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Ideological formation, national development, and the "mass line": the historical-political complexity of cultural policy and Chinese socialism

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Abstract

The subject of this article is the nexus of strategic political frameworks of the People's Republic of China that have informed the evolution of national cultural policy. The article underscores how cultural policy always was, and has remained, a central official mechanism for both national economic development and not (as is assumed) the dissemination and inculcation of political ideology. This article therefore attempts to address what it perceives to be the limited depth of Western contemporary cultural policy research on China — and its research agenda otherwise hostile to China's communist government. The article's principle purpose is therefore to identify the conditions by which cultural policy emerged as a significant field of political thought, strategically used by central government for articulating its mission, values and aims within its broader political economy. The article argues that today, even without the possibility of China's immanent conversion to Western liberal-style democracy, the enterprise of cultural policy can play a significant role in the country's development. This possibility is not dependent upon Westernisation or Western influence in any form, but on what is one of the most established of communist doctrines, the doctrine of the "mass line".

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Introduction

"Cultural policy studies" is not a universally established field of inquiry in academia. More specifically, on China, and in the English language, only a few journal articles and book chapters have China's cultural policy as their primary object of analysis (e.g., Zhang, 2006; Tong and Hung, 2012; White and Xu, 2012; Keane and Zhao, 2014; Su, 2015). Studies of China's media sector, particularly with Government's media policies as a major research subject, however, has been developing exponentially for decades.

Cultural policy in the West, although a relatively new academic field, has involved scholars from a range of disciplines, from aesthetics and cultural studies, economics and sociology (Gray, 2010). In his seminal review article, "The Torn Halves of Cultural Policy Research" (2004), Oliver Bennett examined two key books with two distinctively different approaches to cultural policy. The divide between what Bennett viewed as "critical" and "practical" cultural policy studies, can be traced back to the 1990s — when, within the Humanities and social sciences generally, the problem of ideological dominance and class struggle (in Marxist terms) was declining along with the seeming disappearance of concrete "alternatives" to capitalism (and the forms of liberal democracy that facilitated it). Some scholars found the newly established Cultural Studies – an interdisciplinary field that found cohesion, in part through Marxism but also older English philosophical-literary criticism — as a potentially enduring form of scholarly research that was also culturally "progressive" with a "radical-democratic" mission against elitism and ideological hegemony (Bennett, 2004). However, Cultural Studies arguably became increasingly detached from the institutional practices and realities of cultural 'governance' itself (the actual policy and administration of culture). Since the 1990s, with the rise in dominance of "economic" and "managerial" knowledge in public policymaking (Gray, 2006; 2007; Belfiore, 2012), along with successive governments' both Left and Right celebrating the power of the market in both creating wealth and facilitating creative industries (Oakley, 2004; Hesmondhalgh and Pratt, 2005), cultural policy research was increasing faced with Cultural Studies lack of influence on policymaking agendas and interests. There were, of course, Cultural Studies scholars who retained an exclusive commitment to historic critical and humanities traditions by asserting culture's potential for transformation, alternative values, models of social democracy (and so on). However, such ambitions for academic research were de facto marginalised and ignored by policymakers (O'Connor, 2016). As Bennett (2005, 246) argued (notoriously) in his review essay that cultural policy research "can be practical, or it can be critical, but it can never be both at the same time".

Interestingly perhaps, 'critical' and 'practical' approaches also constitute two major agendas among academics on China's cultural policy and media sector research, although they exist in very different forms. Many Western academics and journalists continue to comment on the Chinese government's activities in the area of culture for their violation of the normative standards and values of "democracy", but combined with the general academic approach to China in these areas. Their views tend to appeal to a Western consensus on what democratic standards and values are (representation, accountability, and so forth). This, not only diverts scholars' attention from the Chinese Government's owns plans for culture, but also severely limits any "usefulness" for dialogue with, or policymaking in, China itself. On the other, researchers on China who focus primarily on cultural and creative industries (as commercial industries that have been promoted by the Chinese Government), all too often are prone to downplay or even ignore the ideological nature of China's cultural policies.

This article first amplifies these two approaches to China's cultural policy, arguing that they tend to be heavily shaped by existing models of Western nationalism (assumptions on democracy) and have limited facility in accounting for the Chinese Government's socialist-communist agendas for culture. The article then investigates the connections between China's cultural policy and its socialist development, and demonstrates that political elites aim to maintain and enhance China's decentralised economic system as well as its means to create citizens who actively

participate in culture and thus in the construction of an ordered and sustainable "socialist society". It highlights the "mass line", which is a fundamental principle of China's cultural policy, and explains how the Communist Party has connected its anthropological understanding of culture to a powerful ideological construction and socialist development. Finally, this article argues that analyses of China's cultural policy should attend to the historical-political complexity of the Communist Party's policies and agendas of culture, rather than treating culture merely as a mediator of Western democracy.

