessment of the KMT's war effort received support from the top level of the CCP leadership, not just from liberal reformists but also from some conservative

¹⁷⁵ Bill Clinton, 'Remarks at a State Dinner Hosted by President Jiang Zemin of China in Beijing', June 27, 1998, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William J. Clinton (1998, Book I)*, pp. 1078-1079. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PPP-1998-book1/html/PPP-1998-book1-doc-pg1078.htm>

¹⁷⁶ Peng Shujie, '江主席举行国宴欢迎克林顿总统 两国元首表示将继续推动中美关系向前发展 李鹏朱镕基李瑞环胡锦涛尉健行李岚清等出席宴会', *People's Daily*, 28 June, 1998.

ideologues such as Hu Qiaomu. But the reassessment was still a sensitive subject, as the leadership constantly weighed its benefits for cross-strait relations against its potential damaging effort to the party's historical legitimacy. Hu Qiaomu, who supported the reassessment, nevertheless issued stern warnings to party and PLA propagandists when he thought they were going too far in praising the KMT.

In the 1990s, when tensions grew between Beijing and Lee Teng-hui's KMT government, praising the KMT's patriotic feats became less desirable for CCP propagandists. As a result, the Nationalist war effort was again played down and criticised in mainland media. However, paradoxically, the worsening relations with Taiwan's KMT government made it even more important to maintain and improve China's relations with the United States. Therefore, the memory of the war continued to have major propaganda value to the CCP, as China's wartime cooperation with the United States was used to improve Sino-US relations. But, as the next chapter will show, dramatic shifts in Taiwan's domestic politics would soon set the scene for another about-turn in the PRC's official historiography of the war.

Chapter 6: Patriotism and great power status – reassessing the War against Japan

(Part 2)

This chapter follows Chapter 4 and discusses the reassessment of the War against Japan since 2000. In this period, boosting CCP-KMT ties once again became a key motivation for the CCP to allow and encourage positive portrayals of the KMT's war effort, as the ascendancy of the pro-independence DPP in Taiwan added to the urgency of finding pro-unification allies in Taiwanese politics. But some new factors have also emerged that make elements of the reassessment desirable for the CCP's propaganda chiefs.

China in the early 2000s began to emerge as a great power on the world stage. China's war contribution, including the major battles fought by the KMT forces and especially the military expedition to Burma, became valuable evidence that could be used to justify China's great power status and allay Western concerns over China's rise by stressing China's role as an ally of the West and a founder and defender of the post-war international order.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Section 1 discusses how the reassessment revived in the early 2000s and thrived under Hu Jintao as the CCP and the KMT formed an alliance against pro-independence forces in Taiwan. Section 2 focuses on how the Xi Jinping government has handled the reassessment to stress the legitimacy of China's great power status.

1. 2000-2012: Revival and culmination of the reassessment amidst CCP-KMT rapprochement

In March 2000, Chen Shui-bian, candidate of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), won the presidential election in Taiwan. This shock result led to profound changes in cross-strait relations. In order to isolate Chen, the CCP government in Beijing ramped up its ‘united front’ work to court Taiwan’s opposition ‘pan-blue’ camp, namely the KMT, now no longer under Lee Teng-hui’s control, and its splinter parties, the People First Party and New Party.¹ The tension that existed between the CCP and the KMT during the 1990s was significantly reduced, and the two parties began developing a more cooperative relationship. Therefore, a major obstacle to the reassessment of the KMT’s war effort was removed.

At the same time, the usefulness of the history of the war to China’s effort to develop good relations with the United States, which was discussed in the last section, persisted. Sino-US relations, which were on relatively good terms in 1997 and 1998 with the reciprocal summit visits, experienced major setbacks not long afterwards, i.e. the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in May 1999 and the collision between a US EP-3 spy plane and a Chinese fighter jet in April 2001.² The EP-3 incident took place weeks after George W. Bush, the new US president, took office, and Beijing feared that the new US administration might adopt a less cooperative policy towards China as a result.³ But the Al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City on 11 September, 2001, diverted US attention from China and Beijing seized this strategic opportunity to transform Sino-US relation into a close anti-terror

¹ Sheng Lijun, *China and Taiwan: Cross-Strait Relations under Chen Shui-Bian* (London: Zed Books, 2002), pp. 72-75.

² Garver, pp. 651-661.

³ Garver, p. 658.

partnership.⁴ At this juncture, history of the Second World War, which featured prominently in the Sino-US rapprochement in 1997 and 1998, was once again enlisted to serve as a diplomatic tool.

Warming Sino-US ties and CCP-KMT ties boost war reassessment

On 17 October, 2002, five days before Jiang Zemin embarked on his last visit as China's top leader to the United States, China's State Council Information Office launched an exhibition at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars in Washington D.C. Entitled 'Memories from History', the exhibition focused on the cooperation between China and the United States during the Second World War. At the opening ceremony, which was attended by Chinese Ambassador to the US Yang Jiechi and Anna Chennault, widow of the Flying Tigers leader Claire Chennault, Zhao Qizheng, head of the State Council Information Office, said that he believed that 'this exhibition would help people of the two countries to better understand history and strengthen cooperation'.⁵

Several months later, on 11 February, 2003, after Hu Jintao had taken over as CCP general secretary, the Chinese government managed to put up the same exhibition in the US Senate. Chinese Ambassador Yang Jiechi said at the event, 'The heroic deeds of the people of China and the United States working together to resist Fascism during the Second World War are unforgettable. Today, in view of the fundamental interests of the people of both countries and of the world, China and the United States should continue to work together to push for the stable, healthy and sustained development of Sino-US relations.'⁶

⁴ Garver, pp. 662-664.

⁵ Ren Yujun, Wang Rujun and Tan Weibing, '缅怀英雄讴歌合作增进友谊《历史的记忆》在美展出', *People's Daily*, 19 October, 2002.

⁶ Xinhua News Agency, '《历史的记忆》在美参院展出', *People's Daily*, 13 February, 2003.

These diplomatic events can be seen as a resumption of the practice in 1997 and 1998, when the CCP used some aspects of war history which involved mainly the KMT, rather than the CCP itself, to boost Sino-US ties, even though the CCP saw no reason at the time to praise the KMT. But, as made clear at the beginning of this section, in the early 2000s, the CCP had begun wooing the KMT again and the positive reassessment of the Nationalist war effort had become useful in both Sino-US relations and cross-strait relations. Therefore, the image of KMT forces in the CCP's domestic propaganda about the War against Japan, which turned negative in the mid-1990s, once again began to improve.

This gradual shift was reflected in the contrasting depictions in two television dramas of the KMT forces' relationship with the CCP's New Fourth Army, which was formed by reorganising CCP guerrillas in South China after the establishment of the KMT-CCP anti-Japanese united front and was historically known more for their conflicts with KMT forces, especially the South Anhui Incident (also known as New Fourth Army Incident) in 1941, in which the New Fourth Army suffered heavy losses, than for fighting the Japanese.⁷ In 2003, China's state broadcaster aired on its flagship channel CCTV-1 a television series entitled *New Fourth Army*.⁸ This drama followed the orthodox historiography and depicted only the CCP as anti-Japanese heroes while describing the KMT as impotent in fighting the Japanese and more concerned with restricting the growth of CCP forces.⁹

But relationship between the New Fourth Army and KMT forces was completely different in another television drama, *The Sky of History (Lishi de Tiankong)*, which was aired on local

⁷ See Gregor Benton, *New Fourth Army: Communist Resistance Along the Yangtze and the Huai, 1938-1941* (University of California Press, 1999).

⁸ Li Zhun, '气壮山河 光照千秋——我看电视剧《新四军》', *People's Daily*, 15 August, 2003.

⁹ Summary of each of the 26 episodes of television drama *New Fourth Army*, *Sina.com.cn*, 28 July, 2003. <http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/2003-07-28/1524177649.html>

government-run channels nationwide in 2004. In this drama series, which was based on an award-winning novel, though the two sides still harboured mutual suspicions, KMT forces were shown to be fighting Japanese aggressors bravely often in close cooperation with the New Fourth Army.¹⁰ This new version of history deviated significantly from the orthodox version, but was no less official, as the series went on to receive a major award from the Central Propaganda Department.¹¹ In other words, the CPD was allowing two almost opposite views of history to be propagated among the population. But, as CCP-KMT relations warmed still further, it soon became clear which of the two views was in the ascendant.

After Chen Shui-bian was unexpectedly re-elected as Taiwan president in 2004, Beijing adopted a new strategy which continued to isolate Chen's pro-independence government but was at the same time consistent with the Hu government's new theory of China's 'peaceful rise'.¹² In early 2005, Beijing invited the leaders of Taiwan's anti-independence politicians, most prominently KMT chairman Lien Chan, to visit the mainland in an attempt to promote cross-strait exchange without giving credit to Chen.¹³ These cross-strait developments, just months before the 60th anniversary of the end of the War against Japan, massively increased the political significance of the 60th anniversary of the end of the War against Japan, which was to fall in September that year.

Films and television dramas produced to mark the anniversary typically cast the CCP in the leading role in the resistance and the KMT in a lesser but cooperative role, adopting the

¹⁰ Summary of each of the 32 episodes of television drama *Brothers (Lishi de Tiankong)*, 25 November, 2003. <http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/2003-11-25/1954240271.html>

¹¹ '第十届“五个一工程”获奖作品', *Zhongguo Wenming Wang website* (run by the General Office of the Central Commission for Guiding Cultural and Ethical Progress, under the Central Propaganda Department), 8 September, 2007. http://archive.wenming.cn/zt/2007-09/08/content_17337477.htm

¹² Jianwei Wang, 'Hu Jintao's "New Thinking" on Cross-Strait Relations', *American Foreign Policy Interests*, 29: 23–34, 2007.

¹³ Jianwei Wang, 2007.

treatment of the KMT's role in *The Sky of History* rather than that in *New Fourth Army*. Commenting on the film *On Mount Taihang* and the television series *Eighth Route Army*, Ming Zhenjiang, director of the PLA's Bayi Film Studio, which participated in both productions, wrote that the two propaganda pieces stressed the 'mainstay' role of the CCP in the resistance but also 'properly' handled the relationship between the KMT and the CCP.¹⁴ He wrote in the *People's Daily*:

'Consistent with historical materialism, both productions properly handled the KMT-CCP relationship and objectively reflected the KMT forces' positive role in the War of Resistance and the contribution made by its key figures. For example, in the Battle of Xinkou, Lieutenant General Hao Mengling, an army commander of the KMT army, raised his pistol, led his troops in a charge and was killed on the battlefield. He Bingyan, the one-armed regimental commander of the Eighth Route Army, brandished a sword and killed enemies with all his strength. [The two scenes] worked in concert and formed a symphonic poem on the united resistance by both the KMT and the CCP.'¹⁵

Another television drama, *Liangjian (Unsheathing the Sword)*, also depicted the wartime KMT-CCP relationship as one of cooperation, not confrontation. The protagonist, Li Yunlong, an Eighth Route Army commander, had a love-hate relationship with KMT general Chu Yunfei. There was mutual suspicion and competition between the two, as they belonged to rival parties, but they admired each other and supported each other in their common fight against the Japanese.¹⁶ The drama, which was a product of the collaboration between a PLA production unit and a private TV company, achieved the highest ratings for TV series broadcast by CCTV

¹⁴ Ming Zhenjiang, '抗战烽火照亮银幕荧屏', *People's Daily*, 19 August, 2005.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Geng Song, 'Chinese Masculinities Revisited: Male Images in Contemporary Television Drama Serials', *Modern China*, 36(4), 2010, pp. 404-434.

in 2005 and became a big hit nationwide.¹⁷ This shows that the narrative of sincere KMT-CCP cooperation for a common patriotic cause was not just an official narrative but had already become part of the popular discourse.

But this is not to say that the war history was no longer a sensitive subject. In fact, the Central Propaganda Department remained vigilant against perceived threats to the CCP's official narrative. In June 2005, *Bingdian (Freezing Point)*, a weekly supplement of the China Youth Daily newspaper, was criticised by the CPD's 'news commentary group' (*yuepingzu*), a powerful group of mostly retired propaganda officials tasked with identifying violations of propaganda discipline and issuing post-facto criticisms,¹⁸ over an article about the Battle of Pingxingguan.¹⁹ The so-called 'Great Victory of Pingxingguan', in which a Communist Eighth Route Army division led by Lin Biao ambushed and destroyed a small and largely unarmed Japanese resupply column, had been a key part of CCP propaganda touting its patriotic feats ever since the event took place in September 1937.²⁰ But the article in question, written by Xu Linjiang, a history professor at Shanghai Jiaotong University, pointed out that the Communist ambush was just a small part of the wider Battle of Pingxingguan, most of which was fought by KMT forces.²¹ Yu Liren, a *Bingdian* editor, added an editorial note saying that the CCP's 'Great Victory of Pingxingguan' was indeed a 'glorious victory', but it 'could not have happened without the Second War Zone [commanded by KMT general Yan Xishan] organising the Battle of Pingxingguan or without the altogether 11 armies putting up a valiant resistance

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ David Bandurski, 'Wanted: Official News Critics to Help Control China's Press', *China Media Project website*, 1 September, 2009. <http://chinamediaproject.org/2009/09/01/wanted-official-news-critics-to-help-us-control-the-press/>

¹⁹ 'Editor challenges party to justify weekly's axing', *South China Morning Post*, 27 January, 2006.

²⁰ Hattori Satoshi and Edward J. Drea, 'Japanese Operations from July to December 1937', in Mark Peattie, Edward Drea and Hans van de Ven (eds.), *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945* (Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 164-167.

²¹ Xu Linjiang, '平型关战役与平型关大捷', *Bingdian weekly (China Youth Daily)*, 1 June, 2005. http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2005-06/01/content_1123948.htm

to enemy forces attacking the Pingxingguan area from different directions'. Yu lamented the fact that even history students in Chinese universities were not aware of the wider Battle of Pingxingguan and called for a 'more comprehensive and more rational view' of history.²² The blatant call for a change to the party's propaganda approach did not impress party censors. According to Bingdian's then managing editor Li Datong, the CPD's 'news commentary group' criticised the article for deviating from the official version of history and 'beautifying the KMT and belittling the CCP'.²³

However, propaganda control on the representation of history was soon loosened further. In August 2005, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), China's broadcasting regulator, announced that a film that was banned in 1995 was to be released for public viewing.²⁴ The film was originally named *Iron and Blood at the Kunlun Pass (Tiexue Kunlun Guan)* and was renamed simply as *Iron and Blood (Tiexue)*. In contrast to the productions described above, which focused on CCP forces and cast the KMT in a lesser role, *Tiexue* talked about the Battle of Kunlun Pass in 1939, which was part of Chiang Kai-shek's Winter Offensive and was fought exclusively by the KMT.²⁵ In terms of historical reassessment, it went further than the *Battle of Taierzhuang*. While *Taierzhuang* was mostly about KMT factional forces and the main figures in the film did not participate in the Civil War with the CCP, the Battle of Kunlun Pass was fought by Chiang Kai-shek's Central Army and several generals featured in the film later fought the CCP – probably the reason why it was banned in 1995. The decision to release this film showed that the Hu leadership was prepared not only to resume the reassessment of war history but also to go further than the regime had ever been

²² Ibid.

²³ Li Datong, '就《冰點》周刊被非法停刊的公開抗議', *Hong Kong Independent Media website*, 26 January, 2006. <https://www.inmediahk.net/node/93397>

²⁴ Xiang Bing, '壮丽画卷展示民族气概 一批抗战新片走上银幕', *People's Daily*, 5 August, 2005.

²⁵ Hans van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China 1925-1945*, pp. 239-243.

willing to. As the next section will show, Hu's positive stance on the reassessment of war history was manifested further in his speech on the anniversary.

60th war anniversary: Giving credit to KMT but stressing CCP's 'independent role'

On 3 September, 2005, Hu Jintao gave a major speech at a meeting commemorating the 60th anniversary of the war's end.²⁶ Like his predecessor Jiang Zemin's 50th war anniversary speech in 1995, Hu's speech also highlighted China's role as 'the main Eastern battlefield of the World Anti-Fascist War'. This is because, though Sino-US relations had improved since the 1990s, China under Hu continued to arouse suspicion in the West and, as China's economic power grew, the so-called 'China threat' theory was gaining influence in Washington.²⁷ To counter this negative perception of China's intentions, the Hu leadership came up with a theory of China's 'peaceful rise' to allay fears of the international community.²⁸ In this context, China's wartime cooperation with the West obviously serves the propaganda objective of stressing China's peaceful and cooperative stance towards the West.

Also like Jiang Zemin, Hu repeated the CCP's orthodox that the party was the 'mainstay' of the resistance. However, unlike Jiang, who made only cursory mentions of the KMT's participation in the war effort, Hu went much further in elaborating the KMT's contribution:

²⁶ Hu Jintao, '在纪念中国人民抗日战争暨世界反法西斯战争胜利 60 周年大会上的讲话（2005 年 9 月 3 日）', *People's Daily*, 4 September, 2005. English translation by Xinhua at <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2005/Sep/140771.htm>

²⁷ Emma V. Broomfield, 'Perceptions of Danger: The China threat theory', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 12(35), 2003, pp. 265-284.

²⁸ Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros, 'The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of "Peaceful Rise"', *The China Quarterly*, No. 190 (Jun., 2007), pp. 291-310.

‘Resistance forces under the leadership of the KMT and the CCP were engaged in operations against Japanese aggressors on frontal battlefields and in the enemy’s rear respectively, forming a strategic common front against the enemy. As the main force on frontal battlefields, the KMT army organized a series of major campaigns, particularly the Shanghai, Xinkou, Xuzhou and Wuhan campaigns during the initial phase of the war, which dealt heavy blows to the Japanese army. In the enemy’s rear areas, the CCP went all out to mobilize the masses to engage in an extensive guerrilla war. The Eighth Route Army, the New Fourth Army, the South China Guerrillas, the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, and other anti-Japanese armed forces of the people fought bravely against the Japanese occupation.’²⁹

The fact that Hu enumerated the KMT’s battles before talking about the various CCP-led forces was highly unusual. No CCP leader before Hu had ever treated this topic this way, and, as will become clear later in this chapter, it has never been repeated since.

