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The Return of the Repressed: Three Examples of how Chinese Identity Is Being Reconsolidated for the Modern World

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Abstract

After setting the scene for an examination of the changes in culture and self-perception in China today, the authors explore three areas of activity which can be interpreted as illustrating these changes: (1) the current treatment of Confucius, as compared to the recent past; (2) the enthusiasm for the Chinese canon, which has developed from a grassroots movement into government policy; and (3) the way in which the presentation and content of public slogans have changed to, apparently, reflect the substitution of Communist nostrums for Confucian mores. In the first and second cases, the authors suggest that the authorities are acceding to the aspirations and prejudices of the people; rather than leading, they are following, and this has the effect of reinforcing the trend. The third—the gradual abandonment of the use of Marxist shibboleths in propaganda, and their replacement by Confucian adages—is not yet an established fact but, again, the trend is evident. China has revised and modernised its traditional culture and the first fruits of that can be seen in the words and behaviour of its political and intellectual leaders.

Keywords: Confucius; *guoxue*; China; Xi Jinping; renaissance; culture

In 2016 President Vladimir Putin visited Mount Athos, in Greece, one of the holiest shrines of Orthodox Christianity, as if to set the seal on the rejection of Marxism as the guiding vision for Russia. His nominally Communist counterpart, President Xi Jinping, preceded him by three years in making such a gesture. He visited the birthplace of Confucius in 2013, becoming the first Communist leader so to do.

A good Marxist would say that both men are attending to the superstructure; the failure of the economic revolution led to the return of a market economy in both countries (although more successfully in China than in Russia) and ideology must reflect that. Another way of looking at this is suggested by Dikotter (2015), who argues that Deng Xiaoping is not to be

congratulated for noticing that Communism was dysfunctional and freeing up the economy from central control; it was the people who in desperation restored market society and he was obliged to follow them and abandon Marxist economic policies. The same may be happening in the cultural sphere, whereby the leaders are acknowledging that they must go along with the reincarnation of tradition: where the people lead, the leaders follow.

The Communist overthrow of the established order in Russia and China, in 1917 and 1949 respectively, took place at times of great disruption and weakness. Energetic populists, proselytising a millenarian religion which promised cake for all once the guilty (rich peasants, businesspeople, free thinkers) had been abolished, seized control and proceeded to centralise all political and economic power in their own hands, eliminating potential critics, termed “class enemies”. They then proceeded to substitute their own ideology for the traditional identity. In China’s case, the natural law religion of Marxism, a derivative of Christianity, was comprehensible to Buddhists, but antithetical to Confucians: “Like Buddhists, Communists believed in a superhuman order of natural and immutable laws that should guide human actions. Whereas Buddhists believe that the law of nature was discovered by Siddhartha Gautama, Communists believed that the law of nature was discovered by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin” (Harari: pp 254).

Although Buddhist notions are influential in China, the ideological bedrock, certainly of the literate echelons, was Confucianism. Among them, a fanatical and missionary secular religion such as Marxism, millenarian and exclusive, was only likely to take shallow root. Lenin’s elitism, his organisational methods, and his extreme materialism were invaluable to a sect of revolutionaries but, once these same revolutionaries had taken power, were the opposite of what was required to develop and modernise a country. In the period from 1949 to the 1980s, the clumsy brutality of the Marxists and the irrelevance of their policies to the Chinese situation soon became obvious to anyone with the courage to think. This state of affairs has been best recorded in novels, for example those of Mo Yan, Yu Hua, and Yan Lianke.

In the early 1970s, when the incompetence of Marxoid economic policies started causing too much suffering to be ignored, the people quietly rebelled. They started planting and trading privately; this obliged the power-holders to reverse their policies and claim the credit. At this point, instead of the Party’s problem being “we have a vision that we are struggling to impose”, its difficulty became one of “we have a vision which is an embarrassment because it neither reflects our society nor provides a helpful story or identity.” Shi Yinhong (2004, 228) has described graphically the contempt for Marxism that became widespread in the 1990s.

The Chinese people came to the rescue. Notwithstanding the persecution or elimination of the educated, the thoughtful, and the public-spirited that took place between 1949 and 1979, and despite the destruction of the relatively enlightened political and legal arrangements of Sun Yatsen’s Republic, China has been able to draw upon its cultural resources to start rebuilding the ruined temple. Chinese society’s famous yen for cooperation (often referred to as collectivism), and its reliance upon interpersonal trust, role reverence (filial piety), passion for learning, and deep respect for the human being who has maturity and experience to share, provided the capital resources for economic take-off (Hofstede 2015 *passim*). The ways in which Chinese culture has made possible the successes of the 1980s and 1990s have been adumbrated for us by (mainly American) economists and anthropologists (Perkins 2000).