Culture for democracy and cultural industries – two approaches to China's cultural policy

It is a truism of a critical approach to cultural policy studies to say that research on a nation's cultural policies should discern between rhetoric and reality, or define the relation between the agendas of policymakers and their efficacy in stimulating substantive change. This is, arguably, not the case on China's cultural policy and cultural sector, where English language-based research has been effective in defining sectoral development (the media sector; specific arts; heritage; and so on) but has conducted little examination of China's cultural policies and their implications for the nation's "culture" in terms of socialist development (particularly China's "mode" of economic development). Since its emergence, for example, studies of China's cultural and media systems have rarely focused on the Communist Party's agendas for culture, but have been preoccupied with the normative concern of China vis-a vis the demands of Western-style democracy (Zhao, 2015). The dominance of the "democracy question", as Keane (2011a) points out, has much to do with how most Chinese scholars (who write in English) are educated in the West, and consequently tend to align the development of China's cultural sector with "free world" (particularly the US and the UK) and its concerns for media independence, freedom of speech and civil society. In a broader sense, this is also symptomatic of the global predominance of liberal democratic-inspired ideas, values and models of management and governance mediated through ever expanding Western media corporations and conglomerates, who see non-Western nations such as China as not simply emerging markets but as a "testing ground" for Western value-agendas (Lee, 2011; Dong, 2011).

A salient consequence of the intellectual dependency on generalisable Western democratic norms, is that the Chinese Government's own cultural policies (policy making and institutional practices) are often subject to an interpretative dichotomy of "good versus evil" (the Party-State being portrayed as an authoritarian force while those who break or resist regulations are seen as "democratic" and "liberating"). Such an approach provides a limited view of China's cultural policy, and further (cf. Bennett, 2004), is of little use in facilitating change in Chinese Government agendas (or, asking difficult questions on its own assumptions: will China become more democratic with the transference of the cultural sector to private corporations or Chinese citizens per se?).

In Western cultural policy research, one of the most visible approaches to China is the "creative industries approach" to China's political economy (usually focusing on the media and cultural sector, rather than the full breadth of creative industries, from TV to internet, software and AI). This is an approach that has engendered robustness and longevity for its close examination of China's cultural policies as well as the ownership and operations of cultural units (Keane, 2011a). Within this, scholars since the late 1990s have tended to focus on several fundamental questions. Foremost among these questions have been two major and interconnected objects of research: (i) the CPC and whether it is losing or maintaining control of the media sector; and (ii) the commercialisation of media and whether it is a stimulus for Chinese society's progress towards democracy (Akhavan-Majid, 2004; Hadland, 2012). Before the early 2000s, when the Chinese Government was experimenting with commercialisation and the decentralisation of the cultural system, the media industry was evolving new dimensions of production – investigative journalism (and local news workers' defiance of central propaganda guidelines), and the rise of entertainment and human-interest stories. These were viewed by many scholars as signs or "evidence" that previous state monopolies of governmental power were dissolving in their historic powers of command,

resulting in new political freedoms and potentially liberalisation and the increasing democratisation of Chinese society (e.g., Zhang, 1993; Huang, 1994; Pei, 1994; Huang and Yu, 1997; Hao, Huang and Zhang, 1998).

However, since the 2000s, most of the visible "democratic indicators" in China have gradually dissipated, as central Government has (arguably) successfully reformed and re-centralised its political command-style management of the cultural system, systematically enhancing official regulatory and administrative measures. There are new institutional arrangements for political instruction, and a ubiquitous media content censoring and monitoring apparatus (Zhao, 2008; Brady, 2008; Hong, 2014), and many scholars have so realised that instead of liberation, commercialisation has created new alliances between political and economic powers, enriching and empowering politically compliant or simply a-political "cultural entrepreneurs" (many of whom are either in the employ of, or networked within, central Government authorities). The CPC's "control" is no longer brutal and direct but is further entrenched and consolidated (cultural workers have to be politically compliant if they want to survive in the marketplace) (Zhao, 2008; Stockmann, 2013; Hearns-Branaman, 2014).

For the last ten years a scepticism on China's "liberation" has grown (Hadland, 2012), and a consensus of scepticism has tacitly consolidated with President Xi Jinping since 2013, whose political aim is that the CPC can lead, in Xi Jinping's own words, "everything" (Xi, 2017). Consequently, many scholars have proposed alternative frameworks to the normative "authoritarian state versus the liberating market" (or "state in collusion with the market") approaches (e.g., Keane, 2015). One option is to shift focus from the state, to the new forms of power and discourse at civil (social, community and "grassroots") levels (Lagerkvist, 2014), such as investigating public discourse in the media (particularly on the internet), and identifying the emergence of "democratic signifiers" and the intellectual conditions of political liberalisation in China's civil society, such as individualisation or critical reflection (Berry, 2009; Sima, 2011; Jiang, 2014; Wu, 2017).

Another option taken by scholars is in using economics to "work with" (or at least engage with) the Chinese Government and its policy makers. By taking the economic attributes of culture as abstracted from the normative aims of the communist state (i.e., as officially defined by the Party-State since the early 2000s as "cultural and creative industries"), a flurry of research publications has emerged, measuring, evaluating and articulating the economics of the cultural and creative industries (e.g., Wu, 2006; Ye, 2008; Zheng, 2011; Si, 2016). Allowing a more pragmatic engagement with government through economic research, facilitates, in the words of authoritative Australian scholar Michael Keane, a move beyond the "conventional disciplinary boundaries of media and cultural studies" and its "ideological representations" (Keane, 2013, 4). Keane's research (e.g., Keane, 2006; 2007; 2009; 2011b; 2013; 2015) represents a fruitful empirical analyses of Government policy in terms of organisational structures, production, and development, particularly attentive to innovative municipal centres, and more explanatory than critical, and motivated by a concern to comprehend China's uniqueness, innovation and different management of values.

