

Cadres and Discourse in the People's Republic of China

Michael Schoenhals
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[†] Denotes Chapter written by Michael Schoenhals

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Key Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CELAP	China Executive Leadership Academy, Pudong
KMT	Nationalist Party
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
RMB	<i>Renminbi</i> , the Chinese Currency Unit

Abstract

Background: Political action and political thinking (“ideology”) provide the twin sets of data on which most conventional analyses of the Chinese Communist Party’s transformation are made to rest. The 21st century’s unprecedented concern with information and communication technologies has underscored, however, the need for analysts to upgrade the relevance of political *language* to any actionable appreciation of an untidy present and forecasting of a potentially turbulent future. A study that focuses on how language and state officialdom intersect in the areas of propaganda and nationalities/ethnic affairs is reported here. **Results:** The first chapter’s findings show how in the reform-era of the 1980s and 90s, language control and strategic management of political discourse exercised by cadres in the party propaganda apparatus helped forestall a development along Soviet lines ending with the sudden collapse of the socialist state. The findings indicate that the post-reform future—which in parts of China has, in fact, already arrived—is likely to see the contested disappearance of the traditional symbols and rhetoric of socialism “as we know it,” but that this transformation of discourse must be distinguished from the demise of socialism *per se*. The findings of the second chapter, in which the center of analysis shifts to language and ethnic cadres on China’s national periphery, illustrate how a discourse on socialism is successfully employed by grass-roots officialdom to mitigate conflict and make demands on the state. As much as ethnic cadres are restrained by the local offices in which they serve, their maneuvering and creative manipulation of the language of power constrains the central state, in particular in the context of development and nationalities policy. **Lessons to be learned:** A theoretical analysis of written primary-sources and first-hand ethnographic data make plain that unless language-in-use is factored into analyses of China’s past and present, even the most judicious conjecture concerning What May Happen Next? may well be fatally skewed.

Executive Summary

As the People's Republic of China (PRC) sails further into the uncharted waters of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" in search of The Harmonious Society, state discourse is being transformed almost beyond recognition. With respect to form, meaningful references to the canonical works of revolution are disappearing. Taking their place in the speeches of senior politicians—not to mention People's Daily editorials and op-ed pieces—are novel interpretative instruments and formulations that would have struck even the big "architect of reform", Deng Xiaoping, as cognitively dissonant. As far as the political content of discourse is concerned, the PRC now promotes open debate on issues that did not even exist as recently as a decade ago, as well as purposive inquiry into familiar problems from angles that once were, but no longer remain, taboo.

So far, this state discourse transformation has been able to run its course without threatening systemic collapse. While there may be parallels in the political life of the PRC today and in the former Soviet Union ensuing the arrival of *perestroika*, what happened to the USSR in the end does not seem to apply to the PRC. In the former Soviet Union, one strand of analysis suggests that changes in the discursive regime facilitated the creation of the crucial "conditions of possibility" for the collapse of socialism. In China we see a different set of conditions evolving and gaining momentum in the wake of the watershed 3rd Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in December 1978. This paper traces part of the reason to a nexus of state discourse together with the cadres acting as its primary "carriers."*

* Published here with permission, the paper originated as presentations prepared for the second workshop of the international network *Cadres and Discourse in Late Socialism: The USSR, Mongolia and China* (funded by the British Academy and CRASSH) in Cambridge, on April 8–10, 2005. For a stimulating discussion and valuable feedback, the authors would like to thank

The first chapter, *Abandoned or Merely Lost in Translation?* approaches the cadre-discourse nexus from the vantage point of the central state and its institutions, which for more than half a century have dominated propaganda, debate, and so-called “political education.” It comments on some of its transformations and poses analytical questions that ask where the praxis of state discourse in the PRC differs from the former Soviet Union and why changes in the discursive regime that helped end the Soviet Union are impacting so differently in the PRC. It looks at the management of state discourse under—and since the deaths of—Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping and asks what some of its salient points have been. Cognizant of the difference between political discourse *in Chinese* and *in* (multi-ethnic and hence invariably multi-lingual) *China*, it asks with respect to the communist party which institutions may end up playing what roles in the future and what some likely scenarios for future change may be.