Culture is never static, but we can confidently say that although the application of Marxist superstitions by Leninist methods has destroyed much, it did not wipe out the fundamental

aspects of Chinese culture sketched above (Feuchtwang 2015). And these have their superstructure to reflect and reinforce them: once hunger and penury had been overcome in the 1990s, families began to rebuild their ancestral halls and dig up their genealogies, villages rebuilt shrines, and teachers opened schools to rescue and pass on Chinese learning.

The government had already in the 1980s re-instituted civil service recruitment by examination on the model favoured since the Han Dynasty; decision-making was once again localised and central direction was to be implemented through personnel appointments rather than through violent campaigns. Tacitly acknowledging the irrelevance of Marxism, cadre training now nearly avoids it altogether (Pieke 2016). Since President Xi's ascent he has consistently exhorted his compatriots to see themselves as the heirs and exponents of a great Chinese tradition and opined that China has a vision of itself and its role in human civilisation equal to any American Dream. He cannot abjure Marxism publicly, but he is giving new relevance to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) by talking of it as the spearhead of a Chinese renaissance.

Preceding Studies

The abovementioned developments in Chinese identity and its reconstruction have been observed by academics at least since the 1990s. However, initially they were seen as nationalist, with all the negative overtones that nationalism holds for Europeans and Americans. Wang (1996), Unger (1996), and Gries (2004) published notable books on nationalism, but it was Guo Yingjie, in 2004, who refocused attention on the various epiphenomena of nationalism and asked us to see them, less pejoratively, as *identity construction* in his work *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China: The Search for National Identity under Reform* (Guo 2004). Based upon Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" that depend upon cultural fictions, Guo examined, from several different angles, how new conceptions of identity were being expressed by historians, Confucians, those who wish to revive traditional written language, and "postcolonialists" for whom Communism was "colonial culture". One of the threads running "through the whole discourse of cultural nationalism ... is an unwavering conviction that China has strayed from its own natural path" (Guo 2004: 112) on account of the Communist revolution and Westernisation.

In 2006 Xin Xu tied analysis of the issue of identity construction to the particular circumstances of the Olympics. The article "Modernizing China in the Olympic Spotlight: China's National Identity and the 2008 Beijing Olympiad" (Xin 2006) connected sports policy and the staging of international mega-events as building blocks in identity formation.

Subsequent years saw the publication of a stream of monographs on various aspects of neo-Confucianism, generally seen as the foundation for an emerging national consensus about identity and values. For example, Li and Witteborn (2012) have found Confucian values returning in screen drama. Writing on a larger canvas, Daniel A. Bell's *China's New Confucianism* (2008) has identified an ideology that was developing as an alternative to both Western liberalism and Marxism-Leninism. A burgeoning Chinese perspective was that of the "protection of Chinese culture", exemplified by Li (2008), who has argued that cultural security is as important as food security or defence security in a world "threatened" by globalisation, implicitly seen as a vehicle of US capitalism. Yan Xuetong (2011) has shown, in *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, how ancient Chinese concepts have re-

emerged in international relations theory and are increasingly likely to be deployed by Chinese political leaders.

In 2016, Cheng Chen surveyed Russia, Eastern Europe, and China in order to argue for the recognition of a process through which all states go as they make the transition from one form of political organisation to another. The process is not just one of constructing new institutions, but of providing a “sense of mission” and policy guidelines. He declared such a construction essential for legitimacy and analysed which factors determine the success of such a project. (Cheng 2016).

Below, we continue this thread by looking at three movements in the restoration of Chinese identity: the resurrection of Confucius, the growing importance of the Chinese canon in schools, and the changed nature of official exhortations since 2000.

Confucius

Sun Yatsen sought to marry Western and Chinese ideas about polity and society and respected Confucius. The sage was denigrated after the Communist takeover. During the Cultural Revolution, remaining vestiges of his teachings or his influence—found in books, statues, memorial arches, ancestral temples, and tombs—were destroyed in bonfires.

