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“Dinner Party of Discourse Owners”

China’s Intellectual Scene Today

*Revolution is not a dinner party, or writing
an essay, or painting a picture, or doing
embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely
and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous,
restrained and magnanimous. A revolution
is an insurrection, an act of violence by
which one class overthrows another.*

—Mao Zedong

Today Mao’s famous axiom, dating from 1927 and chanted by millions of fanatic Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), strikes one as both an anachronism and an oxymoron. In today’s post-revolutionary China, any invocation of revolution as insurrection and violence chills the spine of the political powers, whose utmost concern is *weiwèn*, or maintaining stability. Meanwhile, the buzzword in Beijing’s political circles is “cultural soft power,” or “discourse power” (*huayu quan*), which amounts to nothing less than dinner parties, writing essays, or painting pictures (or making motion pictures). In China, we seem to have come to a time of festivity and celebration filled with dinner parties, and “revolution” appears only in nostalgic reproduction in films and TV dramas or as a parody-travesty of Mao and the icons of Cultural Revolution in the postmodern, contemporary Chinese art of Ai Weiwei and his like, thriving largely in the West, with strong connotations of political dissent.

However, the Mao era passed on to its posterity a revolutionary culture or ideological legacy with an enduring, significant impact on China today. *Revolution* is now a passé word in China and elsewhere. However, revolution and liberation are fundamental precepts in the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) history. And despite numerous revisions since Deng Xiaoping’s *gaige kaifang* (reform and opening up), revolution, or at least the revolutionary rhetoric, has still been the legitimating, if no longer the ruling, ideology of the CCP. The Deng era, beginning in 1979, known also as the *gaige kaifang* or the New Era, has set in motion China’s modernization and globalization, turning China into an economic giant and a significant player in world

affairs today. The Deng era began as a fierce denouncement of the radical ideology of the Cultural Revolution. Deng's *gaige kaifang* reversed virtually everything that Mao's radicalism embodied, replacing the pursuit of moral purity with that of material wealth. However, Deng insisted that "Mao's banner" should never be abandoned, and with his astute, pragmatic wisdom, Deng managed to salvage China from one after another political and ideological crisis, particularly the 1989 Tiananmen event. The banner of Mao thus has remained as an ambiguous and ambivalent icon ever since the *gaige kaifang*, providing a legitimating rhetoric and cultural imagining, on the one hand, and serving as a reminder of the CCP's ideological legacy on the other. Now, the revolutionary legacy nonetheless becomes an increasing liability for China, with Mao's ideology of egalitarianism and idealism utterly at odds with China's social reality and the policies of post-Mao leadership, bereft of any ideals of revolution and communism.

The Chinese intellectuals, or *zhishi fenzi* (intelligentsia, or literati class, in different variants), now seem to embody all of the internal fissures and contradictions that more than three decades of *gaige kaifang* have set in motion. Indeed, intellectuals not only serve as the agents of soft power or discourse power; they have also borne the brunt of Mao's sinister foreboding of revolution as violence and, ironically, as dinner parties and essay writing. Mao's revolution relied essentially on two armies: the army of guns, consisting of peasants; and the army of pens, or the cultural army consisting of urban intellectuals (McDougall, 1980, 84). Yet Mao never trusted the army of pens, and his hostility toward intellectuals undermined the coalition between the two revolutionary armies. Decades after Mao's death, a significant number of Chinese intellectuals still cannot forgive him for the massive persecutions they experienced during his reign. In the beginning of the *gaige kaifang*, Deng first mobilized the intellectuals to form a new coalition with the communist bureaucrats persecuted by the radicals of the Cultural Revolution. In the decade of the 1980s known as the Cultural Fever, those intellectuals in the humanities then took the center stage of China's social life, demolishing Mao's revolutionary ideology and calling forth a new Chinese cultural enlightenment and renaissance. The Tiananmen incident, however, signaled a political red line that could not be crossed, and the intellectuals' ambition of political reform that threatened to undermine the CCP's rule was brutally crushed.

Contrary to the expectation in the West that China would plummet back into a dark age of political suppression and ideological retrenchment in the aftermath of Tiananmen, China in the following

decades astonished the world with its miraculous economic growth and wholesale embrace of capitalism, from market economy to neoliberal ideologies and to consumer popular culture, stopping only short of adopting Western political democracy. The CCP under Deng, and then under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, respectively, has firmly taken the driver's seat of the Chinese economic locomotive, gradually turning themselves into the CEOs of a mammoth corporation, the CCP, Inc., which oversees the second-largest economy and perhaps the single most powerful state economy in the world. In the meantime, a technocratic elite has emerged. Replacing the revolutionary old guard of the Deng era, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao were themselves engineers and technocrats by training, and in the ensuing years they created a political elite of technocrats from the top down. Education in China has witnessed exponential growth and expansion since the late 1990s. While it has continued to invest heavily in natural sciences and engineering, the “pragmatic liberal arts fields,” or *yingyong wenke*—an odd Chinese concoction derived from the Ministry of Education's Changjiang Scholarship Award that began in the early 2000s to attract overseas Chinese scholars or returnees in economics, finance, and business management—received a boost as graduate business schools and MBA and EMBA programs mushroomed all over China.