Notwithstanding the value of the aforementioned research and scholarship on China's cultural and creative industries, they all have limited facility in accounting for the Communist Party's agendas for culture. Established academic approaches to the study of culture in China are often critical in a philosophical sense (as a classical liberalism[1], which appeals to a broad Western consensus on normative democratic values of liberty, rights and representation). They are not able to fully identify the complexity of the Communist Party's management of culture as a concerted political investment that is central to the ideological project of the CPC and China's socialist development. At the same time, scholars whose research largely functions "affirmatively" in supporting the economic development of China's culture and creative realms, may see this as a de

[1] Classical liberalism is here a political ideology that advocates civil liberties, limited government, unhampered market economy, rule of law, religious and media freedom.

facto force of liberalisation (thus providing some material conditions for democratic progress), but they are similarly confronted by a political reality on which they have little explanatory power or influence for change (O'Connor and Gu, 2006). In fact, many cultural economists who may regard themselves as Left-leaning tacitly subscribe to the now discredited assumption (promoted most famously by Francis Fukuyama, 1992) that in a largely post-industrial global economy, capitalist competitive free market practices are not only necessary for economic survival, they facilitate the rise of civil society, individual interest and innovation, which in turn are powerful conditions for liberalisation and democracy.

While this article does not oppose classical liberalism, it offers a principled alternative by asserting that a critical evaluation of the efficacy of the Communist Party's management culture must be grounded in a more comprehensive understanding of its agendas for culture. For it only pertains to a different set of normative values (as communist and socialist values, not entirely foreign to Western liberal traditions of political thought), yet these values are mediated by a complex and historically evolving political economy heavily invested in a socialist development project. Furthermore, by attending to the internal complexities of China's cultural policy (including its pitfalls and contradictions), potential avenues can be identified by which China's communist society can politically evolve (not simply adopt or replicate Western liberal values) and develop the institutional mediation and policy mechanisms that facilitate China's socialist culture.

Cultural policy and China's political economy

China's cultural policy is shaped by the Party's communist history and is employed by the Central Government to reach developmental goals. The fundamental aim of China's development has been to construct a modern socialist nation, which, as Mao Zedong aspired, would be an alternative modern society to Western capitalism. Mao placed a central focus on culture and ideology based on the belief that a national "socialist culture" would resolve contradictions between the forces and relations of production, and motivate Chinese people with revolutionary passion and energy for economic construction (Liu, 2004). In the post-Mao China, the Communist Party no longer uses ideological indoctrination as the primary way for socialist development. Instead, Deng Xiaopeng's Reform and Opening-up grounded on the perception that socialist development should be based upon social practice, and that China should accept (particularly in the realm of the economy) institutional arrangements that are able to yield to pragmatic results. The four generations of leaderships in the post-Mao era, of course, have never ceased to perceive cultural management as a top agenda in order to achieve political, economic and social aims.

China's Central government understanding of culture and socialist development involves fundamental assumptions on how culture is a principal manifestation of social and economic — and, in turn, is internal to the political and economic development of society (Pan, 2002; Yao, 2014). This holistic understanding entails that culture fulfils multiple functions. First, as a political organisation which gained its ruling position through a profound ideological struggle, the CPC evidently understands the discursive formation of culture and ideology as one of its core political aims. For the ruling elite, it has also maintained the management of culture and ideology as a priority of the Government's political agenda (and internal to the order and maintenance of the Party's legitimacy, from within and without). A sturdy and attractive official ideology is considered as not only necessary for resisting "disruptive" foreign values and ideas, but also for transforming those moral standards, ideas and values that are beneficial to the ruling elites into the "mainstream culture" of Chinese society, so the general public would voluntarily follow the Party's leadership and support its rule (Wang, 2016). Political leaders, in addition, have consistently emphasized on the importance of "positive propaganda" [*正面宣传*] by demanding media and cultural sectors to highlight the positive aspects of Chinese society, politics, and people's lives in order to maintain social and political stability (Sun, 2010).

The Chinese Government's tight control of cultural and media industries has stimulated much

criticism in the academia. However, what is often ignored in the English literature is the fact that CPC's understanding of culture is also grounded in a philosophical anthropology, which foregrounds culture as "way of life" for social development. This historical materialist conception of culture (Chinese Marxist, but whether of Marx himself is another matter) underpins Marx's more "scientific" frameworks of political economy and capital production. It can be phrased in terms of the material conditions of human production through labour, which through industrial modernity formed a proletarian class of the majority of the "people", who are the source of all material production and thus historical progress. As the "creators" or central agents of history, they in turn evolve new forms of social life and exceed the contradictions and crisis inherent to the kinds of divisive social orders required for an economy built through capital accumulation (Tucker, 1961; Callinicos, 2012).