Though Hu clearly made some concessions to the KMT over the assessment of war history, he also made a fresh move to strengthen the CCP’s defence of its self-proclaimed patriotic record – he redefined the War of Resistance from the eight-year war from 1937 to 1945 to a 14-year conflict that started in 1931 with the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Hu said in the speech:

‘The September 18th Incident in 1931 marked the start of their War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, and the unrelenting struggle the Chinese people put up on a local basis was, in fact, the prelude to the World Anti-Fascist War. In the wake of the September 18th Incident, the CCP called upon the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red

²⁹ Ibid.

Army and the oppressed people to wage a national revolutionary war to drive Japanese imperialists out of China, and urged the various ethnic groups to get united in fighting against Japanese aggressors for national salvation and to oppose the policy of non-resistance. The December 9th Movement, which was inspired by the call of the CCP for national salvation and for resistance by the entire Chinese people, further awakened the Chinese nation and heralded an upsurge in its democratic campaign of resistance against Japanese aggression for national salvation. The Xi'an Incident started by Generals Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng and its peaceful resolution played an important role in ushering in a second KMT-CCP cooperation and unity of the two parties in fighting against Japanese aggression. The July 7th Incident in 1937 marked the outbreak of the World Anti-Fascist War in the East, in that China's national war of resistance opened the first battleground, massive in scale, in the World Anti-Fascist War. Under the banner of the national united front against Japanese aggression, initiated by the CCP, the Chinese people, basing themselves on the KMT-CCP cooperation, fought against ferocious Japanese aggressors with unparalleled heroism.³⁰

Put simply, Hu redefined China's War against Japan as a 14-year war which started in 1931, and the eight-year period from 1937 to 1945 was redefined as the 'World Anti-Fascist War in the East'. Though he recognised that the KMT played an important role in the latter, he attributed the struggle from 1931 to 1937 exclusively to the CCP.

Some Chinese scholars had been arguing for years that the War of Resistance should be regarded as having begun in 1931,³¹ but this was the first time the top Chinese leader endorsed

³⁰ Hu Jintao, 2005.

³¹ Hans van de Ven, 2003, p. 209.

the view in a major speech. Hu's endorsement was supported by Li Changchun, a politburo Standing Committee member in charge of ideological work. At an academic conference organised by the Central Propaganda Department, Central Party School, CASS, and the PLA General Political Department, etc. on the eve of the anniversary, Li emphasised the importance of studying the CCP's role in the war. He urged propagandists and scholars to properly 'handle the relationship between the eight-year War of Resistance and the 14-year War of Resistance'. He said, 'Not only must we give ample recognition to the whole-nation War of Resistance which took place after the July 7th Incident in 1937, but we also need to give ample recognition to the anti-Japanese struggle led by the Chinese Communist Party independently after the September 18th Incident in 1931.'³²

Why did the CCP leadership want to change the definition of the war? Li Junru, vice-president of the Central Party School, gave an explanation three weeks later at a seminar organised by the Central Propaganda Department and the Party History Research Centre of the CCP Central Committee on implementing the spirit of Hu Jintao's speech.³³ He said that the CCP's recognition of the KMT's war contribution had been 'well-received unanimously by people of vision both at home and overseas'. But, he said, 'there are also some people who negate the CCP's historical status and historical role in the War of Resistance against Japan in the name of restoring historical truth and objectively assessing war history'.³⁴ Li said:

'Under such circumstances, acknowledging that the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression started after the September 18th Incident in

³² Li Changchun, '在纪念中国人民抗日战争暨世界反法西斯战争胜利 60 周年学术研讨会开幕式上的讲话 (2005 年 9 月 2 日)', *Xinhua News Agency*, 4 September, 2005.

³³ Li Junru, '确认九一八事变为抗日战争起点意义重大', *People's Daily*, 30 September, 2005.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

1931 and lasted for 14 years is conducive to clarifying many muddled understandings and erroneous viewpoints. Because, only by studying the 14 years of both local resistance and total resistance as a complete history of the War of Resistance can we clearly see the respective statuses and roles played by the KMT and the CCP during the war.³⁵

According to Li, during the first six years of the 14-year war, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government focused its effort on suppressing the CCP and adopted a policy of 'non-resistance' in regard to Japan's occupation of Manchuria. By contrast, he said, during these six years, the CCP organised a movement of resistance and national salvation and set up the Northeast United Resistance Army to fight the Japanese in Manchuria. Li concluded that 'clarifying this major issue of principle' could help establish the CCP's 'mainstay role' in the war.³⁶

Anti-Japanese dramas became dominant genre of popular dramas

Despite the precautionary measures intended to prevent the recognition of the KMT's war role from harming the CCP itself, Hu Jintao's anniversary speech was a significant turning point in the reassessment of the war and the development of CCP-KMT relations. It served as a powerful gesture of goodwill to the pan-blue opposition parties in Taiwan. Ma Ying-jeou, the KMT's new chairman, praised Hu for his 'effort to restore historical truth'.³⁷ Hu's speech, it appeared, did generate goodwill between the two parties.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Lin Yifeng, '馬英九：抗戰勝利不等於台灣歸中國違背事實', *Central News Agency*, Taipei, 29 October, 2005.

Downplaying historical KMT-CCP rivalry and stressing cooperation between the two parties also made sense in foreign relations. China's growing power had aroused suspicion in the West over its potential threat to the existing world order.³⁸ Though the Bush administration had embraced a relatively positive view of Sino-US relations, it nevertheless emphasised in 2005 the importance for China to act as a 'responsible stakeholder'.³⁹ When Hu visited the US in April 2006 and gave a speech at the welcoming ceremony in the White House, he mentioned the history of China and the US 'jointly fighting against Fascist aggression' as one of the examples of the 'deep friendship' between the two countries.⁴⁰ By playing down party differences and subsuming the KMT war effort into a broadly and vaguely defined 'Chinese' contribution, the CCP had made it easier for itself to use war history as evidence of its 'responsible' intentions despite the inconvenient fact that the war was fought under a completely different regime.

Probably due to these considerations, after 2005, the War against Japan almost completely eclipsed CCP-KMT conflicts on Chinese screens. According to Zhao Ningyu, veteran actor, director and professor at the Beijing Film Academy, few films about the CCP-KMT civil wars either before or after the War against Japan were produced after 2006.⁴¹ This, coupled with the fact that international wars China fought after 1949, such as the Korean War and the border conflicts with India and Vietnam, were deemed as sensitive subjects for diplomatic reasons and were seldom allowed to be given cinematic treatment, meant that the War against Japan had

³⁸ Robert G. Sutter, *Foreign Relations of the PRC: The Legacies and Constraints of China's International Politics since 1949* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), pp. 173-174.

³⁹ Remarks of Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, 'Wither China? From Membership to Responsibility', *National Committee for US-China Relations*, 21 September, 2005. www.ncuscr.org/files/2005Gala_RobertZoellick_Whither_China1.pdf.

⁴⁰ Hu Jintao, '在白宫欢迎仪式上的致辞（2006年4月20日）', *People's Daily*, 21 April, 2006.

⁴¹ Hu Ke, Zhao Ningyu, Li Zhen and Zhan Qingsheng, '国产抗战(反法西斯)电影的历史、现状与未来', *Dangdai Dianying (Contemporary Cinema)*, Issue 8, August 2015, pp. 4-16.

become the only safe option for producers of military-themed films.⁴² Following the success of television dramas such as *Unsheathing the Sword*, the anti-Japanese war also became an increasingly popular genre on the small screen. The strict censorship regime played key role in the trend. As previously popular genres such as anti-corruption dramas, costume dramas, spy dramas and romantic dramas were subjected to primetime bans and state media criticisms, TV producers came to the conclusion that anti-Japanese dramas were the safest option.⁴³ As a result, dramas set in the War against Japan proliferated.

In contrast to dramas produced before Hu's war anniversary speech, in which KMT forces were usually given secondary roles to the CCP, a number of dramas were allowed to focus on battles and events that had never been dramatized before due to the undisputed leading role played by the Nationalist government and its armed forces. But, consistent with Li Changchun's insistence that the CCP's role had to be highlighted, these dramas featured significant CCP contribution in those events despite having no historical basis to back it up.

In August 2007, CCTV aired a drama series titled *The City of Memories (Jiyi zhi Cheng)*, which was the first PRC television drama ever on the Japanese bombing of Chongqing, China's wartime capital.⁴⁴ During the war, the Japanese high command attempted to use aerial bombing to wear down Chinese morale, but the Nationalist government worked hard to counter air attacks and the Japanese bombing campaign failed to break the Chinese will of resistance.⁴⁵ Though there was absolutely no role for the CCP to play in Chongqing's air defences, the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Huang Yiqing and Zhang Xueyan, ““抗日”这门生意 “横店抗日根据地”是如何开辟的”, *Nanfang Zhoumo (Southern Weekend)*, 7 March, 2013. http://news.ifeng.com/shendu/nfzm/detail_2013_03/07/22857023_0.shtml

⁴⁴ Li Ping and Yong Luping, ‘《记忆之城》央视落下大幕 观众看剧眼泪流干’, *Chongqing Chenbao*, 27 August, 2007. <http://news.cctv.com/performance/20070827/106723.shtml>

⁴⁵ Edna Tow, ‘The Great Bombing of Chongqing and the Anti-Japanese War, 1937-1945’, in Peattie, Drea and van de Ven (eds.), *The Battle for China*, pp. 256-282.

scriptwriter, Xu Meng, was determined to give the CCP a leading role in the drama. In a People's Daily article, she wrote that, when she was writing the script, she intended to 'write about not only the cruelty of the Great Bombing of Chongqing, but also the bravery and tenacity of the Chinese armed forces putting up a joint resistance against the Japanese aggressors, as well as the anti-Japanese united front led by the CCP leading the Chinese people in their common resistance and their determination and will to fight to the end and never surrender'.⁴⁶ With this in mind, Xu made up a Chongqing-based family, in which the older brother was a KMT officer but both the younger brother and the little sister's lover were Communists. While the Chongqing family were dodging bombs, the brothers were fighting on the frontline, with the younger brother joining, and in the process showcasing, the CCP's only two significant anti-Japanese operations – Pingxingguan and the Hundred Regiments Offensive. The sister and her lover, a CCP spy posted in Shanghai, were even credited with informing Chongqing of the Japanese plan to raid Pearl Harbor.⁴⁷

In addition to exaggerating the CCP's role, propagandists also made sure that positive representations of the KMT were kept within acceptable limits. According to a 2008 report in *Oriental Outlook*, a weekly run by the Xinhua news agency, when a TV drama (possibly *The City of Memories*) showed Chiang Kai-shek and his wife Soong Mei-ling visiting a school in Chongqing, CCTV censors raised objections. The report quoted Feng Wanyou, a retired CCTV editor hired back to check TV drama contents, as saying: 'We saw a TV drama on the Japanese bombing of Chongqing. Chiang Kai-shek and Soong Mei-ling went to inspect a secondary school and were so amiable towards the students that they looked like our man-of-the-people

⁴⁶ Xu Meng, '电视剧：厚重一些更好看', *People's Daily*, 13 September, 2007, p. 9.
http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2007-09/13/content_19744677.htm

⁴⁷ '资料：电视剧《记忆之城》分集介绍', *Sina Entertainment website*, 15 August, 2007.
<http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/2007-08-15/ba1677197.shtml>

premier⁴⁸. In reality it might have been the case, and we shouldn't portray characters in a stereotypical way as in the past. But it was to be aired on our China Central Television Station, and it should be carefully considered how the propaganda is conducted.'⁴⁹

The rising profile of the Chinese Expeditionary Force

Another previously off-limits subject for television dramas was the Chinese Expeditionary Force to Burma. As mentioned earlier, books had been published about the expedition and CCP leaders and state media had cited it as an important example of China's contribution to the Allies. But as a campaign with no CCP input whatsoever, it had remained sensitive and had never been the subject of a television drama intended for the mass market. However, the situation began to change in the new propaganda environment. In March 2009, the first ever PRC drama focusing on the Chinese Expeditionary Force, entitled *My Chief and My Regiment* (*Wode Tuanzhang Wode Tuan*), was aired simultaneously on several satellite TV channels.⁵⁰ But in many ways it was a peculiar production, as all the figures were fictional and even top commanders such as Joseph Stilwell and Sun Liren were nowhere to be seen. Instead, it told a made-up story of a KMT officer somehow turned around a group of shabbily-clad, undisciplined and demoralised Chinese soldiers into a fighting force, who fought to the death at the China-Burma border.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Here 'man-of-the-people premier' (qinmin zongli) is a clear reference to Premier Wen Jiabao, who had cultivated an image of being close to the people.

⁴⁹ Chai Aixin, '中央电视台如何审查电视剧', *Oriental Outlook (Liaowang Dongfang Zhoukan)*, 29 July, 2008. <http://yule.sohu.com/20080729/n258459444.shtml>

⁵⁰ Wang Songlin, '《我的团长我的团》激战 3 月荧屏', *Chuanmei (Media magazine)*, April 2009. <http://media.people.com.cn/GB/22114/45733/152001/9137059.html>

⁵¹ Zhang Xi, 'History comes alive in "My Chief and My Regiment"', *China Daily*, 20 March, 2009. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-03/20/content_7599495.htm

This depiction of the KMT soldiers caused a bit of a row. Zhou Chuanji, a veteran of the Chinese Expeditionary Force and a retired professor of the Beijing Film Academy, called the series ‘rubbish’, because, he said, real soldiers in the force were clean and well-armed and were nothing like the shabby ones as depicted in the drama.⁵² More notably, Xu Li, a well-known CCTV news anchor, fiercely criticised the drama for wasting an ‘opportunity’ to popularise the history of the Chinese Expeditionary Force. She wrote in a blog post:

‘The whole nation fought an eight-year War of Resistance, but how much of the history is truly known to the people? People do not have the avenue to learn about it. Hundreds of thousands of troops of the Expeditionary Force marched to southern Yunnan, but today, the cruelty and heroism can be seen only in some limited texts and historical images. I want to say, no matter who is in power, the heroism of the whole nation in the resistance deserves praise and commemoration. The whole nation should know. The whole nation should remember.’⁵³

She asked angrily, ‘You were given an opportunity, but why didn’t you treasure it? ... You were given an opportunity, but why did you give up another possibility to let the whole nation learn about the true history?’⁵⁴

This was a remarkable clash between propaganda workers on how the war should be represented within the scope allowed within the censorship rules. The dispute was caused by different understandings of the limits placed by censors. Xu appeared to think that, as the producers had been given permission to show the story of the Expeditionary Force on TV, they

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Xu Li, ‘给你们机会了，为何不珍惜’, *Phoenix TV website (ifeng.com)*, http://ent.ifeng.com/special/tuanzhang/xinwen/200903/0326_5788_1077169_2.shtml

⁵⁴ Ibid.

must be able to produce a reasonably truthful representation of history. But another famous CCTV personality, Cui Yongyuan, was more pessimistic about the censorship and therefore more sympathetic towards the producers. Cui, who had been making his own documentary on the war and was himself deeply interested in the history of the Burma campaign, told the Southern Weekend newspaper, ‘Do you believe [director] Kang Honglei did not want to represent the Expeditionary Force properly? [But] if Sun Liren, Dai Anlan, Chiang Kai-shek and Stilwell all appeared in the drama, and as positive figures, it would have been very hard to say whether or not it could be broadcast.’⁵⁵

The concerns over censorship were confirmed by Wu Yi, the general producer of the drama. Talking to Oriental Outlook weekly, he said his biggest concern was over the view of history. When the script was being written, he invited relevant personnel of the PLA, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) and Yunnan provincial CCP Propaganda Department to help the production team get it right.⁵⁶ According to Wu, the balance between the respective roles of the KMT and the CCP was repeatedly discussed. As a result, a leftist young man and a Communist guerrilla force were written into the script.⁵⁷

Though the drama did not come anywhere close to a serious representation of history, it did break new grounds in terms of covering a previously untouched subject. As Cui Yongyuan commented, the drama’s most positive contribution was that it had caused controversy. ‘At a time when the internet is so well developed, only when there is controversy can it attract attention.’⁵⁸ According to Shi Hang, a scriptwriter, the military campaigns in Yunnan and

⁵⁵ Ping Ke, ‘每个人都是历史的炮灰——《团长》背后的中国远征军’, *Nanfang Zhoumo (Southern Weekend)*, 9 April, 2009. <http://www.infzm.com/content/26631>

⁵⁶ Liu Fang, ‘寻找国家民族的平衡线’, *Liaowang Dongfang Zhoukan (Oriental Outlook)*, Issue 13, 8 April, 2009. <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/sd/2009-04-08/103817568287.shtml>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ping Ke, ‘每个人都是历史的炮灰’.

Burma had been considered as a possible subject for dramatization for a long time, but people had been unsure about whether the political ‘climate’ was right for such a production. This drama had finally opened up the space for telling this story, he told *Oriental Outlook*.⁵⁹

The crew of *My Chief and My Regiment* were not the only people trying to make it possible to tell the story of the Chinese Expeditionary Force. Zhang Liying, a CCTV producer, had been working towards that goal for years. She told *Wenshi Cankao (History Reference)*, a magazine run by the People’s Daily, that her journey started in 2000 when she saw a Nationalist cemetery in Yunnan and learned about the Chinese Expeditionary Force for the first time.⁶⁰ She felt an urge to tell more people about it, but, mindful of censorship, she adopted a gradualist strategy. She first produced a television drama entitled *Dianxi Wangshi (Past Events in Western Yunnan)*, which was aired in 2005 focused on CCP activities set against the background of the Nationalist operations on the China-Burma border. The second drama series she produced was *Dianxi 1944 (Western Yunnan 1944)*, which was aired in early 2010 and showed the Chinese counteroffensive in Western Yunnan, giving more prominence to Nationalist forces than in the previous drama. According to Zhang, she had been testing the waters and zeroing in on the real subject she wanted to cover in a roundabout manner, while at the same time waiting for the media environment to improve.⁶¹

The media environment did improve sufficiently for her dream to come true. In February 2011, a new drama she produced, which was explicitly entitled *Chinese Expeditionary Force (Zhongguo Yuanzheng Jun)* and focused directly on the Burma expedition, was broadcast

⁵⁹ Liu Fang, ‘寻找国家民族的平衡线’

⁶⁰ Yang Xiaoguang, ‘我的“远征军”情结——专访《中国远征军》总制片人张丽影’, *Wenshi Cankao (History Reference)*, Issue 6, 2011. <http://history.people.com.cn/GB/198819/217098/15328596.html>

⁶¹ Yu Ying, ‘《中国远征军》：荧幕上的历史“突围”’, *Junying Wenhua Tiandi (Culture in Barracks)*, May 2011, pp. 37-39.

simultaneously on two satellite TV channels⁶² and was praised by the People's Daily for its 'serious and praiseworthy' attitude towards 'historical truth'.⁶³ It was clearly a more serious production than previous attempts such as *My Chief and My Regiment*, as the commanders of the force such as Stilwell, Sun Liren, Dai Anlan, Du Yuming and Luo Zhuoying, as well as Chennault, leader of the Flying Tigers, were all given positive portrayals.⁶⁴ But what was behind the relaxation of censorship control on this subject?