The chapter suggests that when Deng Xiaoping took charge of the post-Mao CCP, he no longer assumed that because the steps used to obtain results in the real world had up to a point coincided with those prescribed by party ideology, it was by necessity the case that ideology, therefore, amounted to a correct description of the real world. In the winter of 1978–79, Deng took Mao’s pragmatic “decoupling” of form and meaning and turned it inside out: for almost two decades thereafter, in collusion with a somehow still sympathetic public traumatized and exasperated by the Cultural Revolution, he let it serve as the cover under which new semantic meaning was gradually inscribed in that which had been neglected for too long.

Citing examples of discursive proscription and contextualization in nationalities affairs, the chapter highlights the normative role played by the CCP Central Propaganda Department. Although the impact on cadres of its instructions, concerning politically correct language, could vary tremendously, the Department played an indispensable role in the Deng era by defining and redefining under changing circumstances the parameters of state discourse.

Concluding with a look at CELAP (China Executive Leadership Academy, Pudong), the chapter speculates on the future of the cadre-discourse nexus. It argues that the pragmatic manipulation of translation occurring at CELAP—where Marxism is giving way to the *Book of Changes* and CCP History and “party building” are rebranded in English as “quantitative analysis”—may well be the shape of things to come. Provocatively, it asserts that once all the familiar chunks of words that spell out the parameters of left and right, good and bad, have been redacted from the “cadre vocabulary” in Chinese, they may well be set to disappear from state discourse in the PRC altogether.

The second chapter, *Warming to Socialism in the Cold Mountains*, picks up the cadres and state discourse theme but looks at it from a different angle, bringing the present sharply into focus while making forays into history. Incorporating ethnographic data from southwest China and information from written sources in the public domain, it concerns itself with ethnic minority cadres and their experience, individually and collectively, of encountering and eventually grasping state discourse. Going beyond the conventional static view of binaries, it explores the interaction of a wide range of forces within the political system that shape the dynamics of ethnicity and ethnic relations in China.

Arguably the most understudied aspect of what makes ethnic cadres a topic is the PRC political system that has transformed the one-time local headmen in frontier society into civil servants of the new government. Underscoring their transformation is tension generated within the state bureaucracy. The chapter shows that as much as ethnic cadres are restrained by the offices in which they serve, their own manoeuvring invariably imposes constraints on state policy-making in nationalities affairs as well as economic development. Local autonomy and preferential treatment are the key devices adopted by the state in response to the socio-economic particularities of frontier societies; ironically, these very devices end up creating the “conditions of possibility” for the hijacking of state discourse from below.

How socialism changed from being an alien concept in the early 1950s to acquiring its present catchphrase-status illustrates a complex learning process on the part of ethnic minority cadres. Their “embrace” of socialism is an adaptation through which they justify their relationship with the state. One

of the most thought-provoking findings of the chapter concerns the role that socialism has come to play: in the given political system, its power lies not in its ideological appeal, but in that of the policy implementation in its name. In a multiethnic region like southwest China, where ethnic identities remain fluid and local nationalism largely reflects inter-community relations vis-à-vis the state, socialism serves a unique conflict mitigating function.

The post-Mao reforms saw the CCP abandon ideological control and opt for economic development, a change entailing a major discursive transformation. Instead of rupture, a new discourse revolving around development has emerged as an extension of socialism. A “shift” in ideological terms has provided the necessary conditions for both state and ethnic officialdom to maximize benefits. This stands in marked contrast to the Soviet Union, where socialism collapsed as a social system but not as a set of values. In the PRC, socialism may have lost its appeal as a set of values, but has not collapsed as a system.