For the CPC, the historical primacy of "the people" (peasants and workers) features in official historical narratives on its own revolutionary experience in building the People's Republic of China (from the 1st National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1921). Further, the "proletarian revolution" took place under very different social realities than Europe, where culture and ideology played a decisive role in defining a uniquely "Chinese" communism (and today, the phrase "socialism with Chinese characteristics" [*中国特色社会主义*]. China's own national "socialist values" can cause some confusion in Europe, where socialism is internationalist and defined in contradiction into nationalism of all kinds). A key political principle in the strategic indoctrination and mobilisation of Party allegiance in the people, is the utilisation of culture, consciousness and "ways of life" — education, the arts, local folk and custom, and the social "everyday" of the life of the masses.

The ideological equivalence attributed to "the people" and historical socio-economic development is articulated in the doctrine of the "mass line" [*群众路线*], the leadership method of the CPC. From the slogan of Mao Zedong, "from the masses, to the masses" (Mao, 1991, 899), the Party defines its own legitimacy in terms of how it "must rely on the masses for its strength, serve the needs of the masses, draw its inspiration from them, and gear its political ideology and organisational tactics to their responsiveness" (Steiner, 1951, 423). The mass line is, in effect, three fundamental tenets: (i) in their everyday social life, the masses generate valuable ideas, wisdom, and practical know-how from which political leaders should learn and so to advance socialism; (ii) the party policies and strategies must be generated from an understanding of the living conditions of the masses and a comprehensive analysis of their social situation; (iii) the party leader should return the summarised and "enhanced" ideas and practices (in a scientific and systematic manner) back to the masses in the forms policies, disciplines or propaganda, and implement them through tests and experiments to prevent errors (Mao, 1991).

Culture and China's "mode" of economic development

China's apparent and much studied economic transition from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy is a complex process, which many studies wrongly assume to involve political values and fundamental beliefs (i.e. capitalist not communist). Within merely four decades, China has indeed been transformed from one of the poorest countries to the second economic power in the world, and the behaviours, everyday cultural habits, individual aspirations, financial liquidity and household income, have all been transformed. Such transformation, of course, was directly resultant from the implementation of China's reform and opening-up policy since the late 1970s. For Deng Xiaoping, China's economic transition should not be based upon dogmatic ideology or existing economic templates. Rather, people's autonomy, enthusiasm and creativity in social practice should be regarded as the foundation of economic development. In order to promote local experiments, the central Government delegate the control rights over a substantial amount of resources such as fiscal income, state-owned enterprises, land, raw materials, energy, etc. to regional governments (Paus, 2009; Xu, 2011; Shambaugh, 2008) and give almost exclusive rights to local governments in appointing and dismissing officials within their

territorial jurisdictions (Zheng, 2007). The central Government, on the other hand, take on such indispensable roles as initiating, coordinating and correcting experiments at sub-national levels, scaling up and formalising successful and widespread economic arrangements (through national policies, laws and regulations) and steering the general direction and emphases of national development strategies (Corne, 2002; Heilmann, 2008; Xu, 2011).

According to statistics provided by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, China's gross domestic product (GDP) has soared from RMB 367.9 billion yuan (1978) to over 82.7 trillion yuan (2017), with an average annual growth rate of 9.5% (Xinhuanet, 2018). Since the 1990s, there has been a great number of studies conducted by social scientists both in China and overseas that aim to explore and unravel the "mysteries" of this, China's apparent "economic miracle" (e.g., Lin, Cai and Li, 2003; Hu, 2007; Tsai, 2007; Nee and Opper, 2012; Wang, 2013; Yu, 2017). A well-established fact is that China's development is not based upon pre-existing economic "models". In sharp contrast to the radical "structural adjustments" that have taken place in innumerable developing nations under the demand of the America-led West — facilitated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (McMichael, 2000; Peet, 2009) — China's economic transition has been a gradual and historical process, rationalised as an historical narrative of the growth and eventual triumph of Chinese socialism (Xi, 2017). Governmental decentralisation and local autonomy are now widely recognised as the key to the creativity and adaptability of China's economic system. Sebastian Heilmann, a specialist in China's economic and political strategies, describes the country's economic system as "experimentation under hierarchy" (Heilmann, 2008). He maintains that through devolving responsibility for development to sub-national governments and declared "autonomous" economic zones, China's reform was able to exploit bottom-up innovations, local knowledge and industrial experiments, all managed to bring about coherent and widespread transformative changes, all despite a rigid authoritarian political environment (Heilmann, 2008). Similarly, contemporary economics professor Xu Chenggang, argues that the local experimentation and regional competition resulting from economic decentralisation have been the fundamental driving forces of China's national development. He finds that "almost all successful reforms in the past three decades were introduced through local experiments" (Xu, 2011, 1082), and that diversified local innovations are the key to the nation's economic success.