Traditional liberal arts education and research, including the social sciences and humanities, suffered from this overwhelming trend of pragmatism. The humanists and social scientists—especially those in literature, philosophy, and history—who commanded China's limelight in the 1980s were forced to undergo a metamorphosis as inconceivable as it was painful for their self-esteem. In the words of Gan Yang (2006, 1), the self-styled crusader of the Cultural Fever of the 1980s, “The decade of the 1980s was the last era for *homo culture* and then from the 1990s, China entered an era for *homo economicus*.” Not unlike their engineering and business management counterparts, the humanists and social scientists over the years have gradually shifted their identity from intellectuals, or *zhishi fenzi*, to professionals, or *zhuanye renshi*. Their job? Producing a massive quantity of articles published in journals indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index in the United States or the Chinese Social Sciences Index—“core journals” of the first, second, and third tiers, with elaborate ranking systems—and to garner ever increasing amounts of research funds from national, provincial, and regional sources.

The National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science, the highest state agency for funding and setting research agendas in the social sciences and humanities (actually a subdivision of

the Propaganda Ministry of the CCP Central Committee), annually announces the subjects and categories for research grants and funds, covering twenty-three areas that range from Marxism and scientific socialism, economics, political sciences, literature, management sciences, and archeology to demography, ethnography, and so forth. Each area contains approximately thirty to fifty research topics. The 2012 topics include things like “U.S. and Western Export of Democracy and Ideological Safety in China,” “Improving Adjustment and Control of Real Estate Market in China,” “Theoretical System of Religion of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” and “Evolution of Chinese Feminist Literature in the New Era” (National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science 2012). Millions of yuan have been granted for liberal arts research, and numerous new grants and funds are being allocated. In the new rush on the gold mines of research grants, awards, and promotions, the intelligentsia of the New Cultural Movement of May Fourth 1919 and the traditional literati, or Confucian gentry class, that gave the special aura to Chinese intellectuals all but evaporate; or all that is solid melts into air, as it were.

Along with this seemingly irreversible transformation of the intellectual’s identity is the dissolution, if not disappearance, of the compelling issues and questions that China and the world face now. Take, for example, one of the most pressing questions for China: what is the set of core values or a dominant ideology that would bring some social cohesion and consensus in an increasingly divided, diverse country of 1.4 billion? What amounts to such an ideology (or facade of it) right now appears to be economic developmentalism, or the GDP fetish, coupled with a “get-rich” mentality, an unbridled pursuit of individual desires, and material wealth. Meanwhile China in recent decades has witnessed upsurges of nationalism in different variants, and the party-state apparently favors a cultural version of nationalism, searching for some synergy between Confucian values of “harmony” and “socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

Yet the fundamental questions remain. How can such Chinese values reconcile with, if not altogether be congruent to, the so-called universalism or universal values and principles as spelled out in such documents as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Bill of Rights (as the core of the US Constitution), and so on, and widely recognized and accepted in most parts of the world now? Specifically, what are the responses from the perspective of Chinese values, the very core of the Chinese soft power, to multiparty electoral democracy as the preferred political system, to the free mar-

ket economy, individualism, and the middle class as social foundation, and to cultural diversity and pluralism—all widely acknowledged as the fundamentals of the modern world? Will Marxism and socialism, let alone communism, still be viable alternatives for China in the Western-dominated modern world system of capitalism? In what sense is the “Chinese model,” if there is such a thing, different from the existing or nonexistent systems or models in the modern world, from Western democracy to East Asian autocracy and other kinds of capitalism? These larger fundamental questions have aroused a great deal of interest in China and in the world, especially in the recent years of economic woes, apparent decline of Western models of capitalism, and rapid rise and global expansion of China. And there is no lack of response and debate in China, as well. Yet in the bustle and hustle of China’s soft power and discourse power, the discourse owners—namely, the academic professionals, now with pockets full of grant money and with much-inflated self-confidence—seem to enjoy the carnivalesque sense of the dinner parties more than the substance of discourse about, or responses to, the fundamental questions.

In what follows, I offer a sketch of four groups of discourse owners: state strategists, the (politically) scandalous, professionals, and the *weibo* (microblogging) opinion leaders. They are invariably the most powerful and influential figures in academic and media sectors, who continue to prefer to refer to themselves as intellectuals or public intellectuals. Such a label, however, looks more like a way to amass cultural capital than a claim to serious critical scrutiny of societal problems. Of course, my sketches can offer only a partial glimpse at the intellectual scene in China today, meant as a critical commentary to provoke further critique rather than as objective assessment.

The State Strategists

What I loosely group as the state strategists, or *guoce pai*, share some common features: first, politically and ideologically, they are not pro-Western liberals even though they either received graduate education in the West or even now teach in the Western academic institutions; second, institutionally, they tend one way or another to identify themselves as policy consultants working for the think tanks or policy research centers in universities; third, academically, their fields are mostly so-called hard-core social sciences, such as economics, political science, and international relations, and rarely humanities. It should, however, be immediately pointed out that in the “pragmatic liberal arts,” such as economics, finance, and business management, the

political and ideological identities are quite complicated, as the majority of economic policy consultants are staunch supporters of Western neoliberal economic precepts while remaining politically close to the party-state and its economic policies. They are thus differentiated from those pro-Western, liberal-leaning academics who favor Western-style democracy and are thus decidedly critical of the party-state.

The so-called think tanks in China differ significantly from those in the United States or elsewhere in the West in that they usually belong to the academies of social sciences, which are Soviet-style research institutions at the national, provincial, and local levels focusing primarily on research rather than teaching at universities. In more recent decades they have tended to take on many government research projects with policy implications, even though the governments at various levels usually have their own research departments that serve as policy consultants, and there are numerous Communist Party schools across the country, functioning both as the party's primary policy research units and as training sites for officials. The recommendations of these think tanks are usually made after the decision or implementation of a policy, thus serving to justify the policy's "correctness"—with some minor adjustment for improvement in the future—rather than offering options or lobbying before a decision is made. Nevertheless, these Chinese-style think tanks have mushroomed in recent decades, particularly in economic sectors, with more vocal opinions aired through seminars, workshops, and media outlets; and the governments tend to consult more with these diverse groups of policy researchers, sometimes inviting them to lecture at the CCP standing committees, especially the scholars from Qinghua (Tsinghua) University and Beijing University.