If there are lessons that outside observers can learn from this paper’s findings, one that comes to mind immediately concerns the need to be sensitive to matters of language in use. National and local actors on the political stage in the PRC are no less skilled in the art of creative wordplay than are our own, in the case of Sweden, parliamentarians. In seeking to understand what drives China’s “executive leaders”/cadres and what carries weight in the political processes that will influence the country’s future direction, it would certainly be a mistake to neglect the role of socialist ideology altogether. But it would also be a mistake—and possibly an even bigger one—not to read and interpret the discourse in which that ideology plays its part with the same eye toward pragmatic misrepresentation and linguistic manipulation, plain and simple, that one has done all along when divining from what our own elected leaders care to say today, how they might proceed to act tomorrow.

I. Abandoned or Merely Lost in Translation?

Michael Schoenhals

Introduction

In “Soviet Hegemony as Form: Everything Was Forever until It Was No More,” Alexei Yurchak suggested that the conditions for the collapse of the Soviet Union had been “invisibly created... and at the same time rendered unexpected” by aspects of the particular “culture” of Soviet socialism. Specifically, change in what he called the discursive regime of the thirty some years that preceded the beginning of perestroika in 1985 had amounted to a process in which the “form of representation is replicated but its meaning is changed.” A pragmatic “decoupling” of ideological form from semantic meaning had led to the emergence of “conditions of possibility for the collapse of socialism, as a social system but not as a set of values...”¹

Yurchak’s analysis of the “conditions of possibility”—n.b. not the *causes*—of the collapse of the Soviet Union is clearly relevant to an inquiry into the present and future of the PRC. Contentious, though, is the question of *how* it is relevant? Should one, for example, expect to find a variant of the Soviet process at work in the system of “reform and opening up... with Chinese characteristics”? Is change mirroring that which occurred in the Soviet Union discernible in China’s discursive regime? Or does the value and relevance of Yurchak’s analysis to those who still study problems of communism actually lie in the way it alerts us to a number of crucial *differences* between the once fraternal pair of giants on the communist block?

In this chapter, I argue that “conditions of possibility”, like those which emerged a few years after the death of Stalin in the Soviet Union, have been present in the PRC since well before the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. However, the PRC has so far not witnessed the emergence of any “causes” equivalent to those which made the Soviet Union a thing of the past and the

¹ Alexei Yurchak, “Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (July 2003), pp. 480–81.

Soviet communist party a former governing party. In *Chinese* socialism, a different realization of the possible has occurred, one that does not readily lend itself to characterization in terms of sudden “collapse” or “implosion.”² Change has, on the other hand, been no less stark or potent in the way it has affected everyday life. China may still be governed by a communist party, and yes, its name is still that of a “people’s republic”; but the hundreds of millions of Chinese who were born, came of age, or started their adult lives during the period from 1949 to 1976 have had to live through the *de facto* “evaporation” of an entire social system of language and rituals that had once been “creative acts of rendering communist ideology meaningful within the broader framework of human values.”³ Like Soviet citizens on the eve of *perestroika*, they too had assumed “that everything was forever.”⁴ But three decades into post-Mao late socialism, they have learnt the hard way that nothing is forever. Once the sacred lyrics of *The East is Red* stood for the shared values and aspirations of a “worker-peasant-solider alliance” that battled capitalism and resisted revisionism; in the 21st century, their subliminal message is invoked in adverts for lighting fixtures addressing China’s post-revolutionary modern consumer.⁵

The *form* of change, in other words, has been very different in the PRC from what it once was in the former Soviet Union. One explanation for this has to do with the lived ideology and realities of socialism in China and what I have referred to elsewhere as simply how things are done with words in Chinese politics.⁶ The catastrophic downgrading in importance of the referential function of language was far more pronounced during Mao’s final years at the helm of the CCP than it had ever been under Lenin or Stalin, or for that matter under Khrushchev and the men who ousted him.⁷ When Mao finally

² Chinese views on whether or not the CCP may be able to stave off regime “collapse” indefinitely is the subject of Christopher Marsh, “Talking Behind their Back: Chinese Thoughts on their Coming Collapse,” *The National Interest: Weekly Commentary and Analysis on Foreign Policy*, at <http://www.inthenationalinterest.com/Articles/Vol1Issue7/Vol1Issue7Marsh.html> (accessed by the author on 31 March 2005).