Officially, Chinese citizens are cast as the fundamental "creators", "writers" and "witnesses" of China's history (Xi, 2014a, paragraph 27). The people's values, ideas, and ways of life, accordingly, have been recognised by central Party leaders as having played contributory roles to China's own "development model". Premier Deng Xiaoping (1978-1992), for example, when commenting on China's economic experience, emphasised that "a great many of things in the economic reform have been brought up by the masses through practice... It [China's economic reform] is people's wisdom and collective wisdom" (cited in Hu, 2013, paragraph 9).

Party leaders' recognition of the importance of culture and practice (particularly Chinese people's values, ways of life and creativity) for China's diversified and regionalised developmental realities determines that "cultural pluralism" (in UNESCO's terms) should be officially acknowledged (Xia et al., 2003, 11-12). In former President Jiang Zemin's report at the 16th National Congress of the CPC, "highlighting the keynote and advocating diversity" ["*弘扬主旋律，提倡多样化*"] was officially put forward as a key principle of China's cultural policy. Emphasising the importance of cultural and artistic works in depicting people's culture and ways of life, Jiang Zemin said,

> We should highlight the keynote and advocate cultural diversity. In particular, [we should] encourage and promote works that reflect contemporary scenes of the construction of socialist modernisation...[We] hope that the great majority of national artists will actively devote themselves to people's lives in the reform, opening-up and modernisation construction. [They should] acquaint

> themselves with life, understand people, accumulate materials and stimulate inspiration in order to create works for the masses that appeal to both refined and popular tastes (quoted in Wu, 2012, paragraph 6).

According to current President Xi Jinping, "In the process of reform of opening-up, every breakthrough in [our] knowledge and practice, the emergence and development of all new things, the creation and accumulation in every field all originated from hundreds of millions of people's wisdom and practice" (Xi, 2014b, 68). When Xi Jinping served as the Secretary of Zhejiang provincial Party Committee, he published an article titled "Construct a Harmonious Society Which Respects Cultural Diversity" in *the People's Daily* (*人民日报* – the official mouthpiece of China's central Government), in which he emphasised the crucial importance of regional culture to Zhejiang's development. According to him: "The achievements made by Zhejiang during the 20 years of reform cannot be separated from Zhejiang's culture as the prime power [*源动力*]. It is the organic integration of Zhejiang's profound culture with its current development that supports people's entrepreneurial spirit and innovation mechanism" (Xi, 2005, paragraph 3).

In recent years, the importance of local culture, people's social practice and ways of life to China's economic development, has been expressed increasingly frequently by the central Government. Between October and November 2018, for example, and in order to boost people's confidence in the China-United States "trade war", major Party newspapers such as *the People's Daily* and the *Guangming Daily* [*光明日报*] published a series of articles to introduce China's regional economies. Local values and traits are repeated highlighted as a crucial contributor to development, such as the values of "solidarity, hardworking, weightbearing, and dare to be" that are ascribed to people in Zhangjia Gang (Wang, 2018, paragraph 3); the spirit of self-sustaining, creativity and honesty of people in Wenzhou (Gu, 2018).

Culture for a sustainable development and ideological construction

As the only dominant power in Chinese politics, the Communist Party must consistently maintain its position as the vanguard of China's socialist cause – its representativeness of traditional cultural values and orthodox socialist philosophy (equality, comradeship, and so on) is no longer to be assumed (Shambaugh, 2008). As Party leaders routinely recognise culture as having crucial roles to play in the nation's economic development, policymakers have been continuously defining its position as the representative of "advanced culture" in order to lead and "correct" China's developmental reality. As noted by Xia et al. (2003, 11), for the political leaders in China, cultural and ideological management should "create a healthy social and cultural environment for economic development", "establish healthy social ethics and psychological quality" among Chinese people.

Along with culture, morality is a primary focus of the Party's construction of socialist culture. Under the influence of Confucianism, moral authority has been regarded by China's political leaders as a major source of political power (Klimes, 2017) as well as of cultural significance. In today's China, moral codes are also used to address some of the key challenges of national development: under Hu Jintao (2002 to 2012) and then Xi Jinping's leadership (2013—), increasing income inequality, social injustice, rampant corruption, and environmental degradation, are all officially designated as central moral failings and thus direct threats to China's socialist project (Hu, 2005; Xi, 2017). Address these threats, Hu Jintao promoted the concept of "harmonious society" and "scientific development", with the purpose of leading the country towards sustainability. Xi Jinping further defined the "primary contradiction" [*主要矛盾*] of Chinese society as "the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life" in such aspects as equality, justice, security, and environment (Xi, 2017, paragraph 22). In the ruling elite's vision for an ordered society and sustainable national development, the construction of morality plays a crucial role. As Hu Jintao declared, "whether or not a society is harmonious, whether a nation can achieve long-term order to a great extent depend on the ideological and moral characters of all

social members... We must actively carry out the project of citizens' moral construction, widely promote the education of social morality, professional ethics and family virtues..." (Hu, 2005, paragraph 20). Since 2005, a series of moral campaigns, such as "Socialist Concept of Honors and Disgrace" [*社会主义荣辱观*], "Four Virtues Education" [*四德教育*], and "Socialist Core Values" [*社会主义核心价值观*] have been strenuously carried out by the Party-State as key national strategies. In the 18th National Congress of the CPC held in 2012, "rule of virtue" [*以德治国*] was formally enshrined into the Party's charter as a critical means of governance.