Today Confucius is back in favour; some speak of “neo-Confucianism” as modern media interpreters provide a sanitised version that attracts 21st-century Chinese. Lecture programmes abound; the most successful of the many was a series called “Learning from Confucius” by Yu Dan (俞丹), transmitted in 2006. Its companion volume, *Confucius from the Heart* (Yu 2008), sold well. In 2014–2016 another lecturer, described as a talk show host and broadcasting online with a reported 900 million views, had great success in discussing topics relating to the Confucian tradition. Gao Xiaosong’s *Xiaosong qitan* (高晓松), the talk show on iQiyi, is controversial and the style is authoritative and even at times aggressive; it draws on Gao’s wide scholarship and deep reflection.

Oscillations in the treatment of the master are not extraordinary to those familiar with Chinese history. Such demotions and revivals—including the rise of neo-Confucian movements—have been witnessed at other times, even thousands of years ago (Morris 2010). Some aspects of Confucianism were revealed, immediately after the ascent of Deng Xiaoping, to have been merely hidden out of sight: the intense belief in the healing properties of education, how the family is conceived and operates, views on the bureaucracy and its central role, as well as the urge to harmony (Jacques 2012). The aspect of harmony in particular was most visible during the Hu Jintao years, with an official CCP goal being to build a “harmonious socialist society”. During Hu’s years, a statue of Confucius appeared just off Tiananmen Square, at the north gate of the Chinese National Museum (renovation completed in early 2011) in the centre of the capital. Its appearance in such a location, important politically as well as philosophically, was an indication of changed priorities, even though the statue, placed in January 2011, was removed in April of the same year. (Huang 2011)

President Xi Jinping has gone much further in rehabilitating the sage, his adherents, and his ideas, in complete antithesis to Mao Zedong. In addition to promoting traditional Chinese culture on a more general level to all, the Xi administration obliges senior government

officials, as part of their in-service training, to attend lectures on Confucianism presented by academics who would once have been labelled reactionaries (Page 2015). The establishment or restoration of temples honouring Confucius has been given unprecedented attention; recitals of the analects and many other closely associated activities and rituals are no longer low-profile, one-off events (Osnos 2014).

President Xi, the first CCP leader to give a speech in commemoration of Confucius's birth (Xi 2014b), has visited the birthplace of Confucius, with its great temple and many memorials. He makes more references in his speeches to Confucian thinkers than to any other category (Sun 2014). He conveys the message that socialism is really a Chinese invention—did not the emperors hold their mandate only when they served the people? He has stated that “the people hold the country together” (□□□□), “governance requires the people's support” (□□□□), and “both civility and law are required to govern” (□□□□) (Xi 2015 *passim*).

President Xi has suggested a Chinese “exceptionalism” in much the same way as anthropologists have described Anglophone exceptionalism. He said, according to the *People's Daily*, “Several thousand years ago the Chinese people trod a path that was different from other nations' culture and development” and has called upon the people to draw upon “5000 years of continuous Chinese culture”. (Tatlow 2014). Other Confucian thinkers are repeatedly mentioned by Xi. He provides quotations from classic texts that buttress the idea that *socialism with Chinese characteristics* has its origins not in Western thought but ancient Chinese philosophy. Chinese civilisation is the culmination of several thousand years of achievement, and the point of reference for the Chinese people (Xi 2014b).

The Canon

A decade ago the road to Shaolin was already lined with schools—primary and secondary—in the vast courtyards of which hundreds of children exercised, wearing costumes traditionally associated with the martial arts. This was one product of a growing determination by parents to seek indigenous schooling for their children and a by-product of what is loosely referred to as the “national studies” (*guoxue*) movement. Today millions of children are learning about the intellectual and artistic heritage of Chinese civilisation, which may have a much greater impact than emphasising martial arts.

The term “*guoxue*” was already in circulation in the early 20th century and is thought to have been invented by the doyen of Chinese journalism, Liang Qichao (Xie 2011 p1). Zhang Binglin, (1867-1936) a noteworthy scholar and activist, used the term to refer to the educated Chinese way of looking at the world and cultural heritage. He founded the Society for the Discussion of the Chinese Canon (□□□□□) to stimulate a renaissance of Chinese learning at a time when Western schooling was replacing traditional Chinese education, at least among the educated families of the eastern provinces. Zhang argued that, for China to preserve its identity and for the Chinese themselves to have a foundation for life, the canon must be preserved and adapted to the modern world and educated Chinese should incorporate useful lessons from outside rather than be swamped by foreign learning.

After 1949, the CCP was ambivalent towards the canon, up until the Cultural Revolution, when all education was jettisoned and a complete destruction of inherited culture was attempted. In the 1980s there was debate about political institutions, rivalling the great debates of the early 20th century which led to the founding of democratic institutions.