The space created by previous productions such as *My Chief and My Regiment* and Zhang Liying's earlier dramas might well have helped. But the gradual shift in the CCP's propaganda priorities was probably a more significant reason. On 3 September, 2010, the 65th anniversary of the end of the war, the People's Daily published an article by Bu Ping, head of the CASS Institute of Modern Chinese History.⁶⁵ According to Bu, recent research had not dwelled upon the relative importance between the contributions made by the KMT and the CCP, and had instead adopted 'the standpoint of the whole country and the whole nation'. Against the background of China's rising international status, he wrote, a prominent feature of Chinese academic research on the War against Japan in recent years had been looking at war history from 'the perspective of the establishment of China's great power status'. As China's status as a founding member state of the United Nations and a permanent member of the Security Council was a result of its contribution during the war, Chinese historians had attached increasing importance to studying China's wartime contribution, such as holding down Japanese forces and preventing Japan from attacking the Soviet Union or sending reinforcements to Southeast Asia, as well as supporting the Pacific Theatre and hastening

⁶² Lin Yanwen, '《远征军》开播 张丰毅称《团长》不符历史', *Qingnian Bao (Youth Daily)*, 22 February, 2011. <http://ent.sina.com.cn/v/m/2011-02-22/15083236372.shtml>

⁶³ Li Zhun, '揭秘历史 叩问人心', *People's Daily*, 13 May, 2011.

⁶⁴ Yu Ying, '《中国远征军》：荧幕上的历史“突围”'.

⁶⁵ Bu Ping, '关于近年来抗日战争史研究的思考——以中国大国地位的确立为视角', *People's Daily*, 3 September, 2010, p. 7. <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/GB/138903/138911/12622381.html>

Japan's defeat. Significantly, the Chinese expeditionary to Burma was the only specific operation he mentioned as an example of such contribution.⁶⁶

Though the story of the Chinese Expeditionary Force had become increasingly useful to CCP propagandists, how the story should be told remained a sensitive question. According to Zhang Liying, the general producer, she instructed the scriptwriter to reflect the overall situation of the war, which would make it easier to show the contribution of the CCP alongside the main subject, which was essentially a Nationalist campaign. At the same time, she recommended that a 'red thread' should be woven into the story, which would be 'massively helpful to the censorship and broadcast process'.⁶⁷ Following these instructions, scriptwriter Qiu Dui did not make Stilwell, Sun Liren or Dai Anlan as his main protagonist. Instead, he invented a protagonist – a KMT colonel named Han Shaogong, who conveniently had a Communist sister, Han Shaoying, working as a journalist for the CCP organ Xinhua Daily. Though the KMT colonel was a positive figure, the drama did not cast the Nationalist government in a very positive light and constantly contrasted the bravery of frontline officers with the 'corruption' in Chongqing.⁶⁸

This section has shown that, as the CCP and the KMT formed a quasi-alliance in the early 2000s against the pro-independence DPP, the CCP once again became positive about recognising the KMT's war contribution, though it remains constantly vigilant against any potential damage it might cause its own patriotic credentials. With China under Hu Jintao becoming increasingly powerful and confident on the world stage, CCP propagandists saw increasing value in appropriating the Nationalist war effort, most prominently the Chinese

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Yu Ying, '《中国远征军》：荧幕上的历史“突围”'.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Expeditionary Force to Burma, to justify China's newfound great power status. As the next section will show, the new leadership led by Xi Jinping was to take such appropriation to an entirely new level.

2. 2012-2018: Appropriating KMT war contribution to show China as 'responsible great power'

The preceding discussions show that there is constant contradiction between the CCP's concerns over its recognition of the Nationalist war effort and its desire to appropriate it for its own propaganda use. Concerns about the risks to its own nationalist legitimacy limited the CCP's recognition of the KMT's contribution. Considering the fact that the KMT fought most of the major battles of the war, the restrictions on the recognition also limited the CCP's ability to appropriate these contributions. But as the last section showed, under Hu Jintao, the KMT was given unprecedented recognition for their war effort, and some previously off-limits areas of the war history became available for exploitation and appropriation by CCP propagandists.

The increased opportunity for historical appropriation coincided with an increased need for such appropriation on the part of the CCP. After Xi Jinping took over as paramount leader in 2012, Deng's foreign policy approach of 'keeping a low profile' and 'never claiming leadership' gave way to proactive efforts to advance China's position on the world stage.⁶⁹ The Xi leadership has been trying to bolster its legitimacy by boasting China's status as a great power and attributing this status to the CCP.⁷⁰ Xi also tightened ideological control and boosted efforts

⁶⁹ Garver, p. 763.

⁷⁰ Garver, pp. 789-790.

to defend the party from challenges to its legitimacy.⁷¹ Under such circumstances, appropriation of the national war effort became increasingly useful to CCP propagandists, as they use China's contribution to the 'World Anti-Fascist War' to justify its great power status and legitimise the CCP's one-party rule by putting the CCP at the centre of that contribution.

In particular, when Xi became top party leader in November 2012, China was in the midst of a serious crisis in its relations with Japan, which was triggered by the Japanese government's decision two months earlier to purchase the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.⁷² The Japanese government criticised China's coercive behaviour for threatening the 'international rule of law'. In reaction, the Chinese government invoked war history in its anti-Japanese propaganda, accusing Japan of acting as a revisionist country that acted in defiance of the post-war international order and describing itself as a founder and upholder of the international system.⁷³

Unusually high-profile commemorations in 2014

The importance Xi attached to war history as a propaganda tool was made all too clear in 2014, when the 69th anniversary of the war's end was commemorated in an unusually high-profile manner. In February that year, the National People's Congress set two war-related national memorial days, with 3 September named the Victory Day of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and 13 December the National Memorial Day for

⁷¹ See Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *Chinese politics in the era of Xi Jinping: renaissance, reform, or retrogression?* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 75-150.

⁷² Giulio Pugliese, 'Back to Basics: The Power Politics behind Sino-Japanese Identity Politics', *ASIEN - The German Journal on Contemporary Asia*, Issue 141, October 2016, pp. 8-31.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Nanjing Massacre Victims.⁷⁴ In that year, Xi made personal appearances and gave speeches at events marking these memorial days as well as an event on 7 July marking the outbreak of the war in 1937. Considering the fact that these were neither decennial nor quinquennial anniversaries of these historical events, these high-level commemorations were highly unusual.⁷⁵

At a time when the CCP leadership stepped up its political utilisation of war history and attached unprecedented significance to the commemorations, however, it also noticeably rowed back on its recognition of the role played by the Nationalists. In Xi's speech marking the 77th anniversary of the outbreak of the war on 7 July, 1937, he stressed China's status as the 'main eastern battlefield' and the CCP's role in building an 'anti-Japanese national united front'.⁷⁶ But conspicuously, the word 'Guomindang', the Chinese name of the Nationalist Party, did not make a single appearance. There was only a mention of 'KMT-CCP cooperation', in which the KMT was referred to with just a one-character abbreviation – 'Guo', and one mention of the 'centre-stage battlefield' in parallel with the CCP's 'back-stage battlefield'.⁷⁷ The recognition given to the KMT in this speech was pathetic compared with any of the major war memorial speeches in the Hu Jintao era. This proved to be an early sign of what was to come.

On 3 September, at a seminar marking the 69th victory anniversary, Xi further stressed two major points – China's war contribution and the CCP's 'mainstay' role, while giving relatively limited recognition to the Nationalist role.⁷⁸ Talking about China's war contribution, Xi said:

⁷⁴ Mao Lei, '我国将以立法形式确定中国人民抗日战争胜利纪念日 设立南京大屠杀死难者国家公祭日', *People's Daily*, 26 February, 2014. <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2014/0226/c1001-24463877.html>

⁷⁵ Tan Jieyu, '许耀桐:习近平打破惯例出席纪念仪式向世界发出强烈信号', *People's Daily website*, 7 July, 2014. <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2014/0707/c1001-25248155.html>

⁷⁶ Xi Jinping, '在纪念全民族抗战爆发七十七周年仪式上的讲话', *Xinhua News Agency*, 7 July, 2014. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-07/07/c_1111497611.htm

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Xi Jinping, '在纪念中国人民抗日战争暨世界反法西斯战争胜利 69 周年座谈会上的讲话

‘The great victory of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression re-established China’s great power status in the world. From the beginning, the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression was hugely significant in salvaging the human civilisation and safeguarding world peace, and was an important component of the World Anti-Fascist War... The Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression started the earliest and lasted the longest. The Chinese battlefield pinned down and resisted the main forces of Japanese militarism over a long period, and played a decisive role in the complete destruction of the Japanese aggressors.’⁷⁹

Xi also vowed that China would ‘work with the people of the world to resolutely safeguard the fruits of victory of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War and to resolutely protect the post-war international order’.⁸⁰ It was remarkable that the Chinese Communist regime, which had always been a challenger to the US-dominated post-war order in the Mao era and a revisionist power during the reform era, now saw the need to recast itself as a defender of the post-war order. Ironically, one of the only bases the regime relied upon to convince the world of this dramatic transformation was China’s historical war contribution, of which very little could actually be attributed to the CCP. It was therefore understandable that the CCP stepped up its appropriation of the war contribution of the Republic of China, most of which were made by Nationalist government forces. In line with the need for increased appropriation of China’s war contribution, Xi further exaggerated the CCP’s role and rowed back on the recognition given to the KMT under Hu Jintao. He said:

(2014年9月3日)’, *People’s Daily*, 4 September, 2014. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0904/c64094-25599907.html>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

‘The Chinese Communist Party’s mainstay role was the key to the victory of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. A major reason for the defeats suffered by the Chinese people in successive anti-aggression wars in modern times was the corruption and incompetence of the political ruling groups and the internal weaknesses and lack of morale within the nation. From the day of its founding, the Chinese Communist Party, which began life and grew amidst domestic trouble and foreign aggression, saw it as its historical mission to bring about the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. It was the most steadfast in safeguarding national independence, the most resolute in protecting national interest, and the bravest in resisting foreign aggression... With their political stance, staunch will and exemplary action, the Chinese Communists sustained the whole nation’s hope for national salvation, provided guidance in the correct direction towards winning the war, and became the national vanguard in achieving victory.’⁸¹

In contrast to the glowing terms in which the CCP’s role was described, the KMT only got cursory mentions. Unlike the 7 July speech, this speech, which was much longer, did mention ‘Guomintang’ twice, and did mention the names of four killed KMT generals and the so-called ‘Eight Hundred Heroes’ in the Battle of Shanghai, but KMT figures were invariably listed after CCP figures. Unlike Hu’s 2005 speech, which emphasised the joint effort made by both the KMT and the CCP and even listed the KMT before the CCP, the Xi speech subsumed the Nationalist war effort into the ‘whole-nation resistance’ led by the CCP.⁸²

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

Xi's third major war-related speech in 2014 was delivered on 13 December, the first National Memorial Day for Nanjing Massacre Victims. The focus of the speech was naturally Japanese atrocities rather than the Chinese war effort, but Xi did emphasise the CCP's 'leading' role in the resistance. By contrast, he made no mention of the KMT's war effort and did not even mention the KMT-CCP cooperation.⁸³ Judging from these three speeches, Xi's objective seemed to be the wholesale appropriation of the national war effort at the expense of the KMT.

The 2015 anniversary: Doubling down on two themes

The shift in war-related propaganda strategy was confirmed in propaganda guidelines for the 2015 commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the end of the war. In February 2015, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT), China's top media regulator, issued a directive on publications regarding the anniversary.⁸⁴ Among the priority topics listed in the directive, the two top priorities were:

'One – Focus on propagandising the great historical significance of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, and propagandising the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression's important status in and major contribution to the World Anti-Fascist War, as well as the huge national sacrifice made by China. Two – Focus on propagandising the historical achievement of the whole nation, under the flag of the Anti-Japanese National United Front advocated and built by the Chinese Communist Party, in defeating the Japanese imperialist

⁸³ Xi Jinping, '习近平在南京大屠杀死难者国家公祭仪式上的讲话', *Xinhua News Agency*, 13 December, 2014. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-12/13/c_1113630100.htm

⁸⁴ SAPPRFT Executive Office, '国家新闻出版广电总局办公厅关于做好纪念中国人民抗日战争暨世界反法西斯战争胜利 70 周年主题出版工作的通知', *SAPPRFT website*, 26 February, 2015. <http://sapprft.gov.cn/sapprft/contents/6588/279387.shtml>

aggression, and propagandising the mainstay role of the Chinese Communist Party in the united resistance by the whole nation.’⁸⁵

The directive also urged propaganda workers to ‘stick to the correct orientation’ and to ‘strictly follow the statements by authoritative departments’ and to ‘consult the departments such as documentation, party history and the army for their opinion’, so as to avoid ‘the erroneous inclinations of negating the party’s historical achievements in leading the resistance war and of negating China’s important status and role in the World Anti-Fascist War’.⁸⁶ These guidelines appeared to show a stronger desire on the part of the CCP to claim more credit for China’s war contribution and at the same time attribute China’s contribution mainly to itself.

As the Xi leadership raised the profile of the War against Japan to an unprecedented level, the party propagandists’ main concern seemed to be the potential risk of the KMT’s war contribution eclipsing that of the CCP. In an article entitled ‘Several Major Issues that Need to be Handled Well in War of Resistance Commemorative Activities’, published by the CCP theoretical journal *Qiushi* in June 2015, Qu Qingshan, head of the Party History Research Centre of the CCP Central Committee, discussed four ‘major issues’, three of which were about the comparison between the contributions made by the KMT and the CCP.⁸⁷ First, Qu said that the pre-1937 ‘local resistance’, in which he said the CCP was the ‘earliest, most resolute and most active’ to resist, should be give the same level of recognition as the ‘national resistance’ after the outbreak of all-out war in 1937. This was clearly intended to stress the CCP’s role in the guerrilla warfare in Japanese-occupied Manchuria. Secondly, Qu stressed the importance of the ‘backstage battlefield’ behind enemy lines, which he said was dominated by the CCP, as

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Qu Qingshan, ‘在抗战纪念活动中需把握好的几个重大问题’, *Qiushi*, Issue 13, 30 June, 2015. http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2015-06/30/c_1115751013.htm

compared with the KMT's 'centre stage battlefield'. Thirdly, he discussed the roles played by the two parties. While he recognised the KMT's 'positive role', he criticised it for 'preventing the development of mass movements', 'restricting and attacking the CCP', 'trying hard to maintain their strength and relying on foreign aid'. By contrast, he said, the CCP assumed 'political leadership' of the national resistance, which was the 'fundamental guarantee' for the final victory.⁸⁸

The twin themes of China's status as the 'main Eastern battlefield' and the CCP's 'mainstay' role in the resistance ran through all commemorative activities marking the anniversary. On 7 July, 2015, a new exhibition entitled 'Great Victory, Historic Contribution' opened at the Museum of the War of Chinese People's Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, with all seven members of the politburo Standing Committee in attendance.⁸⁹ According to Li Zongyuan, deputy director of the museum, this was the largest exhibition the museum had ever put up and the number of exhibits was over twice as many as that of the 2005 exhibition marking the 60th victory anniversary.⁹⁰ The *Liberation Army Daily*, the main mouthpiece of the Chinese military, said that, compared with the 2005 exhibition, the 2015 display gave more prominence to two points, namely the CCP's 'mainstay' role and China's status as the 'main Eastern battlefield', especially the latter.⁹¹ According to Li, the exhibition drew on academic research and made two new arguments. The first argument was that 'China's local resistance opened up the prelude to the World Anti-Fascist War', while the second was that 'China's whole-nation resistance war opened up the world's first large-scale anti-Fascist battlefield'.⁹²

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Huo Xiaoguang and Hua Chunyu, '习近平：牢记中国人民抗日战争伟大历史 万众一心推进中国特色社会主义', *Xinhua News Agency*, 7 July, 2015. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-07/07/c_1115847771.htm

⁹⁰ Luo Zheng, '抗战主题展：50%以上为首次展出', *Jiefangjun Bao (Liberation Army Daily)*, 13 July, 2015. http://www.81.cn/jmywyl/2015-07/13/content_6582594.htm

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Li Zongyuan, '宣传抗战胜利是为了向世人宣示中华民族追求和平的信念', *People's Daily website*, 15 August, 2015. <http://ft.people.com.cn/fangtanDetail.do?pid=11424>

In addition to stressing China's importance to the Allied war effort, these new arguments seemed intended to link the pre-1937 resistance activities, of which the CCP claimed ownership, more closely to the Second World War, and in so doing emphasising the CCP's own contribution to the Allies.