Through repeatedly promoting a litany of moral values — typically, honesty, friendship, equality, justice, and trustworthiness — the political elite explicitly aim for an ordered and progressive national development based on a harmonious and unified co-existence of people, party and rulers (Deng, 2001, 144). In recent years, the ostensible "decline" of morality among Chinese people has increasingly attracted official disapprobation on account of it affecting the prospects of national development (even "hard" economic development). As emphasised by Zhang Yong and Hu Fuming, two former high-ranking officials in their article published in *Red Flag* (a core theoretical political journal of the CPC), moral decline has become one of China's major challenges. A sustainable economic system, rather, requires trust, credibility, honesty and efficiency, all in turn contingent on the progressive construction of a socialist culture. "Without the participation of Chinese people in the cultural domain, a sole reliance on economic demands will inevitably lead to unsolvable pitfalls in economic and social development" (Zhang and Hu, 2017, 7).

With the decline of the ideological effectiveness of Marxism and Maoism, nationalism and patriotism have been instituted by the CPC as a major means of unifying Chinese people and bolstering their allegiance with and support for the state and the Party (Gries, 2004; Hyun and Kim, 2015). The promotion of patriotism and nationalism, when carefully orchestrated, are also regarded by the ruling elite as instrumental to the maintenance of social and political stability (Guo, Cheong and Chen, 2007: 468). State nationalism (or official patriotism) in China in the reform era has been most characterised by its emphasis on China's "wounded experience" in the modern era and its salvation and prosperity under the leadership of the Party. According to official discourse, China was a glorious ancient civilisation who fell victim of oppression and humiliation from the Opium War in the Qing Dynasty to the Japanese invasion in 1937. The CPC, on the other hand, is the Chinese people's saviour and the protector of them from enemies and threats (Coble, 2007). This official narrative (and the broader political discourse constructed around it) has been reiterated by the four generations of Chinese leaders in their national speeches, incorporated into the educational system (Grant, 2014), and widely disseminated by the Party's mainstream media outlets.

With the enhancement of China's economic and political power in the reform era, and with the increasingly close connections between China and the outside world, in recent years there has been a distinct increase in the official discourse depicting a prosperous and powerful China who confidently takes its own "socialist" road and contributes greatly to world development. The incumbent president Xi Jinping, by incorporating his "Chinese Dream" [*中国梦*] theory into the core of the CPC's ideologies, has undoubtedly raised nationalism (to a large extent also positive propaganda) to an even more important status than his predecessors. As Lim (2014) rightly pointed out, although Xi's vague "Chinese Dream" encompasses a wide range of development goals (or "national dreams") such as environmental protection and the enhancement of people's standards of living, lying at its core is a strong nationalistic appeal aiming at receiving the widest consensus through "national renewal".

Moral values and nationalism constitute the central components of the Communist Party's ideological campaigns. For political leaders in China, the party's ideologies need to be integrated with the everyday life and consciousness of the mass public order to function effectively. The key principle to such integration is the ideological requirement that cultural works should produce content that is closely related to people's real lives and cultures (discussed in more detail below).

As President Xi Jinping at the Beijing Forum on Literature and Art — a landmark national conference of cultural policy which took place in 2014 — that "people are the sources of flowing water for literature and art creation, whenever they are removed from the people, literature and art will change into rootless duckweeds, baseless groaning, and soulless bodies" (Xi, 2014, paragraph 31). Cultural workers "should consciously breathe together with the people, share their fate, link their hearts with the people's hearts, feel joy for the joy of the people, suffer for the suffering of the people, and be servants of the people" (paragraph 35); that cultural works should "reflect well the people's wishes" and "persist in the fundamental line of serving the people and serving socialism" (paragraph 27).

'Mass Line' — the fundamental principle of China's cultural policy

The above account will now allow us to understand with greater critical nuance how China's cultural policy is a central medium of ideology. And ideology is not monolithic or simply a medium of "control"; it is a discourse, whose deployment in local and regional contexts plays a formative role in national economic development (and the political legitimacy required for its direct — de facto "command economy" — management). It contains at least three important and interconnected aims that are responsive to China's developmental reality and conducive to socialist aspirations of national sustainable development. Firstly, China's cultural policy suppresses those values, thoughts, and information (such as Western democratic values, and "excessive" expressions of commercial culture) that are considered by policymakers to be undesirable and even threatening to the Party and/or to the Chinese society. Secondly, the Communist Party has been strenuously forming its official ideology across the social and economic domains and for strategic political purposes. A powerful and attractive official ideology, which maintains a credibility and usefulness in ordering social and working life in every arena, is not only necessary for resisting "disruptive" foreign values and ideas but also for the unification of Chinese people in a spirit of trust under the Communist Party's leadership. Thirdly, the CPC actively constructs and promotes "socialist culture" and its ideologies in order to reach factual developmental aims. For the Chinese Government, culture must play essential roles in both economic and political construction.