One prominent state strategist is Hu Angang, a Qinghua scholar who directs the influential *Guoqing yanjiu zhongxin* (literally, the center for the study of state conditions, known in English as the Center for China Studies), jointly run by the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Qinghua University. With his background in automation engineering and his 1991–93 postdoctoral research at Yale University, where he collaborated with then Yale scholar Wang Shaoguang—a well-known New Left political scientist who now teaches in Hong Kong—Hu Angang emerged in the late 1990s as one of the staunch advocates for statist intervention in China's economic reform. He then founded the field of *guoqing yanjiu* (the study of state conditions), encompassing almost all policy-related issues from macroeconomic concerns to China's trade deficit, climate change, and unemployment.

His research articles, known as *guoqing baogao* (state condition reports), which adopt largely quantitative, empirical data and statistical approaches, are widely circulated in China's political sectors and often consulted by the CCP's higher authorities.

Starting in the late 1970s, American "futurologists" such as Alvin Toffler created a futurology fad in China, and since then have endeared themselves to the Chinese power elite by making favorable prophecies and predictions of China's development. Consequently, there is no lack of Chinese futurologists. Hu Angang often joins the chorus, predicting an ever brighter future for China with his impressive data and statistics. In a 2011 book, *China 2030: Towards Commonwealth of Prosperity*, Hu Angang announces that according to his research, China's GDP in 2030 will be double that of the United States, and the world under the leadership of China will then be a commonwealth of prosperity, or a *datong* world (common or unified world). As Hu Angang (2011) puts it, "Americans have their values, and [therefore] we need our discourse power, our values, and I translate our values in English as *datong* world." Hu Angang's objective of creating "Chinese values" and "discourse power" vis-à-vis American ones is often echoed by the top CCP leadership, and his recommendations apparently influence their decision making.

As early as 2004, Hu Angang stated that Chinese media power had already surpassed that of Japan and other major Western countries and had rapidly narrowed its gap with the United States. The evidence? In an article titled "The Empirical Study of the Rapid Rise of Chinese Media," Hu Angang compared China, the United States, Japan, Russia, and India, looking at newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet and using an impressive array of statistics, diagrams, charts, and data primarily concerning coverage and circulation rates. He concluded that since "national media power" is proportional to that of *zonghe guoli*, or comprehensive national power—largely the national GDP—China's rapid GDP growth will be matched by its global media power to compete with the United States (Hu and Zhang 2004, 21). Hu Angang was sharply rebuked by other Chinese media scholars for his GDP-centered argument for media power. Huang Dan, a Fudan University media expert, argues that Hu Angang in calculating the sum total of media capability of China in terms of newspaper circulation figures, television coverage figures, and so forth, and comparing that figure to the United States ignores the vast difference in per capita basis between China and the United States, which amounts to nothing less than comparing apples with bananas.

Huang acknowledges Hu Angang's objective of promoting ideological soft power and at the same time criticizes the Chinese media industry's trend toward expansion of its power only through technological and economic means. In the end, Huang thinks Hu Angang simply ignores the fact that China's domestic media and the so-called international media "follow different rules" or belong to completely different ideological and value frameworks (Huang 2006, 45). However, the logic of technological and economic determinism in Hu Angang's argument resonates in the minds of the CCP leadership. It was reported in January 2009 that CCP Central Committee's Propaganda Ministry decided to allocate 45 billion RMB, or the equivalent of \$6.6 billion U.S., to a Chinese government program to fund international ventures undertaken by state media. Since then the Chinese state media, such as China Central Television (CCTV), Xinhua News Agency, and the *People's Daily* have launched major "external propaganda" campaigns across the world, much to the chagrin of their Western counterparts and the skeptical Western audience (*International Herald Leader*, 2009).

The external propaganda campaign took a different spin as Zhang Weiwei's 2011 best seller *Zhongguo zhenhan* (*China Shocks*, or, in the book's 2012 English version, *The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State*) added a new tune to the chorus of Chinese models. The long list of celebratory views—from Jushua Ramo's "Beijing Consensus" (2004) to Martin Jacques's more ominous claim in *When China Rules the World* (2009)—now included that of Zhang, a Chinese scholar residing overseas who offered his strategic vision of why the Chinese model of development is the model for the future world, a model of a "civilizational state" rather than modern nation-states derived from the West. Zhang has impressive credentials: visiting faculty at the Geneva School of Diplomacy and International Relations (identified in his book's Chinese version as a professor at the University of Geneva) and translator to top Chinese leaders in the mid-1980s, including Deng Xiaoping, as the blurb of the book tells us. True to the best seller's design and format, *China Shocks* reads more like travelogue and prose essays, in sharp contrast to Hu Angang's tireless number crunching. The author enumerates his personal travel experiences in more than a hundred countries and canvases sweepingly the rise of China as a civilizational state in terms of the immense size of its population, land, history, culture, language, politics, society, and economy.