³ Alexei Yurchak, “Soviet Hegemony of Form,” p. 480.

⁴ Andrei Makarevich, quoted in *ibid*.

⁵ As viewed by the author in Shanghai’s subway in December 2003.

⁶ Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies*. (Berkeley: University of California Institute of East Asian Studies, 1992), pp. 1–29.

⁷ Alexei Yurchak, “Soviet Hegemony of Form,” pp. 491–96.

“went to see Karl Marx” (which is how the polite Maoist would euphemistically have referred to the CCP Chairman’s passing in 1976), his successors hijacked his pragmatic “decoupling” of form and meaning and, in effect, turned it inside out. The once ideological core now became the cover under which, in silent collusion with an exasperated, traumatized yet somehow still sympathetic public, Deng Xiaoping was able to inscribe new semantic meaning in that which had been neglected for too long.⁸

In probing the question of *why* change in the PRC has assumed so different a form from what it did in the Soviet Union, my broad concern is with cadres, the men and women described in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as office holders “in a Party, governmental or military organization; also more widely, one who holds a position, esp. in a local organization, school, etc.” My specific interest is the nexus of state discourse and cadres as office holders in the sector of nationalities affairs. From the perspective of the “conditions of possibility” under which late socialism in China may or may not survive, their role in shaping the present discursive regime is particularly deserving of analysis. Under Mao, they had already become skilled negotiators of the treacherous political currents that swept regularly across the country and as mediators between the interests of the national and the local, and between the CCP and forces reluctant to embrace revolution.⁹ Today, their role is no less crucial.

The sector of nationalities affairs furthermore brings into focus an often neglected dimension of state discourse in the PRC, namely that of translation (linguistic as well as “cultural”). It mitigates against the imposition of what Edward Said once spoke of as “falsely unifying rubrics” by alerting us to the fact that state discourse in the PRC is not necessarily *in Chinese*, but includes—in addition to minute context- and subject-dependent subtleties in variants of that language—any number of layers of complexity deriving from the fact that the PRC, in the words of its constitution, is a “unitary multi-

⁸ See Michael Schoenhals, “Political Movements, Change and Stability: The Chinese Communist Party in Power,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 159 (September 1999), pp. 595–605.

⁹ Wu Jinghua, *Women shi zheyang zouguolaide: Liangshan de bianqian (The Path We Have Travelled: The Transformation of Cold Mountain)* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2002), pp. i; 43–44.

national state.”¹⁰ State discourse in the PRC may be carried mainly in the medium of Chinese, but in the strictest of terms it is a larger whole that also involves the spoken and written languages of national minorities. In the words of a linguist from Yunnan province, writing at the start of the era of reforming and opening up, “the equality of languages is an important content of the party’s nationalities policy and an important indicator for telling real Marxists from bogus Marxists.”¹¹

State Discourse in New China

In “Mastering the Perverse: State Building and Language ‘Purification’ in Early Soviet Russia,” Michael S. Gorham described the Soviet party-state’s “symbolic cultural cleansing that accompanied more direct methods of social extermination and control.”¹² The first years of the Chinese People’s Republic witnessed something similar, the unfolding of—in the words of a *People’s Daily* editorial from 1951—a “struggle for the purity and health of language.”¹³ Unlike in the Soviet case, however, the Chinese linguistic purification campaign did not target the voice of the peasantry, but the voice of the cadres. It singled out the people for which the foreign media at the time coined the expression “Red Mandarins,” the 3.9 million (1953) men and women tasked with the production or dissemination of writings, policies, and public speech in “new China.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Edward Said, “*Orientalism 25 Years Later: Humanism v. the Empire-builders*,” *Counterpunch*, August 4, 2003. www.counterpunch.org/saido8052003.html (accessed by the author on March 24, 2005).