The "mass line" [*群众路线*], as a method developed over decades of revolutionary struggle, is the fundamental principle of the CPC's management of culture. This ideological principle stipulates that cultural works should provide "truthful" and "honest" depictions [*真实反映*] of the culture and social practice of the people, and make a mass consciousness and ways of lives a central fulcrum of cultural production — as content, motivation and skills, expression and communication.

As a crucial means of ideology-formation, the theoretical principles of the mass line were most clearly articulated by Mao Zedong in articles published in the early 1940s, and particularly his talks at the Yan'an Conference of Literature and Art in 1942. Mao regarded the "cultural front" as a crucial battleground (along with the "military front") for the Party in political-ideological struggles (Mao, 1991). He, on the one hand, acknowledged Marx's original theory that the "economic base" (material or economic structure of society) plays the formative role on determining a people's way of life, social consciousness, basic mentality, and cultural expressions (Marx, 1904, 11-12). He also firmly believed in the key assumption of historical materialism that the masses are central agents and the real source of strength in both revolutionary struggles and socialist construction (Mao, 1991; Vepa, 1979). One the other hand, Mao was influenced by Leninism (with its emphasis on the action-oriented political culture of vanguard groups), and by China's complex cultural traditions (particularly Confucianism), along with the Party's own revolutionary experiences (mobilising peasant movements, for example) and believed that the "superstructure" (culture, ideology, politics) is formative for "common" experience and cognitive understanding of the base-structure of society and economy (Knight, 2007; Meyer-Clement, 2015).

In Mao's view, the fundamental interests of workers and farmers are manifested in their everyday struggles against the exploring classes (capitalist, imperial and feudal) and their self-determined efforts to "propel history forward" towards socialism. The CPC, as the vanguard of the proletariat, share with the masses the same aims and interests in the revolution. Throughout his life, Mao was philosophically preoccupied with the nature of human consciousness and aimed to build a dominant intellectual culture based not (as the West) on argument, opposition, skepticism and dissent — but on the integration of the "consciousness" of the proletariat, with the advanced preoccupations of intellectuals and political aspirations Party members (Schram, 1969; Dirlik, 2005). In ordered to construct a national socialist culture, Mao required a "two directional education" in which party members and intellectuals first re-mould themselves by the proletariat and then sift, refine and articulate the consciousness and aspirations of the masses so they can be recognised and internalised by both (Keane, 2007, 54). In this, the mass line cultural policy was the fundamental medium of political struggle.

In post-Mao China, however, the Communist Party has renounced direct class struggle and cognate concepts of the "dictatorship of proletariat" and so forth. It has also abandoned the adherence to the centrally planned and fully state-owned economic model (which were the fundamental features of the economic systems in Mao's China); for it incorporates markets and private ownership (the core institutional arrangements associated with capitalism) as necessary mechanisms of economic growth and living standards in the cause of a socialist society. In spite of the almost inevitable ideological "hollowness" of the very concept of a communist Party in the context of such "material conditions", the CPC never ceases to replenish its ideological project and assume cultural leadership over the mass public.

CPC official ideology in today's China consists of several major components – patriotism, nationalism (Gries, 2004; Guo, Cheong and Chen, 2007) and moral values (such as "socialist core values") (Ai, 2009; Li, 2015). The "universalism" implied by such national application of values, in turn implies a political consensus from a culturally and ethnically diverse Chinese population — whose lives are deeply embedded in the developmental realities of their own localities. Yet, the mass line remains the fundamental principle of the party's ideological formation for its cultural integration of politics and society. It requires a continual absorption of cultural content from the masses. And it so needs to convince the masses of the vitality of "socialist culture" (in the Government's terms) notwithstanding the increasing social diversification of Chinese society. As President Xi Jinping emphasised on a great number of occasions, both "socialist core values" and patriotism are significant efforts to seek and construct "the greatest common divisor" [*最大公约数]* among Chinese people in order to unify thinking and build consensus (Xinhua News Agency, 2017). According to him, in the context of commercialisation and globalisation, "when people's interests and values become diversified, and when Western values and erroneous trends of thoughts infiltrate into, influence and disrupt the construction of socialist ideology, finding and building common interests and common values among the diversified thoughts and cultures in the whole society should be the core focus of our ideological work" (Xi, 2015, paragraph7).

In China's reform era, Mao's creed that "propaganda work" has to be closely related to people's real lives in order to be effective, continues to be a fundamental stricture for Party officials (Brady, 2008); the Party continues to emphasise "two-directional education" (i.e. using people's lives and consciousness to supplement, demonstrate and substantiate official ideologies while using its ideologies to educate the masses) (Editorial Committee of the *Handbook of the Party's Propaganda Work at Grassroots Level*, 2008).