In the middle-school-textbook-style narrative, Zhang zeros in on the single most important factor of "size" or "length," arguing that

Chinese exceptionalism rests squarely on the magnitude of pretty much everything that China possesses: “China,” Zhang declares, “is a great world of extreme diversity and colors”; and then he goes on in his rhapsodic fantasizing:

If in history ancient civilizations like Egypt, the Two Rivers, India, and Greece had survived till today and undergone modern transformations, they could have become “civilizational states.” If the ancient Roman Empire had not split . . . then Europe could have been now a “civilizational state.” . . . However, as we look around the globe, we can see only one country in the world as an amalgam of an ancient civilization over thousands of years and a modern state, and that country is China. (2011, 244, my translation)

And the *Economist* review underscores his conclusion that China as such “is increasingly returning to its own roots for inspiration, and producing its own norms and standards” (quoted in the cover blurb of the English version, Zhang 2012). The book was hailed in China by a good many CCP officials and scholars. In the words of Li Junru (2011), former vice president of the CCP Central Party School writing in the *People’s Daily*, it is an inspiring book that “sends shock waves to the minds of Chinese people.”

The rhapsody on civilization aside, Zhang’s central thesis is the successful China model of today with its eight features, neatly coined in proverbial Chinese phrases: practical reason, strong government, prioritizing stability, emphasizing people’s livelihood, incremental reform, differential steps (of reform), mixed economy, and opening up to the world. In a Chinese critic’s analysis, none of those features amounts to anything structural or systematic; they merely describe certain policy orientations, and Zhang’s objective is only to justify the legitimacy of the current Chinese political system (Fang 2011). However, if one dismisses the book’s eight features as platitudes and the author as merely a sycophant of the Chinese party-state, one would miss an important point of the book. Simply put, Zhang’s summary of the quintessential characteristics of the China model effectively side-steps the fundamental questions concerning modernity and Western-derived universal values as pillars of modernity. In the debate between Zhang and Francis Fukuyama, Fukuyama (2011, 41) challenges the China model on its political institutions: “What China didn’t develop is the other two political institutions: rule of law and formal institutions

of political accountability.” Fukuyama insists on those fundamentals as indispensable preconditions of modernity. Zhang’s reply, however, is primarily journalistic and impressionistic, emphasizing the effectiveness of China’s current achievements of political accountability and legal practices, citing ample examples from recent years. In the meantime, he continues in the same dismissive style of *China Shocks* to castigate the current “failures” of the United States and the West in economic and political realms in contrast to the accomplishments of China now.

Whether in the seemingly objective, positivist, or scientific manner of Hu Angang, with dazzling charts and statistics, or in the more impressionistic style of Zhang, these state strategists unapologetically endorse Chinese exceptionalism as a thinly veiled counterbalance to American exceptionalism. Their justification for such a Chinese exceptionalism derives largely from China’s economic growth in recent decades, just as American exceptionalism is perceived as consisting essentially of the economic and military might of the United States. Ironically, the logic of economic determinism or developmentalism reigns supreme in the efforts of those state strategists to resuscitate Chinese cultural values and ideologies. In order to bolster China’s soft power, their only recourse seems to lie in reaffirming the hard power of material wealth. Now the Chinese state strategists seem to have faith merely in materialism, albeit a materialism deprived of any Marxist connotations.

The (Politically) Scandalous

There are still those highly politically sensitive and proactive academics and writers in China whose rejection of the GDP fetish and economic developmentalism and whose cries for political and social change endow them with a high degree of controversy, if not notoriety. Moreover, they are often at one of the two extremes of the political spectrum—the far Right or the far Left—which under China’s highly complex and volatile conditions render them scandalous, politically or otherwise. For lack of better labels I call the group the politically scandalous, and the two unlikely candidates for this grouping are Wang Hui, China’s leading New Left public intellectual, and Liu Xiaobo, the imprisoned political dissident and 2011 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

Needless to say, such a grouping would be immediately and vehemently rejected by the defenders of the two, as their politics and personal lives cannot be farther apart, and putting them together

seems thus deliberately provocative, if not preposterous. Wang Hui, an internationally famous literature professor at Qinghua University who now enjoys a good deal of honor and prestige as the standard bearer of China's New Left, has been accused of plagiarism by other Chinese academics, and yet no official investigations, let alone sanctions, have ever touched him, and he never publicly admits any guilt. By contrast, Liu Xiaobo, a veteran political dissident since Tiananmen in 1989, had been detained and incarcerated incessantly for his inflammatory words and political activism against the single party rule of the CCP. While serving eleven years of imprisonment on charges of "inciting the subversion of the state power," punishable under Chinese criminal law, Liu Xiaobo was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for "his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China" (Nobel Prize Announcement 2010).

The commonalities between Wang Hui and Liu Xiaobo seem to lie only in the fact that both cases have captured widespread international attention, often marked by fervent outbursts of anger and animosity. In other words, they are the Chinese humanists whose cases, whether involving plagiarism accusations or imprisonment for political crimes, have become international political scandals. My purpose in juxtaposing these two most improbable bedfellows is not to dissect and probe the behind-the-scene dealings and "conspiracies" of their respective scandals but to show how far-fetched and removed these seemingly sweltering cases actually are from China's real social and political concerns. Beneath the media hubbub of these high-profile political scandals there lie the hard questions of the real political and social relevance and consequences of the intellectual work with which such activists and public intellectuals tend to associate themselves.