On 30 July, 2015, Xi Jinping chaired a politburo 'collective study' session which was entirely dedicated to the 'review and reflections' on the War against Japan.⁹³ Xi stressed the importance of 'sticking to the correct view of history' and 'strengthening media and propaganda work' and called for 'focused studies and in-depth explanations' on the 'great significance of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, the important status of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression in the World Anti-Fascist War, and the Chinese Communist Party's mainstay role being the key to the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression'.⁹⁴ According to Xi, in view of the importance of the war, 'our research on the War of Resistance is far from sufficient'. In particular, he urged researchers to study the history of both the local conflicts between 1931 and 1937 and the all-out war after 1937, and to study the 14 years as a continuous and unified whole.⁹⁵ The idea of a 14-year war, first made official under Hu Jintao as a way to counter the undesirable effects of his recognition of the Nationalist war effort, had received stronger backing under Xi and was eventually written into school textbooks in 2017.⁹⁶

⁹³ '习近平：让历史说话用史实发言 深入开展中国人民抗日战争研究', *Xinhua News Agency website*, 31 July, 2015. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-07/31/c_1116107416.htm

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Jie Wenjin, Liu Shuo and Hu Hao, '改“8年抗战”为“14年抗战”，全国大中小学教材修改这一概念有何深意？', *Xinhua News Agency*, 11 January, 2017. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-01/11/c_1120292098.htm

On 3 September, 2015, China held a massive military parade in Beijing to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of the war. Military parades had previously only been held on 1 October, the National Day of the People's Republic.⁹⁷ Commemorating the War against Japan with a military parade was unprecedented and was a strong indication of the importance Xi had attached to the war. In his speech after the parade, Xi did not talk about the contribution made by either the CCP or the KMT, and focused on China's contribution to the Allied war effort.⁹⁸ He said, 'During the war, with huge national sacrifice, the Chinese people held ground in the main Eastern battlefield of the World Anti-Fascist War, thus making major contribution to its victory.' Having portrayed China as a founder of the post-war order, he said, 'The Chinese people are resolved to pursue friendly relations with all other countries, uphold the outcomes of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, and make greater contribution to mankind.'⁹⁹

The other theme of the commemorations - the CCP's 'mainstay' role - was embodied in the parade itself, which included 10 formations of PLA units with roots in four categories of wartime CCP forces - Eighth Route Army, New Fourth Army, Northeast United Anti-Japanese Force and South China Guerrillas.¹⁰⁰ The only representation of the KMT's contribution was that a number of mainland-based KMT veterans were among the over 100 veterans who joined the parade.¹⁰¹ Considering the decreased recognition of the KMT's war contribution under Xi, it was not surprising that the KMT government in Taiwan, which had otherwise been

⁹⁷ Wang Jianzhu, '天安门广场的十五次阅兵', *People's Daily website*, 2 November, 2015.

<http://dangshi.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1102/c85037-29623056.html>

⁹⁸ Xi Jinping, '习近平在纪念中国人民抗日战争暨世界反法西斯战争胜利 70 周年大会上的讲话', *Xinhua News Agency*, 3 September, 2015. http://www.xinhuanet.com/2015-09/03/c_1116456504.htm. Xinhua's English translation at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-09/03/c_134583870.htm

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Feng Chunmei and Ni Guanghui, '最权威信息在这里：九三受阅 67 个方队都是谁？', *People's Daily website*, 2 September, 2015. <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2015/0902/c1001-27542532.html>

¹⁰¹ Zha Wenye and Wang Jingguo, '共产党抗战老兵和国民党抗战老兵将首次共同接受检阅', *Xinhua News Agency*, 30 August, 2015. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-08/30/c_1116417504.htm

supportive of cross-strait exchanges, accused Beijing of distorting history and urged Taiwan-based war veterans to stay away from the parade.¹⁰²

The Xi leadership's obvious attempt to downplay the KMT's war contribution, however, did not mean that the regime could afford to erase it completely. In fact, the twin themes of the 2015 war commemorations – China's contribution and the CCP's 'mainstay' role – were fundamentally contradictory with each other, because the objective of boosting international awareness of China's crucial role in the Allied war effort could not be achieved by focussing even more on the CCP's guerrilla warfare of very limited scale, which had been exploited by CCP propaganda for decades and had nothing left to give. On the contrary, raising China's profile as a victorious nation in World War II necessitated more candid portrayals of the Nationalist government's considerable military and diplomatic efforts, which nevertheless risked eclipsing the CCP's supposedly 'mainstay' role. To achieve these conflicting propaganda objectives without appearing self-contradictory or disingenuous was no easy task, as the crew of the film *Cairo Declaration (Kailuo Xuanyan)* found out the hard way.

Cairo Declaration: Doomed attempt to satisfy conflicting demands

The Cairo Declaration was a document on the post-war settlement in Asia issued by US President Franklin Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and China's Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek at a conference held in Cairo in November 1943.¹⁰³

¹⁰² 'Taiwanese retired generals attending Beijing second world war parade should be stripped of pensions, says island's former premier', *South China Morning Post*, 28 August, 2015.
<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/1853467/taiwanese-retired-generals-attending-beijing-second>

¹⁰³ "The Cairo Declaration," November 26, 1943, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1961), 448-449.
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/122101>

Crucially for China, the declaration said, ‘all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa, and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China’.¹⁰⁴ Also important was the fact that China, a weak country, was treated at the conference by Western powers, at least nominally, as an equal, and was referred to in the declaration as one of ‘the three great Allies’.¹⁰⁵ The CCP regime, both in the Mao era and the post-Mao era, has used the Cairo Declaration to justify its claim over Taiwan.¹⁰⁶ In the 2010s, the Cairo Declaration attracted significantly more attention, as it became relevant to increasingly urgent geopolitical claims by China in the East and South China seas.¹⁰⁷ For example, Beijing has cited the document to support its claim over and the Japanese-administered Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.¹⁰⁸ The prominence of the Cairo Declaration has been boosted as it began to be seen as a foundational document setting the post-war order and recognising China’s great power status.¹⁰⁹

In the run-up to the 70th war anniversary, the idea of dramatizing this propaganda staple in support of China’s new self-image as a ‘responsible great power’ might have made perfect sense. The film, entitled *Cairo Declaration*, clearly got official backing, as it was produced by the PLA’s Bayi Film Studio and Chongqing CCP Propaganda Department¹¹⁰ and was designated by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Rana Mitter, *China’s War with Japan 1937-1945: The Struggle for Survival* (Penguin Books, 2014), p. 313.

¹⁰⁶ See examples from the People’s Daily – ‘打到台湾去，解放台湾同胞！’，4 September, 1949, p. 1; Editorial: ‘中国对台湾的主权不容干涉’，12 May, 1964, p. 1; ‘历史的倒车开不得’，12 July, 1982, p. 6; Liu Wenzong, ‘要害是分裂中国主权——评李登辉的“两国论”’，8 August, 1999, p. 2; Rao Geping, ‘《开罗宣言》的法律效力不容否定’，28 November, 2003, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Rana Mitter, ‘Presentism and China’s Changing Wartime Past’, *Past & Present*, Volume 234, Issue 1, February 2017, pp. 263–274.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Jia Yu, ‘国际法视野下的中日钓鱼岛争端’，*People’s Daily*, 3 October, 2010, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Xu Jianmei, ‘维护《开罗宣言》开启的东亚及亚太秩序’，*Xinhua News Agency*, 1 December, 2013. <http://world.people.com.cn/n/2013/1201/c157278-23707234.html>

¹¹⁰ Liu Yu, ‘反法西斯题材电影“开罗宣言”开机 胡军韩雪演夫妻’，*Chongqing Wanbao*, 9 March, 2015. <http://media.people.com.cn/n/2015/0309/c40606-26658262.html>

(SAPPRFT) as a ‘key film’ for the war commemoration.¹¹¹ But making a film on the Cairo conference involved some rather thorny issues. When China marked the 70th anniversary of the declaration in 2013, official statements and propaganda pieces often mentioned the document and the relevant content without even mentioning Chiang or the Nationalist government’s role in it.¹¹² Some official media articles did include some background information on the conference and did mention Chiang’s role,¹¹³ but official commentators were quick to make the point that the rise in China’s status was a result of the anti-Japanese struggle by both the KMT and the CCP.¹¹⁴ While it was relatively easy in textual pieces to keep it vague and limit the credit given to the Nationalists, it was much trickier to do so in a feature-length film.

Liu Xing, a veteran scriptwriter from the Bayi Film Studio, was given the difficult task of portraying the Cairo conference to highlight China’s war contribution and its resultant rise in international status without contradicting the official line on the CCP’s ‘mainstay’ role.¹¹⁵ Commenting on the script after the film’s release, he said, ‘During the creative process, we wanted to look at the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation with the spirit of the War of Resistance, and to look at the war from the height of national interest and the World Anti-Fascist War’. Therefore, he argued that the film should ‘avoid fulsome praise for the Nationalist government’, but should also avoid ‘omissions’. At the same time, ‘not even a single stroke

¹¹¹ ‘中国确定一批重点影视作品等纪念抗战胜利 70 周年’, *China News Service (Zhongguo Xinwen She)*, 6 July, 2015. <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2015/07-06/7386665.shtml>

¹¹² See, for example: ‘外交部发言人洪磊就《开罗宣言》发表 70 周年答记者问’, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs website*, 2 December, 2013, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/chn//gxh/tyb/fyrbt/dhdw/t1104709.htm>; Gao Hong, ‘军报:《开罗宣言》的国际法效力不容置疑’, *Liberation Army Daily (Jiefangjun Bao)*, 2 December, 2013, <http://japan.people.com.cn/n/2013/1202/c35469-23711585.html>

¹¹³ ‘综述:《开罗宣言》的来龙去脉’, *Xinhua News Agency website*, 2 December, 2013. <http://japan.people.com.cn/n/2013/1202/c35469-23712141.html>

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Lei Dongrui and Zhou Genghu, ‘《开罗宣言》是“镇妖石”’, *Xinhua News Agency website*, 9 June, 2013. http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2013-06/09/c_124840023.htm

¹¹⁵ Zhang Cheng, ‘从误读者的狂欢到文化知音的派对——专访全国政协委员,《开罗宣言》总导演、编剧刘星’, *China Art News (Zhongguo Yishu Bao)*, 16 March, 2016. <http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/dianying/2016/2016-03-16/267700.html>

should be omitted on the great Chinese Communist Party, which led the resistance war from the base areas'.¹¹⁶

Despite its title, the film did not focus on the Cairo conference itself. It started with the Japanese bombing of Chongqing in 1938, and went on to show the Chinese contribution to the Allies in the subsequent years leading up to Cairo in 1943 and then to the final victory in 1945.¹¹⁷ The main story line was about a code-breaker in the KMT military named Shi Jianfeng, who, according to the film, decrypted Japanese telegraphs and obtained valuable intelligence on Germany's plan to attack the Soviet Union, Japan's plan to attack Pearl Harbor, and also helped America win the Battle of Midway and kill Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto of the Imperial Japanese Navy. According to the scriptwriter, Shi's character was largely based on the experience of Chi Buzhou, a KMT officer whom mainland Chinese media credited with decrypting Japanese messages on Pearl Harbor and Admiral Yamamoto's final flight¹¹⁸ but whose alleged achievements have yet to be corroborated by non-PRC sources.¹¹⁹

The film showed Roosevelt and Stalin as full of praise for China's contribution. Stalin was shown as saying that 'it is China that is solving this global problem', and that China, not the US, should get the most credit for defeating Japan. Roosevelt almost sounded like he was reading right from a People's Daily editorial when he said, 'One could say, as of World War II, China has become a responsible world power.'¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Zhao Xin, '《开罗宣言》胡军原型密码专家 他曾在两路口破译珍珠港密电', *Chongqing Morning Post (Chongqing Chenbao)*, 5 September, 2015. <http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2015-09-05/doc-ifxhqhun8373946.shtml>

¹¹⁷ Song Yu, '电影《开罗宣言》：不仅仅是开会', *Southern Weekend (Nanfang Zhoumo)*, 4 September, 2015. <http://www.infzm.com/content/111640>

¹¹⁸ Zhao Xin, 2015.

¹¹⁹ David Ian Chambers, 'The Past and Present State of Chinese Intelligence Historiography', *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (September 2012), pp. 31-46.

¹²⁰ Cairo Declaration, Bayi Film Studio. Available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7X_4B2bMtc

Consistent with the other official propaganda theme - the CCP's 'mainstay' role, the film included significant mentions of the CCP's contribution. The all-important KMT code-breaker was under constant protection offered by a female CCP spy, who had been specially allocated by Yan'an just to protect him and eventually gave her life to save him from Japanese assassination. In probably the most far-fetched scene of the film, when Roosevelt asked Chinese Foreign Minister T.V. Soong why the Nationalist government was initially not proactive but later managed to fight with ever-increasing fervour, Soong answered, 'I was also perplexed by this question, but later Song Qingling, my second eldest sister, told me that it was because of the CCP's anti-Japanese united front, which concentrated all resistance forces. And it was Mao Zedong who advocated this united front.' To which Roosevelt concurred, 'United front. We are now also part of the united front.'¹²¹

Mao appeared in several key moments of the film. Just before Chiang left for Cairo, Mao was shown as saying in Yan'an: 'The meeting of the Big Three (referring to the Cairo conference) should make an agreement that is beneficial to both the Chinese people and the people of the world', giving an impression that Mao was in a position to influence the meeting in which he played no part whatsoever. After the Japanese surrender ceremony in Nanjing, Mao was shown as standing on the bank of the Yellow River, in deep thought, with his voice in the background stressing that 'our victory is a victory of the people's war'.¹²²

The film was critical of Chiang's policy towards the CCP, showing Roosevelt questioning Chiang in Cairo, 'Why did you send so many troops to monitor the Ningxia border, when so many other troops are needed at the front?' But Chiang was portrayed in a largely positive

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

manner as a patriotic leader determined to protect China's national interest and fighting hard to win back Chinese territories lost to Japan, such as Taiwan and Manchuria. Also, the film did not shy away from mentioning the 'Republic of China' or showing the ROC flag at the key events.¹²³

According to Wen Deguang, one of the film's directors, this film was a 'breakthrough', and it might not have been possible to make this film just a few years before.¹²⁴ Ironically, at a time when the Xi leadership was doubling down to stress the CCP's war contribution at the expense of the KMT, its other priority – raising China's profile as a victorious nation in World War II – made it possible for the contribution of the Nationalist government to be further de-sensitised.

The Xi regime's attempt to backpedal on the reassessment of the KMT's war role was not only hampered by its own conflicting priorities, but also by the population's increased knowledge and diversified views of war history as a result of decades of official reassessment and new modes of communications. Two weeks before its official release date, which was set to coincide with the war anniversary, the film producers were shocked to find themselves in the centre of a huge online controversy.¹²⁵ On 14 August, the film's marketing team released a set of four posters, featuring Roosevelt, Churchill, and two leaders who did not attend the Cairo conference - Stalin and Mao Zedong.¹²⁶ While featuring the Soviet leader, who played a key role in wartime diplomacy in regard to the settlement in Asia and stayed away from Cairo only because the USSR was still officially neutral against Japan,¹²⁷ was understandable, showing

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Sun Ying, '《开罗宣言》导演回应“海报印毛泽东歪曲历史”', *Phoenix TV website (ifeng.com)*, 18 August, 2015. <https://i.ifeng.com/news?vt=2&cid=0&aid=100639382&m=1>

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ '《开罗宣言》曝光人物海报 四位伟人铸就历史', *Huanqiu Shibao (Global Times) website*, 14 August, 2015. <http://ent.huanqiu.com/movie/yingshidatu/2015-08/2791445.html>

¹²⁷ Mitter, 2013, p. 308.

Mao, who was at the time living in cave in the CCP enclave of Yan'an, instead of Chiang, China's national leader who actually attended the conference, proved exceptionally controversial. The Mao poster was widely mocked and ridiculed by Chinese internet users, who produced numerous spoof posters that placed figures including Kim Jong-un, Gollum and the Minions at the conference.¹²⁸ The online row caught the attention of the international media and was reported by major media outlets such as Agence France-Presse,¹²⁹ The Guardian,¹³⁰ the New York Times,¹³¹ and Wall Street Journal.¹³² Even Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou intervened, saying at a veterans' event marking the war anniversary that Mao's appearance in the *Cairo* film was a 'big joke'.¹³³

Faced with criticisms both at home and overseas, the production team denied that they had intended deliberately to erase Chiang from the story. A staff member explained to the Tencent Entertainment website that they did have posters featuring Chiang and Soong Mei-ling and her sisters, which were going to be released later.¹³⁴ But at the same time, he also defended the decision to feature Mao prominently in the film, saying that the recognition China got at Cairo

¹²⁸ Tom Phillips, 'Bloggers ridicule Chinese film placing Mao Zedong at key wartime conference', *The Guardian website*, 17 August, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/17/bloggers-ridicule-chinese-film-placing-mao-zedong-at-key-wartime-conference>

¹²⁹ 'Bloggers ridicule film showing Chairman Mao at Cairo Declaration', *Agence France-Presse*, 18 August, 2015, carried by The Telegraph website <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/11808786/Bloggers-ridicule-film-showing-Chairman-Mao-at-Cairo-Declaration.html>

¹³⁰ Tom Phillips, 17 August, 2015.

¹³¹ Austin Ramzy, 'War Movie Posters Mocked for the Mao Who Wasn't There', *The New York Times website*, 17 August, 2015. <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/08/17/wwii-movie-posters-mocked-for-the-mao-who-wasnt-there/>

¹³² William Kazer, Krystal Hu and Lilian Lin, 'Mao Shows Up a Bit Late at World War Two Conference', *Wall Street Journal website*, 17 August, 2015. <https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2015/08/17/mao-shows-up-a-bit-late-at-world-war-two-conference/>

¹³³ Liu Lirong, '毛澤東出現開羅會議 總統：大笑話', *Central News Agency*, 20 August, 2015. <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/firstnews/201508200119.aspx>

¹³⁴ Zhao Zhenzong, '《开罗宣言》海报惹争议 片方回应：非炒作', *Tencent Entertainment website (ent.qq.com)*, 15 August, 2015. Re-posted by Han Wang website: <http://www.cnhan.com/html/yule/20150820/187750.htm>

‘was a result of the whole nation’s persistent resistance, of which the Chinese Communists led by Mao Zedong were also an important part’.¹³⁵

Despite the film crew’s explanation, however, criticisms continued not just from internet users but also from fellow party propagandists. Writing under his usual pseudonym ‘Shan Renping’, Hu Xijin, editor-in-chief of the *Global Times (Huanqiu Shibao)*, a nationalist tabloid run by the People’s Daily, said that, though the film producers’ understanding of the historical role of the CCP was ‘not problematic at all’, ‘it was still inappropriate to create a poster that emphasises Mao so much’, because ‘it was very hard not to be misread’ and ‘its actual effect may probably be negative’.¹³⁶ Hu also criticised the trailer of the film, in which ‘Mao Zedong made almost as many appearances as Chiang Kai-shek did, and Mao uttered more lines than Chiang’. He expressed concerns that, ‘If the whole film emphasises Mao’s image as much as the trailer does, then the film may produce negative effects’.¹³⁷ He explained:

‘For a period of time, a lot of expressions of historical nihilism have emerged on the internet, such as smearing the images of Mao Zedong and other late party and state leaders and questioning the authenticity of heroes’ stories in the history of the People’s Republic, etc. Whilst we denounce such phenomena, individual cultural units must avoid creating disputes on the issue of history to the opposite effect and providing others with ammunition.’¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Shan Renping (Hu Xijin), ‘《开罗宣言》海报带来的印象令人担心’, *Global Times (Huanqiu Shibao)*, 17 August, 2015. http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion_china/2015-08/7286737.html

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

It must be pointed out that all the criticisms cited above were voiced before the film was released and were based solely on its promotional materials. In the actual film, Mao's appearances were far fewer than those of Chiang, though it can be argued that any such appearance would have been an exaggeration of Mao's role. According to director Wen Deguang, they spent 1.5 months shooting Chiang's scenes and only spent four days on Mao.¹³⁹ As mentioned above, though the film included spurious and often ridiculous claims on the CCP's contribution, its relatively lengthy and positive portrayal of Chiang could be seen as a breakthrough. It was understandable that producers felt hurt and wronged by the overwhelming criticisms. While Wen Deguang acknowledged that the way the Mao poster was released was 'ill-considered', he insisted that 'we are not as shameless as they say'.¹⁴⁰

The *Cairo* film and the reception it got reflected the fact that propaganda workers in the Xi era are faced with multiple pressures when portraying the War against Japan. On one hand, they are expected to boost the profile of China's national war effort but at the same time play down the role of its main fighting force – the Nationalist army. These conflicting propaganda requirements are sometimes impossible to satisfy at the same time. On the other hand, they face an increasingly discerning audience who have learned about the KMT's role both from official sources and from alternative sources on the internet, and whose views they can no longer ignore.