However, the debate was snuffed out in 1989 following the head-on collision between political leaders and naïve and intransigent students and others, whose demonstrations were crushed on June 4, 1989.

From 1991 onwards, and thanks to the initiative of Deng Xiaoping, the briefly stalled modernisation programme revived, leading to the world-shaking results with which we are familiar today. After the failed attempt at political revolution in the 1980s, the enthusiasm of patriots and intellectuals focused on cultural development, particularly the canon. Gradually, Marxism-Leninism came to be seen, except by the far left, as a foreign imposition of little relevance to China (Shi 2004) and the Westernisers looked to the USA, so obviously more successful materially than the USSR, as the lodestar. Those suspicious of Westernisation, and those who now saw Marxism-Leninism as an earlier kind of Westernisation, advocated a return to Chinese roots and the study of Confucianism and of traditional culture, literature, and philosophy. By the 2000s, there were many schools offering the canon either as their core curriculum or as part of it.

There has been a number of milestones. In 1993 two articles were published in the leading national party newspapers, in effect “legalising” the movement. The *People’s Daily* published an article entitled “Guoxue quietly comes back to Peking University” and the *Guangming Daily* published “The charm of guoxue and the guoxue masters”. (Bi 1993) Two years later, at the annual National Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a group of scholars called for the establishment of schools for the study of the Chinese classics. (CPPCC 1995)

In the late 1990s, many small independent schools calling themselves Confucius academies were inaugurated. They deliberately chose the term “academy” (学院)—from the Tang Dynasty onwards it had been academies that offered the education necessary for official and business life, and which aimed to cultivate students’ moral integrity, educate them on ethical principles, and develop their general level of culture. When China’s technological and organisational backwardness vis-à-vis 19th-century Europeans was made manifest, families began to prefer the new Western-style schools that were being established to give their pupils the skills needed for industrialisation, rearmament, and, ultimately, resistance to the globalisers. However, this did not mean that they abandoned their own socialising responsibilities; these had always been seen as the duty of the family as much as that of the school, and when traditional lessons were excluded from the school curriculum the family simply accepted the challenge of compensating, arranging for private tuition in the classics, music, and calligraphy. Chinese families in the USA operate in a similar way today, seeing the (American) school as providing only a modicum of the education needed by the child (Huang and Gove 2012).

In China itself, the implicit understanding that China’s successes over the last 30 years have come about as functions of Chinese culture rather than of Westernisation has altered perceptions of schooling, as of so many other things. The culture that kept Chinese civilisation going longer than any other human endeavour is now seen not merely as a token of distinctiveness, but as the source of achievement.

Today, there are many academies. Among the most famous is the Chengxian Canonical Institute (成贤书馆) in Peking, situated in the Imperial Academy (国子监) where, from the 14th to the late 19th century, officials took their civil service exams and where today once again the pupils wear traditional robes and recite classical Confucian texts. Others include the Four

Seas Confucius Academy (海内孔子学院) and the Peking University Academy of Erudition (北京大学燕京学社).

Although there are hundreds of these specialist academies, the main impact of the canon is probably in the general schools, in which *guoxue* classes have become a significant component. To bring the older generation up to speed, universities and private colleges have also set up such classes. Tsinghua, the author's own university, has a *Guoxue* Department. CCP personnel also take *guoxue* courses. In 2014 the Ministry of Education required more lessons on traditional culture to be added to the curriculum in both primary and secondary schools. (Ministry 2014) By an interesting coincidence, this occurred at about the same time as there was discussion in Beijing education circles about reducing the weight given to English in the high school curriculum. [City 2014]

As to the content of *guoxue* today, an investigation of some of the most widely circulated textbooks for Early Years and primary classes will reveal that they are about teaching manners, behaviour, and the acknowledgment of dependence. These are complemented by prettily produced versions of the great children's classics, *Rules for Siblings* (弟子规) *The Analects of Confucius* (论语), and *The Three Character Classic* (三字经). As in the past, young children recite them. When asked how much the children can actually understand, the response from the pedagogues is that understanding of the classics varies from age to age; the young child will have a limited comprehension but when he/she matures will grasp a great deal more and, later, the adult will be able to draw on the full wisdom of the classics once experience of life and study has readied him/her. In addition, the approach to learning helps train memory and concentration. When asked why they promote these studies, teachers and parents will both say that moral education is a priority, that it is the fundamental basis (德育是基础), that a child must learn to be a good, cooperative, and therefore moral member of society before anything else. In practical terms, older children should look after young ones, all children should understand their interdependence with their parents and grandparents, and learning moral stories from the past helps with problem solving.