In addition, national economic development since Mao was never implemented by permanent institutions, models or industrial apparatus. Rather, Deng Xiaoping elevated "social practice" – the very engine of proletarian revolution as understood by Mao, into the guiding principle of China's economic development. Placing

overwhelming emphasis on the economic practices, innovation and enthusiasm of the "masses" (Deng, of course, perceived "the masses" as consisting of all "Chinese people" rather than merely "the proletariat"), the Central Government provide a high-level of autonomy to local regions in order to promote perpetual reforms that that emphasise experiment, innovation, flexibility and step-by-step transition. The pragmatic, experimental and gradual nature of its development strategies greatly contributed to China's meteoric economic growth and its relatively steady transition from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy. The Chinese Government, accordingly, require cultural works to protect and promote practice, innovation and creativity in social and economic lives. As stipulated by the *Central Committee of the Communist Party of China's Opinions on the Prosperity and Development of Socialist Literature and Art* – a guiding document of China's cultural policy issued in 2015, that cultural works must "vividly portray the great process of people's creation of history" (the CPC Central Committee, 2015, paragraph 5), and "fully respect the principal position and pioneering capacity of the people in order to unleash the creative capacity of the masses" (paragraph 8).

Conclusion

This article has maintained that Western research discourse on China's cultural policy tends to emerge in the discursive space between the assumed demands of Western-style democratic principles and certain aspects of China's communist government, ideology and centralised party power. While this article does not challenge the Western political critique of rights and liberties, which often flow from assumptions derived from democratic principles, it has sought to introduce a dimension of historical complexity on China's institutional reality. It explains that stereotypical perception of Chinese Government's management of culture as centralised and monolithic is a partial understanding. It gives insufficient attention to the Communist party's anthropological understandings of culture, and its political agenda to foreground people's culture as a way of life in media and cultural sectors.

This article therefore unfolds the historical-political complexity of China and culture. Cultural policy in China emerged as integral to the communist system, in Party doctrine and ideology, and in Central Government's strategic approach to socialist development. And "socialist development", which is embedded (and often deceptively so to those outside) an ideological project that maintains CPC leadership through a strategic construction of political legitimacy through national identity and morality, or an horizon of political expectations on the moral character of the socialist subject — and where socialist values are demonstrably superior to the compromised if not socially destructive values of the West. Moreover, for communist leaders in China, socialist values should enfranchise "the people", articulating their essential interests and so stimulating their loyalties. Even in economic policy, grounded in historical materialism's fundamental conception of the undifferentiated labouring mass of workers, post-Mao China's developmental reality is one shaped by individuals, local experiments and regionalised modes of growth. All the while, central Government recognises that culture and the everyday cultural life of the people, is the substantive character of a socialist economy.

Cultural policy research should therefore attend to this complexity, and so the apparatus of cultural production, its institutions, practices, values and changing landscapes of consumption, meaning and experience. Culture (rhetorical, actual, and imagined) is internal to national political reproduction and defines China's national socialist development. Even China's perceived lack of free-market practices in the cultural and creative industries — and the relation amongst economic competition, individual and sectoral interests, and innovation and technology — must consider the political economy within which cultural value itself is formed.

Currently, insufficient attention has been paid to government agendas for culture, their historical legacies, theoretical underpinnings and the overwhelming socialist development priorities that form the policy basis of these agendas. Furthermore, in the absence of an imminent

conversion to a Western liberal-style democracy, cultural policy has a central role to play in China's development. This article has identified the implementation of the "mass line" of culture doctrine, axiomatic of the Chinese Government's management of culture – where "truth" and the veracity of representation provokes significant lines of inquiry. Government's cultural policy contains multiple agendas, or at last operates on different epistemic registers of representation in maintaining its ideological and institutional management over culture and its productive role within the political economy. Lines of inquiry suggested by this might allow us to posit research questions for a renewed research agenda around the Communist Party's agendas of culture, rather than the incompatibilities between China's cultural policy and Western-style democracy.

Crucial research questions, for example, can be generated through identifying conflicts within the Chinese government's own agendas for culture. There are obvious contradictions between the "mass line" principle, which stipulates the promotion of the social practice and cultural life of Chinese people, and the Communist Party's top-down ideological control. China's cultural policy demands "truth" in social practice, but often only accepts "truth" that is not perceived to be detrimental to the party's broadly conceived needs for legitimacy and social stability. A widely observed phenomenon in China's media and cultural sectors has been the marginalisation of public interests and voices when the cultural sector goes through commercialisation under tight political control. This phenomenon can be approached for the cultural sector's violation of the mass line principle and its negative impacts on China's cultural policy.

China's cultural policy recognises that the protection and promotion of everyday life through cultural policies is crucial in supporting socialist development, and also in forming a vibrant socialist culture that buttresses the Communist Party's ideological construction. The government requires "the people", not simply to be obedient citizens but to be citizens of a successful socialist country — cultural citizens who believe in and express the success of an historic, revolutionary, political regime (Zhao and Wu, 2020). The very criteria of political legitimacy, set forth by the revolutionary regime, is embedded in culture and the life of the people: the people are the true expression of communist society. In recent years, a distinct tendency to "isolate itself from the masses" (脱离群众) has been indicated even by central Party leaders as one of the most critical pitfalls of China's cultural sector (Wang, Zheng and Zhang, 2016). More research needs to be conducted concerning the implementation of mass line by China's cultural industries, the incompatibilities between the mass line and the party's control and censorship (both in theory and practice) in contemporary China. And further research is needed on the kind of reforms that need to be taken in order to facilitate effectively enforced political ideology and concomitant network of public policy institutions that allow an authentic socialist culture to evolve and a culture of the people to flourish.

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