Wang Hui's plagiarism scandal occurred in July 2010, when Nanjing University literature professor Wang Binbin published articles in newspapers and academic journals charging that Wang Hui's dissertation on Lu Xun, later published and republished as an important scholarly work titled *Resistance to Despair*, contained a number of passages lifted from other books without citation. The case remained within the small circles of the academics for a few weeks. However, when an open letter signed by more than eighty Western supporters—such world-renowned, mostly American New Left scholars as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Fredric Jameson, and Arif Dirlik—attested to Wang Hui's "scholarly integrity and his importance in international Asian studies," the case soon escalated into international warfare between the Left and the Right (or, in China, the liberals, labeled

usually as the right-wingers). Countering the New Left defenders, a group of famous overseas Chinese scholars in the United States with educational and political backgrounds from Taiwan and liberal views, such as Lin Yu-sheng and Yu Ying-shih, both prestigious academicians of Taiwan's Academia Sinica and professors emeriti at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and Princeton, respectively, also published an open letter demanding a serious investigation and severe punishment of the academic plagiarism, and their letter was echoed by another open letter signed by more than sixty Chinese university professors and public intellectuals calling for immediate investigation of Wang Hui's plagiarism charge (Cluster 2010, Liu 2010). The case then took a bizarre turn, expanding the war of Left versus Right not only to China's pro-liberal southern media, such as *Southern Weekend*, but also to international academics at both poles of the political spectrum. Then there were plagiarism charges against Shanghai University liberal historian Zhu Xueqing, and it began to look more like a conspiracy than a matter of academic integrity. Zhu responded by inviting the university to set up a committee to review his dissertation. Zhu said that he would resign if the academic committee found him to have plagiarized (Clem 2010).

Adding to the increasingly political and ideological hostility is the real and serious issue of academic dishonesty that has plagued China's academic community for years. As Susan Blum, a professor at the University of Notre Dame and author of *My Word! Plagiarism and College Culture*, writes on her blog, "A revolution is afoot in China, and it might even be considered cultural. But this one is about academic culture, as China's slow-moving iceberg floats up against the glacial mass of 'international' (read: Western) principles. The fallout is fascinating for observers, though in some cases tragic for the participants" (2010). Blum's scathing canvas does not stop at China within; she goes on to say that "Centenary College in New Jersey has shuttered a graduate business program in China because so many of its students plagiarized. *China Daily* has an article about 'Academic Corruption Undermining Higher Education.' . . . Faculty in US universities write distraught responses to all this, detailing how many of their Asian (not just Chinese) students commit academic fraud or plagiarism. The *Economist* takes on academic misconduct in China" (ibid.). Blum posits at least one reason for the rampant academic fraud in China: "The number of universities and colleges in China has increased, and the number of faculty has more than quadrupled. The pressure to publish is extraordinary, and many faculty are obliging" (ibid.).

Unlike most other prominent public intellectuals, Wang Hui's fame has resulted not in attention from the Chinese media for his public views but in his expanded international reputation, as attested by his friends among New Left academic celebrities of the West. His articles and books have appeared in English translations in major US journals and have been published by the prestigious Harvard University Press, significantly boosting his domestic standing and in fact rendering him a shining academic star, at least in the eyes of the Qinghua University administrators, who till now have remained steadfastly silent on his plagiarism case. Indeed, apart from the plagiarism accusation, Wang Hui's only other high-profile media exposure occurred in 2000, in allegedly under-the-table deals concerning the Changjiang Scholarly Awards of the then famous intellectual journal *Dushu*. Wang Hui, a coeditor of the journal and a major panelist on the award's board, was selected as a winner; thus he was charged by *Southern Weekend* as self-serving and as at least violating the principle of conflict of interest (Xue 2005).

Liu Xiaobo, on the other hand, gained his reputation as a human rights activist and political dissident not by involvement in any of China's grassroots social and movements rising and spreading across the country rapidly but largely by his high-profile crusade in the Cold War style of ex-Soviet bloc political dissidents, including actions such as public petitions, hunger strikes, protests against the CCP single-party dictatorship and its violations of press freedom and human rights, and finally, drafting and signing of *Charter 08*, in the manner of the Czechoslovakian *Charter 77*. Such a Cold War style of political dissent and confrontation wins Liu Xiaobo continued applause from the Western media and human rights advocates and from Western right-wing conservatives and anticommunists. Yet the fact is that his impact in China has been persistently diminished, owing partially to censorship by the government and partially to his own lack of involvement with everyday societal conditions and issues. His impact had become almost negligible by the time he won the Nobel Prize. When the Nobel was announced, the majority of Chinese Internet users under the age of thirty had little if any idea what Liu Xiaobo's political and human rights activism really meant to China. Instead, what they heard from the Chinese state media was that awarding Liu Xiaobo the Nobel Peace Prize was a conspiracy to humiliate China. The Chinese Foreign Ministry denounced the award, saying that it "runs completely counter to the principle of the award and is also a desecration of the Peace Prize" (Xinhua News Agency 2010). Beneficiaries, for the

most part, of the prosperity and modernization of the last three decades, an increasingly nationalistic young Chinese generation finds it difficult to understand, let alone appreciate, the Cold War–like political confrontations and the continued condemnation of China’s human rights conditions by the West. The Chinese public in general feel once again scandalized. Consequently, their suspicion of Western conspiracy against China was further inflamed rather than assuaged.

Wang Hui’s international fame as a New Left theorist has merely complicated the serious problem of academic fraud and corruption in China and triggered a global Left versus Right war, far beyond the usual confines of the academic ivory tower, through widespread international media exposure. Meanwhile, Liu Xiaobo’s winning of the Nobel Peace Prize, which is always a highly politically and ideologically contested event in itself, showcases a daunting dilemma that China faces in its pursuit of soft power and values. What emerges from these two international scandals is first of all the ubiquity and intensity of global media exposure aimed at scandalizing and sensationalizing any highly politically charged, confrontational event; and second, the star performers in both events fall prey themselves to such concerted, yet anonymous, political ploys (though not quite conspiracies), concocted by forces of all sorts in a mostly bizarre and melodramatic manner. What is unfortunately sidestepped and indefinitely deferred, again, is the question of incommensurability between the Chinese and universal (Western?) values that the Nobel Prize committee, the Western New Left and liberal academics, and the Chinese media and academics all seem to have missed.