¹³⁹ Sun Ying, 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, since 2000, the history of the War against Japan has gained increasing prominence in CCP propaganda. During the first few years of the twenty-first century, the emergence of a pro-independence government in Taiwan meant that wooing the KMT once again became a top priority for Beijing, and giving more recognition to the KMT's wartime patriotism was one of its major methods to develop relations with its erstwhile archenemy. Even more significantly, as China began to emerge as a great power in the first decade of the new millennium, war history became more and more useful as Beijing attempted to portray itself as a founder and defender of the post-war world order.

In the second decade of the century, Xi Jinping's new leadership further boosted its effort to use war history to justify China's great power status. But at the same time, the Xi regime tightened ideological control and attempted to roll back the positive reassessment of the KMT's war effort in order to protect the CCP's own patriotic credentials. However, the two objectives are contradictory with each other, as raising the profile of the national war effort necessarily required significant representations of China's main fighting force during the war – the KMT armed forces. This, combined with fact that the Chinese population have already obtained significant knowledge about the KMT's war role, meant that Beijing's attempt to stress the CCP's role at the expense of the KMT has not been very successful.

As Sino-US tension grew under President Trump, there are signs that Beijing's WWII-themed propaganda is losing its efficacy internationally. Unlike presidents Clinton and Obama, who went along with CCP leaders' interpretation of war history to hail Sino-US friendship and

cooperation,¹⁴¹ Vice-President Mike Pence, in his major policy speech on Sino-US relations in October 2018, used the same history to stress America's assistance to China and the US role in raising China's international status.¹⁴² China's official media angrily retorted that the US helped China in the war out of its selfish reasons.¹⁴³ If bilateral ties continue to deteriorate, the profile of the War against Japan in Chinese propaganda may well be lowered. But no matter how China's propaganda line changes, the result of the positive reassessment of the Nationalist war effort over the past four decades is impossible to undo completely.

¹⁴¹ In his toast at a state dinner for Xi Jinping in September 2015, Obama said, 'I think of the American airmen during the Second World War who went down over China – Chinese villagers sheltered them, fed them, clothed them and treated their wounds. Decades later, one Chinese man said of the American he saved, "He is like the thumb on the hand, and I'm like the fingers. We are brothers together."' See Veronica Toney and Sarah Polus, 'Full Transcript: President Obama's toast at the Chinese state dinner', *Washington Post website*, September 25, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/reliable-source/wp/2015/09/25/full-transcript-president-obamas-toast-at-the-chinese-state-dinner/?utm_term=.0ba8eb83b698

¹⁴² Mike Pence, 'Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China', *White House website*, 4 October, 2018. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>

¹⁴³ Cao Yuanlong, Zhong Chao and Jiang Zhengxiang, '中国的现代化不是美国赐予的礼物', *Guangming Daily website*, 8 October, 2018. http://politics.gmw.cn/2018-10/08/content_31577544.htm

Conclusion

The emergence and endurance of ‘Republican fever’ is one of the most surprising political and cultural phenomena in twenty-first century China. Positive and even nostalgic portrayals of various aspects of the Republican era have proliferated not just on the internet but also in openly-published books and the state-controlled media. And the widespread endorsement of ‘old China’ has taken place in the open in a country where the media and the internet remain under the strict control of the Communist Party, which bases much of its claim to legitimacy on its overthrow of ‘old China’ in the communist revolution. How should we understand this counter-intuitive phenomenon? And what does it mean for China’s national identity and political future?

Over the years, there have been some attempts to explain the phenomenon. Some see it as primarily a liberal intellectual narrative. For example, Louisa Chiang and Perry Link attribute it to two main reasons. On one hand, mainland Chinese readers, having found out they had been lied to about China’s modern history, especially on the War against Japan, had a desire to re-examine the Republican era more broadly. On the other hand, legacies of the Republican era, such as the thinking of liberal intellectuals, were useful for those who wished to comment on the present.¹ Overseas Chinese commentators have tended to see ‘Republican fever’ as an anti-communist dissident narrative. For example, Hu Ping, a veteran pro-democracy dissident based in the United States, wrote in 2011 that ‘Republican fever’ in mainland China was ‘based on the profound recognition of the crimes and wrongdoings by the Communist Party’.²

¹ Louisa Chiang and Perry Link, ‘Before the Revolution’, *New York Review of Books*, 7 June, 2018. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2018/06/07/eileen-chang-before-the-revolution>

² Hu Ping, ‘谈谈“民国热”——辛亥百年话民国’, *Radio Free Asia website*, 6 October, 2011. <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/pinglun/huping/huping-10062011164022.html>

These are, of course, valid points about why the positive reassessment of Republican China attracted the attention of wide swathes of the Chinese society and especially those who are dissatisfied with CCP rule. However, they fail to explain why Communist Party censors, who had maintained tight ideological control over historiography, allowed the re-examination and re-interpretation of pre-1949 history to take place in the first place.

To understand the phenomenon of ‘Republican fever’ and its significance, it is crucial to understand why the CCP propaganda system allowed the historical reassessment to take place, how it has been handling the reassessment, and how successful it has been in its effort to control the discourse. Below, I summarise my findings and try to answer these important questions.

1. Using the past to serve the present: Reasons behind reassessment of pre-communist history

In China, ‘using the past to serve the present’, or adjusting and reinterpreting history to suit new realities, is a deep-rooted tradition.³ Consistent with this tradition, the changes in the historiography of pre-communist China have come as a result of the shifting political reality of post-Mao China.

Commentators have typically attributed the positive official reassessment of Republican China to the CCP’s attempts to improve relations with the KMT, which was exiled to Taiwan in 1949, in an attempt to facilitate cross-strait unification and counter the threat of Taiwan

³ See Jonathan Unger, (ed.), *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

independence.⁴ During the course of my doctoral studies, however, I found that the ‘Republican fever’ had much deeper roots than previously thought. In fact, the regime began invoking Republican-era legacies in its official propaganda almost immediately after the reform era began, when Western-oriented modernisation and pan-Chinese nationalism replaced revolution and class struggle as the party’s top priorities. While wooing the KMT was an important motive for the regime’s change of tone, it was far from the only motive.

This study identified four major themes of the historical reassessment – economy; intellectual life and education; political reform and constitutionalism; and the War against Japan. Within each of these themes, the reassessment involved different political considerations during different periods, including, but not limited to, the need for rapprochement with the KMT.

Economy

The CCP’s propaganda machine started invoking the economic legacy of Republican China almost immediately after the reform era began. Just days after the Third Plenum of the 11th CCP Central Committee, which marked the beginning of reform and opening-up, the official media began citing Sun Yat-sen’s comments on economic affairs to support the new official position of welcoming foreign capital and foreign technology.⁵ One month after the plenum, the CCP began rehabilitating Republican-era capitalists who had been suffering persecution under the Maoist regime.⁶ In an attempt to attract investment from overseas Chinese businessmen, the rehabilitation was later expanded to include even those businessmen who

⁴ See, for example, Qiang Zhang and Robert Weatherley, ‘The rise of “Republican fever” in the PRC and the implications for CCP legitimacy’, *China Information*, Vol 27, Issue 3, 2013, pp. 277-300.

⁵ Luo Yaojiu, ‘孙中山加速发展国民经济的思想’, *Guangming Daily*, 31 December 1978, p. 4.

⁶ Ulanfu, ‘在落实党对民族资产阶级政策问题的座谈会上 乌兰夫部长的讲话’, *People’s Daily*, 26 January 1979.

sided with the Nationalists in the Chinese civil war and fled the mainland before the communist takeover.⁷

The reformist leadership also moved to restore China's pre-1949 economic links to the world. In the 1986, China made a formal request for re-entry into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the predecessor of the WTO. In official media reports, the Nationalist government's 1949 entry into the GATT as a founding member was no longer portrayed as a sell-out to imperialist aggressors, but was seen as a legitimate trade strategy that the PRC was intending to inherit.⁸ In 1987, in an attempt to restore Shanghai's pre-1949 status as an international financial centre, China re-established the Bank of Communications in Shanghai, one of the four major banks during the Nationalist era whose mainland operations had been abolished in the 1950s, as the PRC's first nationwide joint stock bank.⁹

In the 1990s, as China's local governments gained more autonomy in economic development and began developing new discourses of regional cultures and identities that were consistent with marketisation and internationalisation, pre-1949 legacies of commercialism and cosmopolitanism became key resources in the official effort at local identity construction.¹⁰ In Shanghai, nostalgia for the city's 'semi-colonial' past was tolerated and even promoted.¹¹ In Heilongjiang, the history of the Chinese Eastern Railway, once seen as a tool of exploitation

⁷ See, for example, Tang Jiashan, Liao Xiaoying and Zhang Yan, ““引人先引心””, *People's Daily*, 14 February, 1986, p. 4.

⁸ See Ren Zhengde, ‘中国申请恢复关贸总协定缔约国地位’, *People's Daily*, 13 July, 1986.

⁹ Lu Wangda and Li Jianping, ‘以改革新面貌出现在我国金融界 交通银行上海分行即将开业 试营业四个月 初步显示活力’, *People's Daily*, 24 February, 1987.

¹⁰ See David S. G. Goodman (ed.), *China's Provinces in Reform: Class, Community and Political Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997); and Hans Hendrichske and Feng Chongyi (eds.), *The Political Economy of China's Provinces: Comparative and Competitive Advantage* (London: Routledge, 1999).

¹¹ Hanchao Lu, Nostalgia for the future: the resurgence of an alienated culture in China, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol 75, No 2, 2002.

and aggression by Imperial Russia, was used to tout Harbin's status as a 'city of openness'.¹²

In Shanxi, KMT warlord Yan Xishan was recognised as an economic moderniser, and the legacy of Shanxi's local banking tradition was cited as evidence of the province's commercial and cosmopolitan spirit.¹³

After 2000, as the status of private entrepreneurs was further boosted by the party's new ideological invention, the 'Three Represents', pre-communist entrepreneurs got even more positive publicity than in the previous decade.¹⁴ China's pre-1949 legacy of global trade also featured prominently in the propaganda drive for the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, which downplayed the Mao era and often linked China's contemporary progress in globalisation directly to the pre-communist era.¹⁵ After Xi Jinping came to power, his 'One Belt, One Road' initiative further encouraged Chinese localities to mobilise their pre-1949 international links as evidence of their tradition of openness.¹⁶

Intellectual life and academia

In the early reform era, Deng and Hu Yaobang rehabilitated mainland intellectuals who had suffered persecution under Mao and loosened political control over intellectual life, leading to

¹² Liu Yin, '北国“夏都”', *People's Daily*, 15 November, 1991.

¹³ David S.G. Goodman, 'Structuring Local Identity: Nation, Province and County in Shanxi During the 1990s', *The China Quarterly*, Volume 172 (December 2002), pp. 837-862.

¹⁴ Shuyu Kong, 'Cultural Propaganda In The Age Of Economic Reform: Popular Media And The Social Construction Of Shanxi Merchants In Contemporary China', *The China Journal*, No. 63 (January 2010), pp. 79-99.

¹⁵ See, for example, Xiao Chunfei, Wu Yu and Xu Qiaoqing, '上海世博会：百年长路 中国圆梦', *Xinhua news agency website*, 1 May, 2010. <http://news.sinovision.net/portal.php?mod=view&aid=133729>

¹⁶ See, for example, Zhao Hongbo and Zhang Shiyong, '哈尔滨构建“一城对一国”对外开放新格局', *Guangming Daily*, 10 July, 2017. http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2017-07/10/nw.D110000gmrb_20170710_6-03.htm?div=-1

a gradual change of assessment of Republican-era intellectuals.¹⁷ This trend was further boosted by the campaign to ‘liberate thinking’, intended to rally support among Chinese intellectuals for the reforms.¹⁸ At the same time, Beijing toned down its condemnation of Republican-era figures who had opposed the CCP and had fled the mainland before the communist takeover, such as Hu Shi, so as to woo overseas Chinese intellectuals. Previously criticised Republican-era literary works were openly republished.¹⁹

The reassessment of pre-1949 intellectuals was not just about national unity and ‘united front’ work, but also a result of the CCP’s change of priority from class struggle to modernisation. The veneration of left-wing revolutionary intellectuals such as Lu Xun was scaled down.²⁰ By contrast, pre-1949 intellectuals who had championed Western-oriented modernisation, such as Hu Shi and Cai Yuanpei, became politically acceptable and even useful.²¹

After the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, as the party was faced with an existential crisis and the Maoist orthodoxy had been discredited, the regime promoted cultural nationalism, leading to positive coverage and reassessment of Republican-era scholars of ‘national studies’ or Guoxue, which thrived during the Republican era but became taboo after 1949.²² An intellectual trend called ‘Guoxue fever’ emerged with official backing, and pre-1949 scholars, especially cultural conservatives, were exalted as ‘Guoxue masters’.²³

¹⁷ Merle Goldman, ‘A New Relationship between the Intellectuals and the State in the Post-Mao Period’, in Merle Goldman & Leo Ou-Fan Lee (eds.), *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 500.

¹⁸ Deng Xiaoping, ‘解放思想，实事求是，团结一致向前看’ (13 December, 1978), *The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Volume II)*.

¹⁹ Merle Goldman, *China's Intellectuals: Advise and Dissent* (Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 235.

²⁰ Merle Goldman, ‘The political use of Lu Xun in the Cultural Revolution and after’, in Leo Ou-fan Lee (ed.), *Lu Xun and His Legacy* (University of California Press, 1985), pp. 192-196.

²¹ See Chapter 3.

²² Tang Yijie, ‘Some reflections on New Confucianism in mainland Chinese culture of the 1990s’, in Gloria Davies (ed.) *Voicing Concerns: Contemporary Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), p. 127.

²³ See Special Feature: The National Learning Revival, *China Perspectives*, Vol. 1, 2011.

As the Soviet and Maoist models of higher education came under criticism, China's pre-1949 universities, which were built on European and American models, began to get positive reassessments, so much so that some universities, with support from local governments, rushed to restore their Republican-era names and traditions.²⁴ In the late 1990s, as Beijing began a new drive to build 'world-class universities', the government as well as university administrators openly embraced the European and North American models of higher education.²⁵ As a result, in the new millennium, the legacy of China's top universities in the Republican era, which were built on the same models, has been hailed as a glorious tradition that was to be inherited.²⁶

1911 Revolution and constitutionalism

Since the reform era began, the three main political forces at play in the run-up to the 1911 Revolution – the imperial Qing court, the constitutionalist reformers and the revolutionaries - have been subjected to some fundamental reassessments. During the Mao era, revolution was hailed as sacred whilst the idea of reform was labelled as reactionary. Therefore, Sun Yat-sen's revolutionaries were seen as the only positive force, and both the Qing court and the constitutionalists were condemned. But after reform era began in 1978, the revolutionary rhetoric was toned down and promoting reform became the overwhelming priority. In an effort to reverse the anti-reform rhetoric, CCP propagandists began to reassess positively reformers

²⁴ Ruth Hayhoe, *China's Universities 1895-1995: A Century of Cultural Conflict* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), p. xvi.

²⁵ Kathryn Mohrman, 'The Emerging Global Model with Chinese Characteristics', *Higher Education Policy*, 2008, 21, (29-48).

²⁶ See, for example, Yang Jian, '追求新时代的“大学之道”——人文教育在清华', *People's Daily*, 11 December 1995.

in Chinese history, including the constitutionalists, who were praised for their common struggle with Sun's revolutionaries.²⁷

After the 1989 Tiananmen student movement, as stability became the overwhelming priority, official propaganda advocated incrementalism and attacked so-called 'radicalism'. The political elite adopted the thinking of the so-called 'neo-conservative' scholars, who condemned all revolutionary changes and even political reform as too 'radical'.²⁸ As a result, the propaganda authorities began to be increasingly tolerant of negative reassessments of revolutionary or 'radical' political change, especially that of 1911. The most prominent case was a television drama entitled *Towards the Republic*, which was broadcast on state TV in 2003. The drama depicted Sun Yat-sen, the revolutionary leader officially revered by the CCP, as naïve, confused and often comical.²⁹ By contrast, members of the Qing establishment, such as Empress Dowager Cixi, Li Hongzhang and Yuan Shikai, were portrayed as sincere and effective modernisers who were opposed to radical change but committed to gradual reform.³⁰

When China marked the centenary of the 1911 Revolution in 2011, while the authoritative party mouthpieces such as the People's Daily stuck to the official historiography and praised Sun Yat-sen's revolution for 'opening the floodgate for progress in China', censors allowed neo-conservative criticisms of the revolution to featured prominently in the market-oriented newspapers and web portals.³¹ One official organ, *Huanqiu Shibao (Global Times)*, a tabloid

²⁷ Cui Zhihai, '新中国成立以来的辛亥革命史研究', *Jindaishi Yanjiu (Modern Chinese History Studies)*, Issue 3, 2015. http://www.xhgmw.org/html/zhuanjia/chengguo/2015/0611/19554_5.html

²⁸ Peter Moody, *Conservative Thought in Contemporary China* (Lexington Books, 2007), p. 156.