In sum, the *guoxue* movement represents a resurgence of Chinese culture and is an expression of the confidence felt in China's ability to reassert itself as a civilisation that is at least the equal of the dominant Anglo-American one. We foresee academics and pedagogues becoming less obsequious towards Anglo-American norms and more inclined to build on the Chinese intellectual and artistic traditions to investigate and analyse the world. After nearly 100 years of denigration—following 200 years during which Europe overtook China in many fields, to such an extent that Chinese intellectuals lost confidence in their own tradition—it will take time for this rejuvenation to be fully realised. Nevertheless, today there appears to be a powerful and widely shared will for a renaissance of Chinese civilisation to drive China forward.

Official Exhortations

The average Chinese construction site is never dull. Observers find adages and admonitions, usually printed in white characters on red, adorning everything from scaffolding to elevated tracks on high-speed railway sites. In the Deng era, reform policies were advertised using the slogan “Raise high the banner of Socialism with Chinese characteristics” (高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜) reminding everyone of key official policies. Later, modest calls to “realise the Three Represents” (三个代表) or “Let the country be subject to the rule of law” (依法治国) to a great

extent replaced the old political harangues. The banners of today seem not to be aimed at a select audience, but instead at anyone who happens to catch sight of the signs at any given moment. One example is: “Because we have our nation therefore we have our home” (因为我们有国家所以我们有家).

Such signs are as old as the People’s Republic of China (PRC) itself—or probably older, since decorating walls and door frames with ideograms is surely a centuries-old custom. The only difference today is that the newer form of propaganda tries to merge into the landscape. The tone seems to be less urging, more amusing, with traditional folk art posters and “cute” public awareness video clips designed to “endear” themselves to the populace. These hardly seem to constitute government propaganda.

Since 2000, two particular changes have been most visible. Under Hu Jintao there was a slow transition to the theme of harmony, a great contrast to the Leninist priorities of class struggle and the persecution of victims, and a theme derived from the wise Chinese sages of yore rather than any Marxist. The viewer was almost certainly expected to compare the harmony of his/her own country with the news from abroad, which made a point of illustrating the horrors of the Iraq and Afghan wars and, later, chaos in Libya and Syria. Many internet memes that have been in circulation have shown that people were well aware of the message that the government was trying to put across when it contrasted “socialist harmony” with murder and mayhem in the Muslim world and the casual violence of US society. As for the slogans, although the methods of expression remained the same, the content became progressively less “red” and more homely. The following are some examples:

- Cheerfully get to work, safely go home. (开开心心上班，平平安安回家)
- Speed up development; promote railway technology; give greater contributions to creating a well-off society! (加快发展，促进铁路技术，为创建和谐社会作出更大贡献)
- Good parenting, good care and good education: benefits for nation, people and family. (良好的家庭教育，良好的照料和良好的教育：对国家、人民和家庭都有好处)
- China is good at chess. (中国象棋) [The slogan is accompanied by an image of two youngsters in traditional Chinese dress, playing chess.]
- Effort is repaid. (一分耕耘，一分收获)

The second, and probably more important, visible change is in the way government messages are being communicated since the ascent of Xi Jinping. By contrast with Hu’s rise in 2002, Xi’s rise in 2012 was completed within half a year, in which time Xi obtained all the main leadership posts necessary to make his power as comprehensive as the system allows. Since 1989, photo montage has dominated propaganda posters (Landsberger, 2016). In the run-up to the 18th Congress of the CCP, the posters that adorned cities, especially Peking, featured messages in golden characters with a faint background pattern, the banner itself being made of more durable material. Such minor details can be indicative of the increased importance being attached to propaganda by the authorities. After Xi introduced the “Chinese Dream”, posters around the capital were considerably more focused on traditional values and the promotion of an idealised Chinese lifestyle (Qiu 2015) rather than promoting politics—although, we should not forget, the socialist road and rule by the Party were still praised. Xi’s

views have not only been promoted inside China, but also overseas by means of books (see Carlson 2015). The following are some examples of propaganda posters, photographed mainly in the capital:

- The key values of socialism (富强民主文明和谐) are affluence and strength (富强), democracy (民主), civility (文明), harmony (和谐), liberty (自由), equality (平等), justice (正义), legality (法治), patriotism (爱国), professionalism (敬业), sincerity (诚信), kindness (友善). [Often accompanied by pretty pictures of jolly families spanning three generations]
- Love of country, creativity, tolerance, and virtue. (富强民主文明和谐)
- Be brave enough to seek excellence; celebrate the 18th Congress; compete for new achievement. (富强民主文明和谐, 富强民主文明和谐, 富强民主文明和谐)
- The people are happy. (富强民主文明和谐)
- China's dream is an auspicious dream. (富强民主文明和谐) [with a poem]
- China's dream is my dream. (富强民主文明和谐) [with an image of a child dreaming]
- China's dream is the Metro's dream. (!) (富强民主文明和谐)
- The good children of China. (富强民主文明和谐)
- When China's dream is perfect, everybody benefits. (富强民主文明和谐)
- [With three very pretty pictures done in the traditional style] (1) On with the dream. (富强民主文明和谐) [an image of a boat and oarsmen]; (2) You reap what you sow. (富强民主文明和谐) [a girl picking fruit while a boy plays the lute]; (3) The country and you should treat each other with a mother's profound affection. (富强民主文明和谐) [a baby being carried on the back of a mother]
- The people have beliefs (富强民主文明和谐); the nation has hopes (富强民主文明和谐); the state has strength (富强民主文明和谐).

Gentle though the slogans now are by comparison, mobilisation is probably not off the cards entirely. It was deployed during the effort to combat SARS in 2003 (Zhao 2008). And perhaps that is what the constant references to the “Chinese Dream” are about, albeit in more seductive, less authoritarian tones. The national concept is often referred to in tandem with more local concepts; thus, a “Metro dream” can be seen in a propaganda poster in the Beijing underground. A multitude of “dreams”, derived from the central concept “China Dream”, can be seen to express a form of mobilisation where the incentive is to excel at work, to the benefit of the wider “dream” and rejuvenation efforts across the country. If you share the “dream” and sign up for its component objectives, whether it be building a good subway, loving the motherland, or playing chess, you also accept the legitimacy of those exhorting you.

Legitimacy is another theme, with the citizenry encouraged to believe that their political leaders have an unshaken, unchallenged right to govern. The CCP is represented as legitimate because it ejected the evildoers (including foreigners) and because it really knows where China is going and can take it there. Legitimacy appears to be continuously “enforced” in a variety of ways, whether by banners stressing the “correctness” of rule by the Party or through campaigns such as “No Party, no new China” (没有共产党就没有新中国).

We can question the efficacy of these slogans, even in a country with a long tradition of this practice and great respect for the written word. Social media in particular have changed the ways in which erstwhile “all-official” media and propaganda outlets have had to communicate their message. The audiences too have changed; there is now a cohort of young, opinionated, but also comparatively less well-off professionals or would-be professionals who like to take part in public conversations (Chen and Yu 2012). Officialdom has had to learn to communicate in many other ways and to converse rather than command (de Burgh, Zeng, and Mi 2012). Newer methods may need to be employed when the authorities want to issue a rallying call to action (Qiu and Chan 2009).

Returning to the slogans, the changes we have noted have gone further than merely moderation in tone or pragmatism in content. Co-author Feng notes that on a visit to the village of Liqiao, in the northeastern suburbs of the capital, in the summer of 2014, he found no less than five direct quotes from traditional Chinese philosophers, including Confucius and Mencius, positioned next to “regular” propaganda encouraging greater civility in accordance with the socialist and collectivist lifestyle. Among the precepts presented in the conventional propaganda mode were the following:

- Should you not know how society works, you cannot establish yourself. (不知社会如何，不能立身.)
- He who knows speaks not; he who speaks knows not. (知者不言，言者不知.)
- Those who have a good name have it because they have understood virtue. (有德有言，有言有德.)
- Cultivate and discipline your moral life, admire virtue and incline to what is good, being modest and considerate of others. (修身律己，崇德向善，谦虚待人.)

Should these precepts stand, it will be a clear sign that the Party is now openly drawing upon the great thinkers and leaders of China’s past and that Marxist-based propaganda is likely to be superseded by a revitalised form of Confucianism.

Conclusion

Academic attention has been paid to how China is reconstituting its identity, and to the many and diverse forms of evidence of that process. As we reviewed above, these changes were initially viewed as epiphenomena of nationalism, but have latterly been seen as the reassertion of traditional values in a modern context. It is in both the words of leaders and the activities of the population that these reassertions can be seen.

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