The Professionals

While the state strategists and the politically scandalous often command the limelight, Chinese academics are mainly preoccupied with a much more practical, and much less political, concern: how to survive and thrive in an ever competitive yet attractive academic profession, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay. This concern has profound implications for the identity of Chinese intellectuals. The faculty in universities, teachers in middle and high schools, and those working in media and book publishing and other cultural industries still prefer to refer to themselves as *zhishi fenzi*, or intellectuals, for this category’s long-standing aura of prestige and social status. The irreversible trend over the last decade or so, however, has been toward professionalization, in a market-driven, GDP-centered society akin to that of the United States and perhaps most of the Western world. To

be sure, Chinese academic professionals still pay tribute to the age-old conviction that they are the conscience of society and spokespersons for the public good, a conviction expressed eloquently in a saying by the ninth-century Song Dynasty writer Fan Zhongyan: “Before the rest of the world starts worrying, the scholar worries; after the rest of the world rejoices, he rejoices” (Fan 2007, 6). Today’s intellectuals still worry and talk a great deal about the world and China, yet they rejoice no less and no later than the rest. Now that the get-rich mentality and festive atmosphere are ubiquitous, as discourse owners they have every reason to enjoy the dinner parties and other benefits of being in the limelight, center stage again.

Academic professionals in China are too numerous to single out anyone as their representative. As Blum (2010) puts it, “China is in the midst of a great upheaval in terms of higher education and intellectual work in general. Now second only to the US, China’s scientific research productivity is on track to be the highest in the world.” However, Chinese universities, unlike those of the United States, are undergoing not only a corporatizing process (emulating the US model) but also a bureaucratizing process (inventing a Chinese characteristic). As most Chinese universities are state-owned, belonging to various levels of government from the Ministry of Education to the provincial education departments, it is only natural that they become part of the phenomenal expansion of Chinese bureaucracies in recent decades. All CCP secretaries (usually the number-one boss) and presidents (the second in command) of universities are appointed by the government and bear titles and benefits equivalent to those of government officials. Likewise, the deans, department chairs, and even professors are, implicitly or explicitly, entitled to some level of bureaucratic rank and privilege. Moreover, like the Chinese government officials whose responsibilities lie essentially in increasing the GDP and managing productivity, university administrators and faculty consider research productivity and the awards and benefits of academic production their utmost priority.

I will now focus on Qin Shaode, the ex-CCP secretary of Fudan University, a leading Chinese research institution that is strong in liberal arts, to illustrate the circumstances and aspirations of the professionals in social sciences and humanities. Qin studied journalism at Fudan during the Cultural Revolution and taught there as a professor of journalism. He also worked in Shanghai’s media for many years before he was appointed Fudan’s CCP secretary in 2000, in which capacity he served until 2011. Journalism has always been one

of Fudan's strengths, and during his term Qin made considerable efforts to consolidate and enhance its national standing in addition to exercising his generally favorable policies toward social sciences and humanities. (Most Chinese university CCP secretaries and presidents are scientists and engineers by training, and they usually favor natural sciences and engineering over the liberal arts.)

In an interview commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the People's Republic of China by the Shanghai newspaper *Chinese Social Sciences*, Secretary Qin enumerates the achievements of Fudan's social sciences and humanities. He begins with an impressive list of numbers: first the digitized national plans such as Engineering 211 and Engineering 985; Plans for Promoting Philosophy and Social Sciences; and so on, each of which represents the CCP leadership's major funding projects for China's research universities, reinforcing again and again the policy orientation during the era of the planned economy. In fact, it is arguable that China's public education and research sector remains essentially the last bastion of the Soviet-style command economy, with its hierarchical structure firmly based on bureaucratic orders. Over the last three decades of *gaige kaifang*, China's education and research sector witnessed enormous expansion financially and in its size, yet its fundamental structure and guiding concepts remained largely intact even though the influence of American education and research ideas and practices has been increasingly visible, particularly the corporatizing trend in higher education and research with its emphasis on the knowledge economy, academic productivity, and efficiency.

By Qin's account, Fudan's liberal arts research epitomizes Chinese higher education and research:

In 1952, Fudan only had 5 liberal arts departments. After *gaige kaifang*, the traditional basis for liberal arts such as literature, history and philosophy became vibrant, and important fields of political sciences, sociology and law were reestablished, and have grown enormously. Now there are 13 liberal arts colleges, schools and departments, with 8 "key research bases of humanities and social sciences" designated by the Ministry of Education, and 136 research institutes and centers. In the last 2007 National Assessment of the Key Research Fields there were 17 subfields of liberal arts at Fudan ranked as key fields, an outstanding accomplishment indeed. As the growing funding investment of the Engineering 211 and Engineering 985, the

research grants and funds for liberal arts at Fudan accumulated to 240 million yuan. From 2003 to 2007, Fudan received funding from 146 National Social Sciences Projects, 194 Ministry of Education Projects, and 236 Shanghai Philosophy and Social Sciences Projects. During this period there were 2,200 books, 15,000 papers and 2,300 policy research reports published, which received 40% of the academic awards of Shanghai's higher education and research. (Qin 2009)

The numbers are the concrete evidence of productivity and accomplishment for administrators like Qin. By the same token, the numbers represent the single most important measures of performance and effectiveness for academic professionals. Granted, Qin qualified these numbers with caveats to the effect that quality and long-term research matter more than quantity and short-term productivity, but the long treatise that followed, on “producing classics” and “insisting on Marxist principles,” sounds more like the political reports of CCP officials (which fits Qin's position perfectly) and front-page editorials of the *People's Daily* (Qin once served as the chief editor of *Jiefang Daily*, Shanghai's equivalent to the *People's Daily*).