²⁹ Gotelind Muller, *Representing History in Chinese Media: The TV Drama Zou Xiang Gonghe (Towards the Republic)* (LIT Verlag Münster, 2007), p. 9.

³⁰ See Ying Zhu, Chapter 3: 'TV drama as political discourse II: Marching towards the Republic and the Great Emperor Hanwu', in Ying Zhu, *Television in Post-Reform China: Serial Dramas, Confucian Leadership and the Global Television Market* (Routledge, 2008), pp. 45-46. Also see Muller, pp. 10-11.

³¹ See, for example, Li Zehou, '革命不易，改良更难', *Caijing magazine*, 18 October, 2011. <http://comments.caijing.com.cn/2011-10-18/110900188.html>

owned by the People's Daily, even published an editorial which blamed the 1911 Revolution for decades of chaos and 'countless deaths', and even suggested the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s was partly a result of the 'chaos' brought about by the revolution.³²

It is clear that the CCP propagandists have been increasingly critical of revolutionary political change and have become increasingly positive about gradual reform led by the political establishment. They attempted to use the history of 1911 to argue that gradualist reformers were more effective than 'idealistic' and 'radical' revolutionaries in bringing about 'constitutionalism'.³³ By doing this, they effectively conceded that the Republican-era ideal of constitutionalism should be the correct direction of political development, though the concession did not survive Xi Jinping's tightened ideological grip.³⁴

War against Japan

Soon after the reform era began in 1978, as part of the drive to rectify the excesses of the Cultural Revolution and work towards reunification with Taiwan, the Deng leadership rehabilitated a small number of KMT officers killed during the War against Japan who had previously been honoured by the CCP but were later neglected and eventually condemned under Mao's ultra-leftist policy.³⁵ In the early 1980s, as the Taiwan issue became more and more salient in government priorities, a clearly defined propaganda line in regard to the war

³² Editorial, '社评：纪念辛亥百年，告别革命情结', *Huanqiu Shibao (Global Times)*, 10 October, 2011. <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/1152/2011-10/2067356.html>

³³ See, for example, Xiao Han, '风雨百年说共和', *Nanfeng Chuang*, Issue 5, 2008.

http://news.ifeng.com/history/zhongguojindaishi/special/songjiaoren/detail_2012_06/14/15294897_0.shtml

³⁴ Barry Sautman, 'Sirens of the Strongman: Neo-Authoritarianism in Recent Chinese Political Theory', *The China Quarterly*, No. 129 (Mar., 1992), pp. 72-102.

³⁵ PRC Ministry of Civil Affairs, '民政部关于贯彻执行《革命烈士褒扬条例》若干具体问题的解释' (3 September, 1980), *Ministry of Civil Affairs website*, 18 December, 2007. <http://sy.mca.gov.cn/article/lsby/fgzc/200712/200712000059659.shtml>

history began to emerge, and Hu Qiaomu, a top CCP leader in charge of ideological and propaganda affairs, played a crucial role in the process.³⁶

Largely as a result of Hu Qiaomu's support, the 40th anniversary of the end of the war in 1985 became an important propaganda event and a historiographical turning point.³⁷ The CCP hailed the 'national' war effort and wartime KMT-CCP cooperation, and called for renewed cooperation with the KMT for national unification.³⁸ Soon afterwards, a ground-breaking film, *The Battle of Taierzhuang*, which depicted a major battle fought by the KMT forces and cast the KMT army in a heroic light, was produced with support from top leaders and shown in cinemas across China.³⁹ In 1987, top party leaders opened the War of Resistance Museum, which gave credit to the KMT's resistance effort, though it emphasised the CCP's 'mainstay' role.⁴⁰

After Tiananmen, as reunification remained high on the CCP's agenda, the reassessment of war history persisted for a few years. But as cross-strait tensions rose under Lee Teng-hui, the favourable reassessment of the Nationalist war effort was abruptly rolled back in 1995 by Ding Guan'gen, the head of the Central Propaganda Department, who said the reassessment had gone out of control.⁴¹ However, due to the need for mending the troubled Sino-US relationship in the aftermaths of the Cold War, Chinese propaganda mouthpieces used the history of Sino-

³⁶ Wang Fucong and Zhang Xianwen, '张宪文：抗日战争是一场全民族的抗争', *Tuanjie Bao*, 13 August, 2015, p. 7. http://jds.cass.cn/ztlm/jnkzsl70zn/zhbd/201605/t20160506_3329579.shtml

³⁷ Qiu Dexin, '忆乔木同志', in Editorial Group of Hu Qiaomu's biography, *我所知道的胡乔木* (Dangdai Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1997), p. 546.

³⁸ Wang Fucong and Zhang Xianwen, 2015.

³⁹ Gu Yubao, '《血战台儿庄》是怎样拍成的', *Renmin Zhengxie Bao* (CPPCC Daily), 27 May, 2010. <http://www.chinanews.com/cul/news/2010/05-28/2311286.shtml>

⁴⁰ See Rana Mitter, 'Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Nationalism, History and Memory in the Beijing War of Resistance Museum, 1987–1997', *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 161, March 2000, pp 279-293.

⁴¹ Zhang Xianwen, *江苏社科名家文库：张宪文卷* (Jiangsu People's Publishing House, June 2015), p. 35.

US cooperation during the war to stress that China had been a friend of the United States and a contributor to the post-war international order.⁴²

In the early 2000s, following the election of the pro-independence Chen Shui-bian as Taiwan president, the CCP began wooing the KMT again and reassessment of war history once again became a useful tool. In his speech marking the 60th war anniversary in 2005, Hu Jintao praised the KMT's war effort and even enumerated the KMT's battles before talking about the various CCP-led forces, which was an unprecedented gesture of goodwill to the KMT.⁴³ The CCP also continued to use war history to promote relations with the US, citing China's contribution to the Allied war effort as evidence of China's role as a 'responsible stakeholder'.⁴⁴

After Xi Jinping took over as paramount leader in 2012, he has been trying to bolster the party's legitimacy by boasting China's status as a great power. Under his rule, CCP propagandists have stepped up their effort to use China's war contribution, including that of the KMT government, to justify its great power status, as was evident in the unusually high-profile of war commemorations in both 2014 and 2015 and the unprecedented military parade marking the 70th war anniversary in 2015.⁴⁵

⁴² See, for example, Chen Te'an, '江主席抵檀香山受到热烈欢迎 参观珍珠港亚利桑那纪念馆并献花圈 夏威夷州长檀香山市长分别设宴欢迎江主席一行', *People's Daily*, 28 October, 1997.

⁴³ Hu Jintao, '在纪念中国人民抗日战争暨世界反法西斯战争胜利 60 周年大会上的讲话 (2005 年 9 月 3 日)', *People's Daily*, 4 September, 2005.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Hu Jintao, '在白宫欢迎仪式上的致辞 (2006 年 4 月 20 日)', *People's Daily*, 21 April, 2006.

⁴⁵ See Chapter 6.

Multiple motivations

From the brief summary given above, it is clear that, while unification with Taiwan has been a key motive in the CCP's reassessment of Republican-era legacies, it is far from the only one. The CCP rehabilitated Republican-era capitalists and reassessed the commercialism and cosmopolitanism of the pre-1949 economy in order to justify reform and promote capitalistic economic development. While the rehabilitation of Republican-era intellectuals was partly intended to woo Chinese intellectuals in Taiwan and overseas, it was also motivated by the party's new priorities of promoting Western-oriented economic modernisation on one hand and using Chinese traditions to counter unwanted Western political and cultural influences on the other. The party's change of course from revolution to reform led to the rehabilitation of numerous pre-1949 political figures previously seen as reactionary, who are now depicted as patriotic modernisers. While the reassessment of war history was mostly to do with wooing the KMT, it was also partly intended to promote national unity and pride and to improve Sino-US relations.

Ultimately, all these motives - promoting Western-oriented economic modernisation, championing cultural nationalism, advocating gradual reform and discouraging 'radical' revolutionary change, promoting national unity and unification, highlighting China's responsible role in the Western-dominated international order – fall within two main themes, namely modernisation and nationalism. Therefore, I conclude that post-Mao China's identity shift from that of a revolutionary socialist state to that of a modernising nationalist state is behind the positive official reassessments of the Republican-era legacies.

2. Controlling the discourse: Tackling unwanted side-effects of the reassessment

These new interpretations of history are not compatible with the CCP's orthodox historiography. Though they can be used to support the regime's new policy and new priorities, they inevitably come into conflict with the old orthodoxy, on which the party's historical legitimacy still relies. Discussing the reassessment of war history in the 1990s, Arthur Waldron observed that the official loosening 'permitted a vastly broader discussion of the War, which is acquiring a momentum of its own for which the official interpretation serves as no more than rubric'.⁴⁶ The same can be said about the wider reassessment of the history of Republican China, which has often led to discussions that the regime feels uncomfortable with. Therefore, for CCP propagandists, it has been important to utilise these new historical discourses whilst at the same time minimising their potential negative side-effects on the party's legitimacy.

Censoring undesirable interpretations of history

While CCP propaganda in the reform era has been portraying Republican-era businesspeople and economic openness in favourable terms through the prism of the so-called 'modernisation paradigm', party censors have emphasised that the new paradigm cannot be allowed to threaten the CCP's traditional revolution-focused historiography, which must be defended in order to maintain the historical foundation of the CCP's legitimacy.⁴⁷ Some criticisms of the 'modernisation paradigm' in the official media have been quite serious, with some

⁴⁶ Arthur Waldron, 'China's New Remembering of World War II: The Case of Zhang Zizhong', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4, Special Issue: War in Modern China (October 1996), pp. 945-978.

⁴⁷ See Huaiyin Li, *Reinventing Modern China: Imagination and Authenticity in Chinese Historical Writing*, (University of Hawaii Press, 2013), p. 246.

commentators calling it an anti-socialist political conspiracy.⁴⁸ However, as modernisation remains one of the CCP's top priorities, party propagandists have allowed both paradigms to co-exist. But they have issued warnings against so-called 'historical nihilism' in the reassessments, seeing it as a threat to the party's legitimacy. In the words of Xia Chuntao, party secretary of the CASS's Institute of Modern History, 'If the Republic was really that good, then what was the basis and significance of our party's leadership in the revolution and founding of New China?'⁴⁹

The legacy of Republican-era intellectuals and academia was positively reassessed in the reform era, but not all of those legacies were welcomed. In the 1980s, driven by the desire to promote Western-oriented modernisation, liberal-leaning party leader Hu Yaobang supported the promotion of the academic and educational legacies of Republican-era liberals such as Hu Shi and Cai Yuanpei.⁵⁰ But conservative leaders such as Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun pushed back hard, arguing that the academic freedom and 'inclusiveness' Cai adopted as president of Peking University in the 1920s was no longer applicable under socialism and posed a threat to the Communist Party.⁵¹ After Tiananmen, though the regime saw pre-1949 cultural conservatives such as Chen Yinke as symbols of cultural nationalism and hailed them as 'masters of national studies', party mouthpieces such as the People's Daily criticised their dismissal of Marxism and their spirit of independent thinking and warned against attempts to 'mislead the youth' with their legacies of intellectual independence.⁵²

⁴⁸ See, for example, Deng Qiuping, '抵御虚无主义思潮与坚定中国特色社会主义道路', *Renmin Luntan*, Issue 26, September 2013. http://paper.people.com.cn/rmlt/html/2013-09/11/content_1311788.htm

⁴⁹ Xia Chuntao, '历史虚无主义的产生背景、主要特征及其危害', *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Wang (Chinese Social Sciences Net)*, 8 February, 2018.

http://www.cssn.cn/lxx/lishixuezhuanli/bwxcxljism/bwsf/201802/t20180208_3845298.shtml

⁵⁰ See Chen Xiaoping, '1979~1985 : 胡适归来' (1979-1985: Hu Shi returns), *Zhongguo Xinwen Zhoukan (China Newsweek)*, Issue 25, 2011. <http://www.chinanews.com/cul/2011/07-07/3166077.shtml>.

⁵¹ See Gu Xiang, *晚年周扬* (Shanghai: Wenhui Chubanshe, 2003), pp. 85-88.

⁵² Sha Jiansun, '向陈寅恪先生学习什么?', *People's Daily*, 20 June, 1998.

Though the CCP invoked the legacy of top Republican-era universities in its own drive to build world-class universities, discussions of the liberal traditions of those institutions have been severely restricted. In the late 1990s, after CASS political scientist Liu Junning published a collection of pre-1949 PKU scholar's essays on democracy and human rights, he came under leftist attack and was dismissed from CASS.⁵³ In the new millennium, praise for the quality of pre-1949 universities also drew criticism in state media, which said such praise and favourable comparison of pre-communist universities with contemporary PRC universities were 'one-sided' and 'wishful thinking'.⁵⁴

After the reform era started, the CCP downplayed its traditional pro-revolution and anti-reform rhetoric and became increasingly positive about reformers in China's modern history. After Tiananmen, in their bid to discourage revolution and instability, the leadership endorsed 'anti-radicalism' and neo-conservative thinking. But propagandists worked hard to prevent two unwanted side-effects. On one hand, though anti-revolutionary rhetoric were allowed, it was not allowed to challenge the communist revolution. Therefore, Li Zehou was criticised for criticising both 1911 and 1949 for their 'radicalism'.⁵⁵ On the other hand, though neo-conservatism was promoted, its challenge to orthodox historiography and its concession to liberal democracy and 'constitutionalism' must be controlled. Hence the controversy over the television drama *Towards the Republic*, which was aired on CCTV but was soon afterwards cut short and shelved.⁵⁶ Around the 2011 centenary of the 1911 Revolution, the authorities cancelled university events and censored media articles over fears of pro-democracy and pro-

⁵³ See Merle Goldman, 'The Flowering of Liberalism, 1997-1998', in Goldman, *From Comrade to Citizen: The Struggle for Political Rights in China* (Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 155-157.

⁵⁴ See Wang Xuebin, '民国大学教育称得上“盛景”吗?', *Beijing Daily*, 16 May, 2016. http://www.bjd.com.cn/sy/llzk/201605/16/t20160516_11021628.html

⁵⁵ See, for example, Xie Wujun, '评中国当代的保守主义思潮', *Dangdai Sichao (Contemporary Thought)*, Issue 4, 2001, pp. 13-29.

⁵⁶ Ying Zhu, p. 43.

constitutionalism ideas.⁵⁷ Southern Weekend's 2013 New Year's message was changed by the provincial propaganda chief because of its mention of 'constitutionalism'.⁵⁸ In 2014, a director of a documentary on the history of constitutionalism in modern China was jailed.⁵⁹ The following year, a book by Tsinghua professor Qin Hui touching on the same subject was banned.⁶⁰

The positive reassessment of the Nationalist war effort during the War against Japan was first championed by conservative ideologue Hu Qiaomu as a way to promote patriotism and national reunification. But the initial loosening led to a massive trend towards more recognition of the KMT's war role and the publication of a large number of books and articles positive about Chiang Kai-shek's forces, culminating in the film *Battle of Taierzhuang*, which was supported by liberal leaders such as Xi Zhongxun but opposed by some in the Central Propaganda Department. Hu Qiaomu fought back in 1987, calling the phenomenon 'startling' and called for the trend to be reversed.⁶¹ After cross-strait relations cooled in the 1990s, removing a major motivation behind the reassessment, Central Propaganda Department head Ding Guan'gen ordered the positive portrayals of the KMT to be stopped.⁶² In the 2000s, when Hu Jintao restarted praising the KMT's war effort, he nevertheless stressed CCP's 'mainstay' role, and came up with the concept of a '14-year resistance war' in order to highlight the CCP's

⁵⁷ Xu Bo, '借古讽今，潇湘晨报遭整肃', *VOA Chinese website*, 3 November, 2010.

<https://www.voachinese.com/a/article-20101103-china-media-freedom-106601038/771994.html>

⁵⁸ See Rogier Creemers, 'China's Constitutionalism Debate: Content, Context And Implications', *The China Journal*, No. 74, July 2015, pp. 91-109.

⁵⁹ 'Film director jailed in China for making documentary about the constitution', *Agence France-Presse*, 30 December, 2014. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1670695/film-director-jailed-china-making-documentary-about-constitution>

⁶⁰ Kiki Zhao, 'On China's Constitution Day, Book on Constitutionalism Largely Disappears', *New York Times website*, 4 December, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/05/world/asia/china-constitution-qin-hui-book.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=mini-moth®ion=top-stories-below&WT.nav=top-stories-below&_r=0

⁶¹ Hu Qiaomu, '在中共党史、中国革命史讲习班的讲话（一九八七年八月一日）', in Editorial Group of Biography of Hu Qiaomu (ed.), *胡乔木谈中共党史* (Hu Qiaomu on CCP History) (People's Publishing Houses, September 1999), pp. 256-263.

⁶² Zhang Xianwen, 2015.

‘independent resistance’ before the outbreak of all-out war in 1937.⁶³ In television dramas and films, censorship rules meant that producers must exaggerate the CCP’s contribution. Even when they dramatised events that had nothing to do with the CCP, such as the Chinese Expeditionary Force and the Cairo Declaration, they had to fabricate ‘red threads’ in the stories in order to get the dramas past the censors.⁶⁴

Official media attacks on ‘Republican fever’

Despite official attempts at controlling the reassessments of the Republican-era economy, intellectual life and academia, the 1911 Revolution, and the War against Japan, new views of history did, in Arthur Waldron’s words, acquire a momentum of its own and developed into a wholesale reassessment of the Republican era in academic and the popular media, which became known as ‘Republican fever’ in the mid-2000s.⁶⁵ As in ‘historical fevers’ for imperial dynasties such as the Ming and the Qing,⁶⁶ historical interpretations represented in ‘Republican fever’ deviate from the CCP’s orthodox historiography but are, to varying degrees, acceptable to party censors because they support the regime’s new priorities in the reform era, such as economic modernisation, globalisation and national unity. However, there is a key difference between ‘Republican fever’ and historical ‘fevers’ for imperial dynasties such as the Ming. While eulogising China’s imperial past does not directly challenge the CCP regime’s legitimacy, positive depictions of the PRC’s immediate predecessor can be much more problematic. As the Republic was overthrown in mainland China by the CCP and replaced by the People’s Republic, the CCP regime has to defend the legitimacy of the Communist

⁶³ Hu Jintao, 2005.