¹¹ Yu Chaohui, “Yunnan de shuangyu ji shuangyu jiaoxue zhi xianzhuang” (The Current State of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education in Yunnan), in *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu shuangyu yanjiu lunji* (*Studies on Bilingualism Among China’s National Minorities*) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1990), p. 145.

¹² Michael S. Gorham, “Mastering the Perverse: State Building and Language ‘Purification’ in Early Soviet Russia,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Spring, 2000), p. 135.

¹³ Editorial “Zhengquede shiyong zuguo de yuyan, wei yuyan de chunjie he jiankang er douzheng” (Correctly Employ the Language of the Motherland, Struggle for the Purity and Health of Language), *Renmin ribao* (*People’s Daily*), June 8, 1951.

¹⁴ See Karl Eskelund, *The Red Mandarins: Travels in Red China* (London: Alvin Redman, 1959). Eskelund was a Danish journalist and travel writer who had lived in Beijing before 1949; Wan Fuyi (ed.), *Zhongguo gongchandang jianshe da cidian* (*Great Encyclopaedia of Chinese Communist Party Construction*) (Ji’nan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 2001), p. 724. The figure 3.9 million cadres (*ganbu*) is from the autumn of 1953 and does “not include cadres in the armed forces.” It is said to have been “eight times what it had been on the eve of the founding of the PRC.”

Once the cadres had mastered speaking and writing politically correct and “pure” language, it would be their task as educators by personal example to bring about a similar change among the “common people.” As far as most members of the CCP leadership were concerned, the same laws applied to this and almost any physical cleansing or symbolic “purification.” Liu Shaoqi, number two in the party at the time, argued in 1964 that “once the cadres have taken a bath and really given themselves a thorough cleansing, the masses will naturally follow and take a bath too. It need not take too long, a few days should do it.”¹⁵ Interestingly enough, Mao Zedong’s recorded remarks on the subject, while ambiguous, do not appear to privilege cadres in the way that Liu’s do. While Liu ascribed to “the masses” the subaltern role of those whose purification “naturally” only would occur *sub sequentially* to cleansing action on the part of cadres, Mao posited in 1963 the presence of a relationship of interdependence and circumscribed power, and stated that “cadres rely on the poor and lower-middle peasants when washing their hands or taking a bath.”¹⁶

One of the difficult issues that confronted cadres in Mao’s China was that of how they should preferably proceed in the dual mission given to them of not merely purifying the language of state discourse but also to employ it as a medium of policy communication in whatever impure or less than perfect form it might at any given moment still have. On paper, it was easy for someone like the Minister of Defense Lin Biao to state, as he did in 1964, that one must “always and as much as possible make use of the pan-national language propounded by the Party Center and Chairman Mao.”¹⁷ But ordinary cadres, seeking to make the ideological construct of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought not merely known but *meaningful* to China’s “common people,” found the task a daunting one. And it appeared even more daunting than it seemed in China proper—where dialects and illiteracy

¹⁵ Liu Shaoqi, “Zai jingwei dangzu huibao gongzuo shi de jianghua” (Talks During Work Reports by the Party Group of the State Economic Commission) (September 23 and 25, 1964), in *Pipan ziliao: Zhongguo Heluoxiaofu Liu Shaoqi fangeming xiuzhengzhuyi yanlun ji* (Criticism Material: Collected Counter-Revolutionary Revisionist Utterances by China’s Khrushchev Liu Shaoqi), 3 vols. (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe ziliaoshi, 1968), Vol. 3, p. 598.

¹⁶ Mao Zedong, “Guanyu nongcun shehuizhuyi jiaoyu deng wenti de zhishi” (Instructions on the Rural Socialist Education Campaign etc.) (May 1963), in *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui* (Long Live Mao Zedong Thought) ([Shanghai?], 1968), p. 47.

¹⁷ Quoted in Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*, p. 14.

probably came close to exhausting the list of truly massive problems that called for what Mao called “moving mountains”—for cadres working on the periphery of the PRC state, among nationalities that did not speak Chinese.