It is widely acknowledged, however, that the almost astronomical growth of academic books and journal articles, supported by massive amount of state grants over the last two decades in China's social sciences and humanities, have not yielded significant theoretical innovations and discoveries. In most disciplines of the social sciences and humanities, the predominant theoretical and methodological models continue to be the Western ones, despite the leadership's persistent calls for innovations and resistance to Western dominance. To oppose Western hegemony and to self-aggrandize, however, may require only an instant “gut feeling” and no rational reflection. Zhou Qifeng, president of Beijing University, slammed US education as a “complete mess” at a public lecture. The reason? “No U.S. president knows how to respect others and always imposes his will on others, so from this perspective, their education is truly a mess.” And China's education in his view is a great success, as “our country's progress largely depends on the personnel cultivated through China's education” (quoted in China.org.cn, 2011). Himself a chemistry PhD from the University of Massachusetts, Zhou's bold claim reflects the growing nationalistic fervor among the Chinese public more than a somber assessment of the real soft power gap in educational philosophies and practices between China and the United States.

The Weibo Opinion Leaders

Indeed, Zhou's famous, or infamous, diatribe against US education triggered a considerable debate in weibo, the microblogs—arguably the most dynamic public cyberspace in China today, akin to a hybrid of Twitter and Facebook. The *Economist* (2012) comments that “it is hard to overestimate how much the arrival of *weibo* has changed the dynamic between rulers and ruled over the past two years. More than 250 million Chinese Internet users have taken to microblogs for many purposes, plenty of them purely recreational. But a popular pastime is to spread news and rumors, both true and false, that challenge the official script of government officials and state-propaganda organs.” And a 2012 *New York Times* blog by Mark McDonald reports: “Internet usage in China, of course, is massive. A single microblogging site, Sina Weibo, has more than 300 million users. Nationwide there are some 460 million users of the Internet, and more than 300 million Chinese can access it on their cellphones.” However, McDonald's colleague in the Beijing bureau, Andrew Jacobs, adds, “Weibo users—whose numbers recently surpassed 300 million—realize the days of unfettered, anonymous criticism may be drawing to a close. Beginning on March 16, new government regulations will require real-name registration. In short, no more anonymity. Another rule will require Sina Weibo to review the posts of those who have more than 100,000 followers. Those ‘harmful’ to national interests, according to the rules, must be summarily deleted within five minutes” (McDonald 2012).

Since spring 2011, weibo has become China's most contested media forum, with its wide-ranging coverage of topics and terse 140-character posts that can accommodate everything from graphical emoticons to attached images, music, and video files in any post. Comments to a post can be shown as a list directly below the post, and the commenter can choose to repost the comment, quoting the whole original post, to his or her own page. Preferred by China's predominantly young Internet users (nearly 80 percent are under the age of thirty-five), weibo is mostly used for entertainment and recreational purposes. Yet the Sina Weibo strategy for attracting users through “weibo superstars”—opinion leaders with millions of followers or fans—has gradually turned it into a boisterous forum for public debate, rumormongering, fierce personal attacks on celebrities, and high-profile exposure of public (political) scandals, protests, and other societal events and incidents. In the immediate aftermath of the sudden reshuffling of power at the top level of the CCP in mid-March

2012, when the upstart Chongqing party chief Bo Xilai was ousted, widespread commentaries and debates on weibo concerning China's political power struggles ultimately caused panic in the top leadership echelon. Then a series of harsh measures to censor and curb weibo usage were meted out, including required registration of real names for weibo users. Western media outlets such as the *Economist* and the *New York Times* lost no time seizing on the issue of China's tightening of Internet censorship. However, in their rush to condemn the CCP's media control, they missed an important point of commercial interest in the Chinese new media or social media industry. As the *New York Times* commentary puts it,

For much of China's online population, *Weibo* is the first (sometimes only) source of news, rumor and entertainment, and could be considered China's only true public space. The prospect of greater controls on this platform, already burdened with both manual and automatic filters, was a disheartening one. Many observers of Chinese media thought the registration system would turn Weibo, widely known as the Chinese Twitter, into a space for nothing but inane entertainment and banter, robbing us of the most exciting public forum in Chinese life. (Abrahamson 2012a)

The astonishingly successful marketing strategy of Sina Weibo to create the entertainment-centered star system of opinion leaders rather than promote weibo as a forum for public political debate may well be the reason weibo is already a space of "inane entertainment and banter." Likewise, the chief beneficiaries of weibo may well be Sina Co. and the discourse owners—the star-studded weibo opinion leaders. The posts of the opinion leaders and reposts by their followers or fans (*fensi*, the homonym of which in Chinese means "noodle threads") dominate the weibo platform. Out of the top ten Sina Weibo opinion leaders, eight are movie or TV talk show superstars, one is a sports commentator, and one a real estate mogul. The posts that garner most attention are invariably those that concern entertainment news and celebrity scandals.