⁶⁴ See Chapter 6.

⁶⁵ Qiang Zhang and Robert Weatherley, ‘The rise of “Republican fever” in the PRC and the implications for CCP legitimacy’, *China Information*, Vol 27, Issue 3, 2013, pp. 277 – 300.

⁶⁶ Michael Szonyi, ‘Ming fever: the present’s past as the People’s Republic turns sixty’, *China Heritage Quarterly*, 2010, 21.

revolution in order to safeguard its own historical legitimacy. Positive reassessments of the Republic weakens the case for its overthrow in 1949, and consequently the legitimacy of the new regime that resulted from it.

The views represented in ‘Republican fever’ were polar opposites of Maoist views of history, and naturally triggered strong negative reactions from the neo-Maoists, who had been vocal in defending Mao’s revolutionary and theoretical legacy since the early 2000s thanks of the new space for public discussions afforded by the internet, and became even more influential after Bo Xilai began his Maoist-inspired ‘sing red, strike black’ campaign in Chongqing.⁶⁷ However, state media initially tolerated the ‘fever’, probably because CCP-KMT rapprochement was at its peak at the time. But as the CCP became increasingly wary of the threat posed by so-called ‘historical nihilism’,⁶⁸ party propagandists have stepped up their attacks on ‘Republican fever’.

In November 2011, soon after the centenary of the 1911 Revolution pushed ‘Republican fever’ to a peak, the *International Herald Leader* (*Guoji Xianqu Daobao*), a newspaper run by the Xinhua News Agency, published an article entitled ‘The “nostalgic fever for the Republic” needs to be moderately cooled down’.⁶⁹ It said that talking about the Republic had become a fashion and that ‘in some authors’ works, the Republic seems to have become a synonym for “democracy”, “freedom”, “morality” and “justice”’. The article rejected the increasing tendency to be ‘positive about everything to do with the Republic’, and cited commentator Nan

⁶⁷ See Kerry Brown and Simone van Nieuwenhuizen, *China and the New Maoists* (London: Zed Books, 2016); and Jude Blanchette, *China’s New Red Guards: The Return of Radicalism and the Rebirth of Mao Zedong* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁶⁸ See ‘China is struggling to keep control over its version of the past: A battle is raging in the realm of historiography’, *The Economist*, 29 October, 2016. <https://www.economist.com/china/2016/10/29/china-is-struggling-to-keep-control-over-its-version-of-the-past>

⁶⁹ Zhao Wendao, “‘民国怀旧热’需要适度降温’, *International Herald Leader* (*Guoji Xianqu Daobao*), 25 November, 2011. <http://ihl.cankaoxiaoxi.com/2011/1125/6978.shtml>

Fang Shuo as saying, ‘If the Republic can be embellished like this, I cannot help but ask, was the 1949 Chinese revolution wrong?’⁷⁰

Nearly a year later, official criticisms of ‘Republican fever’ intensified, possibly because the ‘moderate’ criticism cited above had not worked. On 11 October 2012 (the day after the ROC National Day), the *Global Times*, a tabloid run by the *People’s Daily*, published a strongly-worded editorial entitled ‘It is a brazen act of lying to embellish the KMT regime of the past’.⁷¹ It admitted that favourable views of the Nationalist regime had led to online debates in mainland China:

‘Yesterday was “Double Ten” festival [ROC National Day] in Taiwan. On the mainland internet, there were debates on the merits and faults of the KMT regime in the past. Some people argued that the KMT’s defeat on the mainland was purely an historical accident. Some even claimed that the Japanese invasion “helped the CCP”. Such views of history have been causing trouble on the internet for some time.’⁷²

The editorial rejected these views as ‘out-and-out historical falsification’, and concluded, ‘Today’s Chinese rulers need to accept criticisms and supervision, but criticising them by embellishing the KMT government of the past and extolling the little regime in today’s Taiwan is not just senseless, it is also an insult to history.’⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ ‘社评：美化当年国民党政权是公然撒谎’, *Huanqiu Shibao (Global Times)*, 11 October, 2012. http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion_china/2012-10/3177957.html

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

After Xi Jinping took over, the party tightened ideological control on universities, think-tanks and media.⁷⁴ Vigilance against ‘historical nihilism’ increased, with the ‘Document No. 9’, which was circulated internally in 2013, listing it as one of seven subversive currents that needed to be tackled.⁷⁵ As could be expected, ‘Republican fever’ inevitably became a target of sustained official media attacks. On 10 October, 2014, the ROC National Day, the *Global Times* published another editorial against ‘Republican fever’, which was entitled ‘Morbid “Republican fever” is an insult to history’.⁷⁶ It said,

‘But in some corners of the mainland internet communities, and among a small number of intellectuals, a morbid nostalgia for the “Republic of China” has appeared, so much so that it has led to the emergence of a “Republican fever” within some small circles. Activists advocating such thinking constantly depict the mainland’s Republican era in a romanticised manner, calling it an era of “democracy”, “freedom” and “respect for knowledge”... A very small number of people assert that they do not recognise the 1 October National Day of the People’s Republic of China and “only mark Double Ten”, winning applause within their small circles.’⁷⁷

The editorial said that nostalgia is a basic human sentiment and that a mature society should ‘tolerate it as long as it can be tolerated’. But it went on to issue a stern warning:

⁷⁴ Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 37-42.

⁷⁵ Chris Buckley, ‘China’s New Leadership Takes Hard Line in Secret Memo’, *The New York Times*, 20 August, 2013. <https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20130820/c20document/dual/>

⁷⁶ ‘社评：病态的“民国热”是对历史的侮辱’, *Huanqiu Shibao (Global Times)*, 10 October, 2014.

<http://opinion.huanqiu.com/editorial/2014-10/5161367.html>

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

‘However, some people are treating “Republican fever” as an ideology or even a political tool which can be used to challenge the mainland society’s mainstream historiography and understanding of actual politics. Their advocacy is no longer just expressions of petty bourgeois sentiment. Rather, they are engaged in malicious deception. Their tricks should be mercilessly debunked.’⁷⁸

In the following year, attacks on ‘Republican fever’ became more official. In January 2015, Jiang Xianzhi, a veteran party historian who served as director of the CCP’s Party Literature Research Centre from 1991 to 2002, warned that ‘Republican fever’ was a phenomenon that ‘deserves vigilance’. In an article published in the journal *Zhonghua Hun (Chinese Soul)*, which was administered by the CCP Central Party School, he wrote, ‘Some people have expressed nostalgic sentiments for Old China. Some people have been trying to overturn the verdict on Chiang Kai-shek, reassessing Chiang as a positive figure, making a fuss about his diaries and vowing to rewrite the modern history. This is a blatant manifestation of historical nihilism.’⁷⁹

In the same month, an article written by three researchers at the Ministry of Education’s Social Science Development Research Centre identified ‘Republican fever’ as a new trend in historical nihilism. Calling it ‘a twisted and morbid nostalgia for the Republican era’, the article, which was published in *Hongqi Wengao (Red Flag Manuscripts)*, run by the Qiushi magazine, attributed the ‘fever’ to the ‘deliberate guidance and instigation by people with ulterior motives’ and the ‘behind-the-scenes influence from Western anti-China forces and the Taiwan Independence separatists’.⁸⁰ In March 2015, also writing in *Hongqi Wengao*, Song Lidian, a

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Jiang Xianzhi, ‘关于意识形态问题的一些看法’, *Zhonghua Hun (Chinese Soul)*, Issue 1, January 2015. <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/n/2015/0126/c85037-26449381.html>

⁸⁰ Zhu Nianfeng, Zheng Liping and Wang Xueling, ‘2014 年思想理论领域的热点问题’, *Hongqi Wengao (Red Flag Manuscripts)*, 29 January, 2015. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-01/29/c_127437073_3.htm

Marxism researcher at the CASS, listed ‘Republican fever’ as one of six main categories of information peddled by ‘hostile forces’ on mobile networks that ‘affect the state’s ideological security’.⁸¹

In December 2017, China Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) convened a high-profile four-day conference attended by more than 100 scholars from across the country, which was dedicated entirely to tackling ‘Republican fever’.⁸² At the opening ceremony of the conference, which was entitled ‘Materialistic view of history and the academia and social development of the Republic’, CASS President Wang Weiguang said in a speech:

‘In recent years, the history of Republican China has become a prominent academic subject. A large number of scholars have been attracted to work in this field, producing an abundance of academic achievements. At the same time, the significance of Republican China history has gone beyond the academic field, attracting attention from various sectors of society and giving rise to the so-called “Republican fever”. What worries us is that some erroneous ideological trends under the influence of historical nihilism have emerged with it. There has been an inclination to embellish and elevate “the Republic” in a one-sided manner, which have even led to some absurd views. The reasons for that include a lack of basic knowledge of history and a biased way of thinking. There are also some people who are disregarding historical truth because they are dissatisfied with reality.’⁸³

⁸¹ Song Lidan, ‘维护移动网络时代国家意识形态安全’, *Hongqi Wengao (Red Flag Manuscripts)*, 20 March, 2015. http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/hqwg/2015-03/20/c_1114710353.htm

⁸² Hu Huawei, “唯物史观与民国学术及社会发展”研讨会召开’, *Guangming Ribao (Guangming Daily)*, 7 December, 2017, p. 4. http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2017-12/07/nw.D110000gmrb_20171207_6-04.htm

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Li Jie, president of the *Qiushi (Seeking Truth)*, the theoretical journal of the CCP Central Committee, said at the ceremony, ‘In recent years, research on the history of Republican China has indeed produced a lot of achievements, but there does exist, to a certain extent, an inclination to overly embellish the Republic, which should arouse our vigilance.’⁸⁴

In 2018, party ideologues continued to attack ‘Republican fever’. Writing in *Hongqi Wengao* in August 2018, Dong Xuewen, a professor at Peking University, called ‘Republican fever’ a form of ‘soft historical nihilism’. In his view, unlike ‘direct historical nihilism’, which blatantly vilifies CCP leaders and negates the communist revolution and therefore is easy to identify and tackle, some writers have adopted a different strategy. ‘Some articles are intended to set off a so-called “Republican fever”, making plausible arguments that the Republican era was perfect, and deliberately trying to give an impression that “the present is worse than the past”.’⁸⁵ Similarly, Guan Feng, a Marxism scholar at the South China Normal University, wrote in *Lilun yu Pinglun (Theory and Commentary)*, a journal administered by the Fujian provincial Propaganda Department, in December 2018 that some people have been ‘doing nihilism’ in an ‘indirect’ way by ‘overturning the verdict on the Nationalists represented by Chiang Kai-shek and embellishing the history of the Republic either overtly or covertly’.⁸⁶

In August 2019, Wang Xuebin, an associate professor at the Central Party School, wrote in *Beijing Daily* that ‘the “Republican fever” is a disease and needs to be cured’.⁸⁷ In January 2020, Zhu Jidong, executive vice-director of the CASS Research Centre on National Cultural

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Dong Xuewen, ‘揭一揭软性历史虚无主义的真实面目’, *Hongqi Wengao*, Issue 16, August 2018. http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/hqwg/2018-08/29/c_1123346540.htm

⁸⁶ Guan Feng, ‘当前我国历史虚无主义思潮的发展态势和有效应对’, *Lilun yu Pinglun (Theory and Commentary)*, Issue 5, December 2018. http://www.cssn.cn/index/skpl/201812/t20181219_4796244_1.shtml

⁸⁷ Wang Xuebin, ‘民国热是种“病”，得治；此病之源头，在心——替“民国热”号一脉’, *Beijing Daily*, 12 August 2019, p. 15. http://bjrb.bjd.com.cn/html/2019-08/12/content_12059034.htm

Security and Ideological Construction, attacked the Republican nostalgia in *Qianxian (Front Line)*, a magazine run by the Beijing party committee.⁸⁸ In a piece warning of the continued existence of ‘historical nihilism’, he wrote, ‘Historical nihilism has also infiltrated the cultural sphere, especially in the film and television sectors, its usual manifestations being the glorification of KMT armed forces and the degrading of Communist forces’. ‘Some other films depict the Republic with a mood of appreciation, elegance and nostalgia, but represent New China with an atmosphere of dilapidation, shabbiness and cruelty.’⁸⁹ What is particularly notable in these recent pieces is that the authors see the ‘Republican fever’ as still ongoing in 2019 and beyond, six years after Document No. 9 signalled the beginning of Xi’s ideological clampdown.⁹⁰

Official condemnation of the ‘fever’ may suggest that any offending content would be ruthlessly censored. However, in practice, censorship of relevant content has been far from clear-cut. ‘Forever Young’ (*wuwen xidong*), a film that portrayed Republican-era intellectuals as pioneers of China’s modernisation and patriotic struggle against Japanese aggression, was suspended for six years but was eventually released in 2018 and became a major box office hit.⁹¹ The patriotic and intellectual legacies of Republican-era universities were subsequently praised by Xi himself, when visiting Nankai University in 2019 and the site of Xinan Lianda in 2020.⁹² In June 2019, ‘The Eight Hundred’ (*babai*), a film telling the story of Nationalist soldiers’ defence of a warehouse against the Japanese during the 1937 Battle of Shanghai, was

⁸⁸ Zhu Jidong, ‘警惕历史虚无主义新动向’, *Qianxian (Front Line)* magazine, Issue 1, January 2020. <http://www.kunlunce.com/klzt/fanduilishixuwuzhuyi/2020-01-16/139711.html>

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ *Economy*, 2019, pp. 37-38.

⁹¹ Louisa Chiang and Perry Link, ‘Before the Revolution’, *New York Review of Books*, 7 June, 2018.

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2018/06/07/eileen-chang-before-the-revolution/>

⁹² See Chapter 3.

pulled from Shanghai film festival and later had its official release cancelled.⁹³ The reason for the cancellation was not clear, but one week before the festival, the Chinese Red Culture Research Association, which was managed by the CASS, held a conference on filmmaking where attendees, some of whom were Maoists, lambasted the film, especially the prominence it gave to the ROC national flag.⁹⁴ Considering the sensitive nature of the content and the political atmosphere under Xi, the film's cancellation was not surprising. What deserves attention, however, is that it was pulled only at the last minute after it had gone through rounds of checks. Also notable is the fact that it has not been definitively banned. Wang Zhongjun, chairman of Huayi Brothers Media, which produced 'The Eight Hundred', told Sina website in January 2020 that the film was only being revised and would definitely be released in the future.⁹⁵ Whatever happens to the film in the end, it is clear that the censors have not been unanimous on how to handle it. This raises a question that will be dealt with in the next section: after six years of ideological tightening, why have censorship rules against 'Republican fever' continued to be confused and contested?

3. Conflicted identities: Implications for CCP legitimacy

CCP propaganda and censorship are disciplined and effective, in most cases. Media bans on taboo subjects such as Tiananmen are so effective that they have caused amnesia on a massive scale among the population.⁹⁶ However, official attempts at controlling 'Republican fever' do not seem to have been as effective as efforts to censor other topics listed above. As the last

⁹³ Elaine Yau, 'Chinese war film *The Eight Hundred*'s release cancelled, days after it was pulled from Shanghai film festival', *South China Morning Post*, 17 June, 2019.

<https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/entertainment/article/3014801/first-chinese-imax-war-film-eight-hundred-pulled-shanghai>

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ '王中军：我很期待《八佰》上映', *Sina Finance*, 16 January, 2020.

<https://finance.sina.com.cn/onehour/2020-01-16/doc-iihnzakh4456872.shtml>

⁹⁶ Louisa Lim, *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

section shows, while the CCP has been taking measures since the reassessment started in the late 1970s to contain its potential negative impacts on party legitimacy, it failed to prevent the emergence of widespread nostalgia for pre-communist China. Though ‘Republican fever’ has been one of the main targets of the high-profile campaign against ‘historical nihilism’, official concerns over the ‘fever’ do not show any sign of abating. So why has the CCP failed to put ‘Republican fever’ under control?

Difficulty in censoring ‘Republican fever’

The fundamental reason why the CCP has been unable to put the nostalgia for the Republic under control is that, in the reform era, the party’s propaganda machine has had multiple objectives that are incompatible with one another.

The CCP’s ultimate goal is to keep itself in power. Maintaining the party’s ideological and historical legitimacy is a necessary condition of achieving that objective, but not a sufficient one. As Marxism-Leninism has been discredited and the Maoist idea of ‘continued revolution’ has been rejected by the Deng-ist regime, portraying itself as a champion for national interest and modernisation has become increasingly important as the CCP’s survival strategy. Therefore, while propaganda outlets have had to continue to support the PRC’s original identity narrative based on revolution and class struggle, they have also been instructed to support the country’s new identity narrative in the reform era, which prioritise modernisation and nationalism. However, these two identity narratives are fundamentally at odds with each other and the contradiction has grown over time. As Cheng Chen observes, in the post-Deng era, the PRC’s ideological repertoire consists of ‘selective elements from the precommunist era, the

Maoist era, and the Deng era'. These elements are far from compatible with one another, and the incompatibility is likely to become even more acute in the foreseeable future.⁹⁷

Nowhere is this incompatibility manifested more strikingly than in the field of modern Chinese history. In order to justify the communist revolution and maintain the party-state's historical legitimacy, official media have continued to paint a negative picture of China's pre-communist era, calling it dark, oppressive, impoverished and ripe for revolution. But at the same time, official propaganda have also been promoting a positive view of certain aspects of the same period in an attempt to support the post-Mao leadership's priorities of modernisation and nationalism. The two views of history are meant to support different aspects of the CCP's legitimacy, but they are diametrically opposed to each other. The positive portrayals of certain aspects of Republican China may have benefited some of the CCP's current policy priorities, but they pose a long-term threat to the party-state's historical legitimacy.

In the Xi regime's crackdown down on 'historical nihilism', the government has taken some strong measures against perceived threats to damage the party's historical legitimacy. In 2016, a Beijing court ruled that historian Hong Zhenkuai, who had questioned the official account of the 'Five Heroes on Langya Mountain' in two articles published in the *Yanhuang Chunqiu* magazine in 2013, had defamed Communist anti-Japanese heroes and ordered him to post a public apology on websites and in news outlets.⁹⁸ In 2018, the National People's Congress passed a law making it potentially criminal to 'misrepresent, defame, profane or deny the deeds

⁹⁷ Cheng Chen, *The Return of Ideology: The Search for Regime Identities in Postcommunist Russia and China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), p. 116.

⁹⁸ Kiki Zhao, 'Chinese Court Upholds Ruling against Historian Who Questioned Tale of Wartime Heroes', *The New York Times*, 15 August, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/16/world/asia/china-hong-zhenkuai-langya.html>

and spirits of heroes and martyrs'.⁹⁹ But these measures, which target direct attacks on the CCP's own leaders and heroes, do not really address 'Republican fever', though it has been identified as a key manifestation of 'historical nihilism'.

While straightforward cases of challenges to the CCP's own historical record are relatively easy to identify and deal with, party ideologues, as mentioned in the last section, have complained that 'Republican fever' is a 'soft' and 'indirect' form of 'historical nihilism' that is more difficult to tackle. Blanket bans can be imposed on direct attacks on CCP heroes, but do not really work on nostalgia for the Republic, because the positive reassessments of Republican-era legacies have over the years been allowed or even encouraged by the CCP's own propaganda authorities. As a result, there are often no clear 'red lines' to guide censorship and to deter writers and producers from engaging in such 'nihilistic' behaviours.

For example, party propagandists have long been attacking 'historical nihilism' in accounts of the War against Japan which they claim exaggerate the KMT's role and diminish the contribution made by the CCP. Such attacks were prevalent in official media in the run-up to the 70th war anniversary in 2015,¹⁰⁰ and the praise for the KMT's contribution in the Hu Jintao era largely gave way to an almost exclusive focus in official commemorative statements on the CCP.¹⁰¹ However, in order to emphasise the legal basis of China's claim of sovereignty over Taiwan, stress China's war contribution and depict China as an ally of the West and a contributor and defender of the post-war international order, the PLA's Bayi Film Studio and the Chongqing CCP Propaganda Department produced the film *Cairo Declaration*, which

⁹⁹ Christian Shepherd, 'China makes defaming revolutionary heroes punishable by law', *Reuters news agency*, 27 April, 2018. <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-china-lawmaking/china-makes-defaming-revolutionary-heroes-punishable-by-law-idUKKBN1HY16C>

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Li Dianren, '坚决批驳历史虚无主义虚无共产党领导的抗战史', *Hongqi Wengao*, 26 August, 2015. <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n/2015/0826/c1003-27521330.html>

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 6.

inevitably gave Chiang Kai-shek considerable credit for his wartime diplomacy and mentioned Nationalist contributions to Allied war effort, especially that of the Chinese Expeditionary Force to Burma.¹⁰² Here, the party's need to defend its own historical legitimacy and the regime's drive to further its diplomatic goals and promote nationalism came into direct conflict with each other.

Similarly, critics of 'historical nihilism' have attacked favourable assessments of the economy during the Republican era. At the 2017 CASS conference on Republican China studies, mentioned in the last section, one of the five keynote speeches was dedicated to rejecting the economic achievements of the Nanjing Decade (1927-1937).¹⁰³ But in the same year, official media have touted the pre-communist traditions of economic openness in places such as Harbin and Qingdao, in order to support Xi's new 'One Belt One Road' initiative and promote the development of international finance.¹⁰⁴ On one hand, party propagandists attempt to maintain the image of 'old China' as backward and impoverished so as to justify the communist revolution. On the other, they see a need to invoke the pre-communist legacies of entrepreneurship and cosmopolitanism to serve the contemporary priorities of economic development and globalisation. But doing the latter inevitably damages the effectiveness of the former.

Due to the self-contradictory identity narratives and propaganda objectives, the CCP has found it impossible to crush 'Republican fever', despite the perceived seriousness of the threat. The conflicted identities have not only posed a threat to the CCP's historical legitimacy, but has

¹⁰² Liu Yu, '反法西斯题材电影"开罗宣言"开机 胡军韩雪演夫妻', *Chongqing Wanbao*, 9 March, 2015. <http://media.people.com.cn/n/2015/0309/c40606-26658262.html>

¹⁰³ Zuo Yuhe and Zhang Deming, '民国学术研究中的“历史虚无主义”须适当回应——“唯物史观与民国学术及社会发展”学术研讨会综述', *Shijie Shehuizhuyi Yanjiu (Studies on World Socialism)*, 29 December, 2018. http://www.qstheory.cn/lqikan/2018-12/29/c_1123924425.htm

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 2.

also given rise to an alternative national identity narrative among the population based on the favourable appraisal of Republican China.

The rise of pro-ROC nationalists in mainland China

The CCP's concerns over the reassessment of Republican China are by no means groundless. By the end of the twentieth century, reinterpretations of the history of Republican China had become part of the arsenal of overseas anti-CCP dissidents. In 1999, Xin Haonian, a mainland Chinese scholar living in exile in the United States, published a book in the US entitled *Shui shi Xin Zhongguo? (Which is the New China?)*, which argued that the Republic of China was the real 'New China' and called for the restoration of the Republic in mainland China.¹⁰⁵ According to Xin, he had developed his views when he was in China as a result of the 'movement of historical reflection' on Republican China triggered by the CCP's decision to use war history to woo the KMT in the 1980s.¹⁰⁶ Xin's views were adopted by some overseas dissidents, mostly prominently Dr Wang Bingzhang, one of the founders of the overseas Chinese pro-democracy movement, who wrote in 2000 that Chinese people should 'rebuild the Republic of China' as a united democratic country.¹⁰⁷

The reach of such pro-ROC national identity narratives was not limited to the overseas dissident community. In August 2004, an online community named the Union of Chinese Nationalists (UOCN) was established on the mainland and its members claimed to be 'spiritual members' of the Chinese Nationalist Party.¹⁰⁸ For several years, the UOCN, which claimed to

¹⁰⁵ Xin Haonian, *谁是新中国——中国现代史辨 (Which is the New China: Distinguishing between Right and Wrong in Modern Chinese History)* (New York, Blue Sky Publishing House, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ Xin Haonian, 1999, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Wang Bingzhang, '重建中华民国', *Huanghuagang Magazine*, Issue 2, July 2002, pp. 112-118.

¹⁰⁸ Jiang Xun, '寻回孙中山——中国大陆泛蓝联盟现象背后', *Asia Weekly (Yazhou Zhoukan)*, 11 May 2008. <https://boxun.com/news/gb/china/2008/05/200805032145.shtml>

have 2,000 mostly young online registered members, was active both online and offline. Members of the group organised gatherings to mark the KMT's war contribution, publicly exhibited ROC and KMT flags in cities such as Wuhan and Chongqing, and took part in human rights activities. Predictably, members were often harassed by police and some were jailed.¹⁰⁹ In 2007, the PRC authorities announced that the UOCN was an 'illegal organization'.¹¹⁰

Despite the crackdown on the UOCN, the Republican identity narrative kept spreading in mainland China. In the late 2000s, as popular interest in the Republican era became feverish, and as social networking and micro-blogging websites enabled people to express themselves more easily, supporters of the Republican national identity became increasingly active on social media. They often had the KMT emblem as part of their online monikers and became known collectively as a distinct online faction – *guofen*, which can mean either 'Republican fans' or 'KMT fans'.¹¹¹ Their online presence, especially on significant dates in China's modern history such as the ROC's National Day, attracted considerable attention from Taiwanese and overseas Chinese media.¹¹²

It is impossible to gauge exactly how influential this online faction has become in mainland China, but judging from the reactions from CCP scholars, propagandists and military officers, the rise of the 'Republican fans' has certainly caused major concerns in party ranks. In the run-up to the 70th war anniversary in 2015, Lieutenant General Wang Hongguang, former deputy

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ '国台办称中国泛蓝联盟是非法组织', China News Service, 25 Apr 2007. http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/200704/0425_17_108886.shtml

¹¹¹ See Zhang and Weatherley, 2013. Also see mention of 'guofen' in Rongbin Han's account of online debates between critics and supporters of the CCP regime - Rongbin Han, 'Defending the Authoritarian Regime Online: Cina's "Voluntary Fifty-cent Army"', *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 224, 2015, pp. 1006-1025.

¹¹² See Wang Mingyi and Chen Boting, '「國粉」慶雙十 我國旗微博飄揚', *China Times*, Taipei, 10 October, 2012. <https://bit.ly/2XZAQF2>. And CK, '民国复兴运动兴起“国粉”队伍壮大', *Radio Free Asia*, 5 March, 2015. <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/zhengzhi/ck-03052015093356.html>

commander of the PLA's Nanjing Military Region, published an article in the *Global Times*, which was entitled 'History will not change according to the will of "Republican fans"'.¹¹³ Wang lambasted pro-ROC internet users' favourable view of the KMT war effort and their negative view of the CCP's performance, and said he wanted to 'remind the "Republican fans" to see the issue in a historical, objective and fair manner'. Notably, he did not give any explanation on what he meant by 'Republican fans', which indicates that both the author and the newspaper editors assumed that this concept was universally understood by PRC readers.¹¹⁴

Zhang Haipeng, a veteran historian at the CASS, also criticised 'Republican fans'. Writing in *Beijing Daily*, he said, 'Nowadays some "Republican fans" echo the KMT's traditional view, comprehensively embellishing the KMT's resistance and negating the CCP's resistance. This is a manifestation of historical nihilism.'¹¹⁵ Xiong Lei, a senior editor at Xinhua news agency and daughter of legendary wartime CCP spy Xiong Xianghui, expressed bewilderment at the scale of the problem. Writing on the *Global View* website, she said, 'Now there are so many "Republican fans". I'm puzzled: They can obtain so much historical knowledge and historical material, but why can't they make a correct judgement? Who exactly is falsifying our true history?'¹¹⁶ Major General Xu Yan, a professor at the PLA's National Defence University, issued a stern warning over the threat 'Republican fans' posed. Writing in *Guofang Cankao* (*National Defence Reference*), a military strategy journal run by the PLA mouthpiece *Liberation Army Daily*, he said, 'Class struggle is no longer stressed nowadays, but faced with

¹¹³ Wang Hongguang, '历史不以"国粉"的意志为转移', *Huanqiu Shibao (Global Times)*, 29 January, 2015. <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/culture/2015-01/5535613.html>

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Zhang Haipeng, '为什么说共产党是抗战中流砥柱', *Beijing Ribao (Beijing Daily)*, 8 June, 2015. <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2015/0608/c49157-27117895.html>

¹¹⁶ Xiong Lei, '到底是谁在篡改我们真实的历史?', *Huanqiu Shiye (Global View)*, 9 October, 2015. http://www.qstheory.cn/politics/2015-10/09/c_1116766600.htm

such public opinion offensives aimed at negating the “root” of the Chinese revolution, sober people must not let down their guard.’¹¹⁷

In September 2016, Wu Qiang, a Marxism lecturer at Shanxi Agriculture University, published an academic paper on ‘Republican fans’ among university students.¹¹⁸ According to Wu, ‘Due to the lack of correct public opinion guidance and the wanton spread of untrue information in cyberspace, the number of “Republican fans” has been increasing in recent years. Especially within the special community of university students, they are getting more and more support and sympathy.’ Wu warned that ‘the rapid spread of the phenomenon of “Republican fans” among university students’ was ‘endangering the education and future of the socialist nation and dissolving the mainstream ideology’.¹¹⁹

To sum up, the regime’s failure to exert effective control over the historical discourses regarding Republican China has led to the emergence of a new national identity narrative in the PRC, which supports the legacy of Republican China and takes a dim view of the CCP party-state. Judging from warnings in the state media, this identity narrative seems to have been spreading at an alarming rate and posing a challenge to the identity narrative the state has been instilling in the minds of the population.

¹¹⁷ Xu Yan, ‘炒作“抗战名将”张灵甫意欲何为’, *Guofang Cankao (National Defence Reference)*, 31 August, 2015. http://www.81.cn/mjzt/2015-08/31/content_6656935_3.htm

¹¹⁸ Wu Qiang, ‘高校大学生“国粉”现象透析’, *山西高等学校社会科学学报(Social Sciences Journal of Universities in Shanxi)*, Issue 9, September 2016, pp. 15-19.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Conflicted identity narratives and the CCP's nationalist legitimacy

What implications do the CCP's conflicted identity narratives have for its legitimacy? Especially since Tiananmen, the CCP has been emphasising its own role as the paramount patriotic force and guardian of national pride in order to use nationalism as a major basis of its legitimacy.¹²⁰ As Allen Carlson summarises, history plays a central role in framing the content of modern Chinese nationalism, and this historical anchor, largely shaped by the CCP regime, has three main points - a sense of superiority over the past greatness of imperial China, an equally endemic memory of the 'century of national humiliation', and the CCP's 'valiant efforts' to save China from humiliation.¹²¹

But the positive reassessment of pre-communist China, especially Republican China, means that two of these three points key to the CCP's nationalist historical discourse are facing challenge. While the 'century of humiliation' narrative describes pre-communist China as hopelessly impoverished, corrupt and oppressive, the new historical narrative recognises that significant efforts were made during the pre-communist period to reform, develop and modernise China. While the CCP's orthodox version of history stresses 'only the CCP could have saved China', the new historical narrative recognises the significant contribution made by various non-communist actors to defending and modernising the country. As a result, the new narrative about China's modern history, which has been allowed and sometimes even championed by the CCP itself, is undermining the party's monopoly on Chinese nationalism.

¹²⁰ Suisheng Zhao, 'A state-led nationalism: The patriotic education campaign in post-Tiananmen China', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 31, Issue 3, 1998, pp. 287-302.

¹²¹ Allen Carlson, 'A flawed perspective: the limitations inherent within the study of Chinese nationalism', *Nations and Nationalism* 15 (1), 2009, pp. 20-35.

The fact that the CCP is inadvertently ceding control over Chinese nationalism has profound implications for its legitimacy. As Cheng Chen observes, while post-communist regimes try to use nationalism to their advantage, nationalism can be seized by diverse political forces, including the regimes' critics and opponents, to advance their own agendas.¹²² In other words, Chinese nationalism does not necessarily support the CCP's legitimacy, and can in fact be turned against it. In fact, as Yinxian Zhang et al found, online Chinese nationalists are not monolithically xenophobic, and some of them actually incorporate liberal values to challenge the government.¹²³ As the CCP's self-contradictory narratives on China's modern history weaken the historical anchor of its own nationalist discourse, it makes it easier for its critics to challenge the legitimacy of the one-party state.

Most importantly, the CCP has been using nationalism as a weapon against 'Western' liberal democracy, calling it incompatible with China's national conditions and even equating it with foreign imperialism and hegemony.¹²⁴ In fact, as Christopher Hughes observes, the CCP's one-party rule 'cannot exist without using nationalism as a reason to prevent the emergence of multi-party democracy'.¹²⁵ But the reassessment of Republican China has revealed that China has its own legacy of liberalism and democratic thinking. Of course, Chinese governments during the Republican era were far from being democratic. But as Orville Schell notes, the national conversation in China in the run-up to the 1911 Revolution and during the early Republican era can be seen as 'China's hidden democratic legacy' and 'has clear relevance for

¹²² Cheng Chen, p. 33.

¹²³ Yinxian Zhang, Jiajun Liu and Ji-rong Wen, 'Nationalism on Weibo: Towards a Multifaceted Understanding of Chinese Nationalism', *The China Quarterly*, 235, September 2018, pp. 758-783.

¹²⁴ Suisheng Zhao, "Chinese Nationalism and Authoritarianism in the 1990s", in Suisheng Zhao (ed.) *China and Democracy: Reconsidering the Prospects for a Democratic China* (Routledge: 2000), p. 259; and Shaun Breslin, "Democratizing One-Party Rule in China", in Peter Burnell & Richard Youngs (eds.) *New Challenges to Democratization* (Routledge: 2009), p. 134

¹²⁵ Christopher R. Hughes, *Chinese Nationalism in the Global Era* (Routledge 2006), p. 156.

the challenges of China's current need for political self-reinvention'.¹²⁶ In fact, Chinese intellectuals have in recent years invoked the Republican ideal of constitutionalism to call for political reforms.¹²⁷ China's legacy of modern nationalism, as Bruce Gilley points out, is not exclusively a force for authoritarianism, but also has the potential to support democracy.¹²⁸ Bringing such legacies back into contemporary discussions on China's national identity certainly makes it less straightforward for the regime to pit nationalism against liberal democracy, and enables activists and internet users to argue for democracy from a nationalist standpoint.

In her book on the history of the Republic of China, Diana Lary points out: 'Since 1949 the Mainland and Taiwan have been locked in a battle for the control of the authentic China, the "real" Chineseness.'¹²⁹ It is a clash between 'two conceptions of what it means to be Chinese' and 'two concepts of a republic'.¹³⁰ But this study has shown that the clash over 'Chineseness' between Republican China and Communist China is not limited to the cross-strait competition.

Since 1978, driven by its new priorities over pan-Chinese nationalism and Western-oriented modernisation, the PRC has been forced to evoke various legacies of pre-communist China to serve contemporary political objectives and support its new national identity narrative. But this has led to nostalgia for the Republic in mainland China, which has come to be known as 'Republican fever'. Nowadays, CCP propagandists see 'Republican fever' as a major threat to the party's legitimacy, but this threat has been created by the CCP's own propaganda machine.

¹²⁶ Orville Schell, 'China's Hidden Democratic Legacy', *Foreign Affairs*, Jul/Aug 2004, Vol. 83, Issue 4, pp. 116-124.

¹²⁷ Rogier Creemers, 'China's Constitutionalism Debate: Content, Context and Implications', *The China Journal*, No. 74, July 2015, pp. 91-109.

¹²⁸ Bruce Gilley, *China's Democratic Future: How It Will Happen and Where It Will Lead* (Columbia University Press: 2004), pp. 13-14.

¹²⁹ Diana Lary, *China's Republic* (Cambridge University Press: 2007), p. 214.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 208.

Unfortunately for the CCP, its continuing confusion over ideology and national identity is making it impossible to put the reassessment of Republican China completely under control. Seventy years after the Republic was overthrown in mainland China, its legacies still loom large in this vast country.

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