Of course there are political and social commentators on weibo, too. For my purposes, I will briefly mention two such opinion leaders. Yu Jianrong, a professor at the Institute of Rural Development of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, was named by more than three hundred thousand Internet users as one of the "nine Internet leaders

in China” (Zhongguo baike wang [China encyclopedia net] 2011) in 2010, for his outspoken criticism and commentaries on the condition of Chinese peasants, serious rural-urban disparities, and other social ills. In January 2011 Yu Jianrong launched on his QQ.com and Sina .com weibo accounts an initiative to share photos of children around the country who are working as street beggars, in order to locate abducted children and reconnect them with their families. Yu Jianrong’s efforts are widely applauded by the Chinese public, both Internet users and the general populace. His reputation as a prominent public intellectual and opinion leader does not stop with social activism. At his QQ weibo (he shut down his Sina weibo in January 2012 to protest the “obnoxious behavior of its users towards others” [from Yu’s weibo, weibo.com/yujianrong]), he posted in March 2012 a ten-year plan for social and political development in China, calling for a three-year initial phase of concerted social and judicial reforms, including the abolishment of the petitioning and household registration systems, followed by a second phase of political reforms moving China toward constitutional democracy (Bandurski 2012). As one of the rare socially committed weibo opinion leaders, Yu Jianrong takes the weibo seriously as a platform for social empowerment and political engagement for the grassroots populace. While his relationship with the CCP leadership and state media is sometimes tenuous, he has maintained a unique presence and relevance in the ongoing social events and intellectual debates of China.

The second famous weibo political commentator I will discuss is Hu Xijin, the chief editor of *Global Times*, a tabloid offshoot of the official mouthpiece of the CCP, the *People’s Daily*. The Chinese edition of *Global Times* is enormously popular, with one of the largest sales and circulation markets. Its market strategy is to write sensational stories on highly sensitive news (mostly international) and provocative editorials with a strongly nationalistic propensity. By so doing, it draws both adoration and affront from the readers, usually divided along the Left and Right (liberal) lines. Capitalizing largely on the popularity of the newspaper, Hu Xijin’s weibo attracts nearly 2 million fans, and each of his posts receives, on average, a thousand comments and reposts, mostly attacking him for being a “shameless” apologist for the authorities. Indeed, Hu Xijin’s weibo posts are often meant to provoke such an assault from the liberal-leaning Right. On March 29, 2012, using a thinly veiled sarcastic tone, he posted a comment on the Milton Friedman Liberty Prize, which the Cato Institute, a conservative US think tank, awarded to the liberal right-wing Chi-

nese economist Mao Yushi: “The prize is given to him by the Americans and even more so by China. Because China is very strong now so the U.S. pays special attention to the Chinese liberals, and people who are politically active but scholarly average, like Mao, have more and more opportunities to receive Western prizes.” Hu Xijin’s (2012) post immediately drew hundreds of comments, either criticizing him as the “lackey” of the Chinese government or, inversely, attacking Mao Yushi as an American lackey or a traitor.

The final selection of weibo opinion leaders is the pair Han Han and Fang Zhouzhi, whose fight over an alleged ghostwriting fraud has been among the hottest recreational news in China since the beginning of 2012. Both are eminent public figures. Han Han, a popular cultural icon in China over the last decade, is a professional rally driver, best-selling author, singer, and China’s most popular blogger—in fact, probably the most popular blogger in the world. He was nominated in *Time*’s 2000 list, One Hundred Most Influential People in the World. However, Han stated that “it [the nomination] has nothing to do with me. I write books and blogs to express my opinions. I’ve never thought of changing other people or the world” (quoted in Wang 2010). Han has never had a weibo account, but astonishingly, his Sina blog has had more than 550 million hits, particularly his three controversial essays on the issues of freedom, democracy, and revolution, posted in the last days of 2011. This kind of popularity leads *New York Times* blogger Eric Abrahamsen to call Han “a spokesman for youthful discontent in China.” He further notes of Han, “His caustic commentary on current events gives voice to popular outrage at official corruption and abuse of power, while avoiding direct attacks on the government that might result in censorship of his blog. The three essays mark his first foray into taking straightforward political positions” (Abrahamsen 2012b).

Yet the controversy over his three essays on China’s political future soon took a bizarre turn. A month later, in January 2012, the Chinese antifraud crusader Fang Zhouzi began to question the real writer of Han Han’s works and then alleged that it was produced by ghostwriters. Han denied Fang’s claims and sued Fang for defamation, and their fight became instant headline news in the entertainment sector (Martinsen 2012). Fang, himself a prominent weibo opinion leader, has exposed more than nine hundred cases of academic fraud and corruption in China through his public campaigns, largely conducted through his website Xinyusi (New Threads). Fang is often considered an important whistleblower against rampant academic

fraud and plagiarism in China, but his much publicized fight with Han Han, who has never been in the academic field, strikes one as quite odd, given the timing of the fight and the nature of the accusations of ghostwriting, made without convincing evidence of Han Han's plagiarizing others' works. Months after the initial accusations, the fight of Han versus Fang has turned into sensational, exciting celebrity warfare, while the sharply critical edge of Han's blogs on political and social issues have all but faded into oblivion.

Conclusion

The Chinese intellectual scene today is apparently filled with excitement and sensationalism, a veritable dinner party of carnivalesque festivity enjoyed by China's discourse owners and their audiences, as I have tried to delineate in the above sketches. However, what one is hard pressed to find in this scene are well grounded and seriously thought-out responses to the fundamental questions and dilemmas that China faces today—namely, the absence of social consensus and coherent social values that might provide not only cohesiveness to an increasingly diverse and fragmented society in rapid transformation but also clues for the whole world community as to the future orientation of a rising China, inevitably a leading power in the world. China's GDP fetish and economic developmentalism have been backbones of the CCP's pragmatic policies since the gaige kaifang, but the historical vicissitudes of the last three decades have not bolstered the leadership's political self-confidence, let alone vision and courage, for the inevitable reforms in the political and ideological realms. Continued and omnipresent censorship and self-censorship in China's intellectual arena as well the corrosive effects of corruption, fraud, and temptations of material benefit in the academic and media sectors contribute to further division among Chinese intellectuals, whose identity as such has already transformed beyond recognition. China's global soft power and discourse power campaign may ultimately turn out to be a self-celebratory extravaganza bereft of real substance.

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