If they were themselves members of, or spoke the language(s) of, the nationalities within which they worked, cadres were able to improvise. The PRC Premier Zhou Enlai may have told a group of cadres from Xinjiang that in order to grasp the “profound arguments” that constituted the intellectual substance of “Mao Zedong Thought,” “you have to understand Mandarin,” but this was not his way of saying that as they progressed toward socialism, China’s national minorities by necessity all had to learn Chinese in order to get there.¹⁸ Rather, it was his way of tacitly acknowledging the difficulty involved in translation and the danger that, as concepts and keywords migrated from one language to another, a lot of cultural baggage would be lost along the way.¹⁹ What was understood in Uighur or Tibetan or Yi to be “Mao Zedong Thought” might still bear a likeness to what at some point indeed had been on the CCP Chairman’s mind, but then again... Did the difference matter? Was it always for the worse? Zhou Enlai had an open mind, perhaps because he himself had a working command of foreign languages, among them Japanese and German. It appears he was prepared to entertain the possibility that in their finest Chinese translations, some of the works of Karl Marx were actually “better” than the original. “How are you coming along with the preparation of your speeches?”, he asked during a meeting with foreign affairs cadres in August 1967, “Do you feel confident? Are they up to scratch? They have to be up to scratch. You mustn’t write the way Germans do when they write books, attempting to write something that

¹⁸ In and after the Great Leap Forward in 1958, the notion of a “direct transition” (*zhijie guodu*) from one’s own minority nationality language to Chinese as being somehow in accordance with socialist development in general, had gained credence in some circles. I have seen no sources suggesting that Zhou Enlai espoused or promoted this notion or some variant thereof.

¹⁹ For reasons that appear to have as much to do with politics as with the personal preferences of bilingual cadres (far more numerous today than they were in the 1960s), important policy texts emanating from the central authorities are now less and less often read or heard in translation. Ethnic Tibetan cadres, for example, most of whom have little difficulty understanding Chinese, prefer to predict which way the political winds from Beijing may be blowing next on the basis of an original Chinese language text, say, of a speech by the CCP’s general secretary, rather than on the basis of a translation. My thanks to Tsering Shakya for enlightening me and drawing my attention to this fact.

looks profound but never quite managing to get the hang of it, or trying to cover just about everything but in the end not explaining anything clearly.”²⁰

Late Socialist Transition

When the CCP first came to power, *change* was argued on the level of competing ideologies, idealism and grand constructs. Its justification involved an entire world-view and meta-narratives about tossing the “moribund” ideology of the class enemy onto the dust heap of history. Cadres, in particular, were after 1949 meant to acquire through “study” a mastery of the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought—an entirely new, in China, explanation of the world and of history. Addressing the first one hundred or so cadres to graduate from what is today the Central Party School, Liu Shaoqi explained how “after victory it will be especially important to study more theoretical works and to become better versed in theories; otherwise, due to the complexity of the situation, the dangers will be even greater than before... The ability to write is, moreover, one of the criteria for judging how well you have done in your studies.”²¹ When questions of *form* arose and precise terminological issues pertaining to this “ability to write” (and speak) had to be settled, the guidance that PRC cadres received was, over the years, to become increasingly fixated on a very narrow range of *politically* “correct” semantic choices.

The culmination of what amounted to the gradual obliteration of the “literal” meaning of words and chunks of words, and the displacement of political communication by quasi-religious *ritual* occurred at the height of the Cultural Revolution. In 1968, a notion of a grading (from deserving of retention and development, to “useless” and unworthy of preservation) of living languages in accordance with the position, on the scale of historical evolution, of the nationality/people using it, was taken to its extreme. This meant, for example, that native speakers of the English language employed to style-edit political tracts written in English by native speakers of Chinese (and slated

²⁰ “Zhou Enlai zongli 1967 nian 8 yue 23 ri jiejian waishikou zaofanpai de zhishi” (Premier Zhou Enlai’s Instructions at a Reception for Rebels in the Foreign Affairs Sector on 23 August 1967), *Dongtai* (Current Intelligence), No. 132, August 25, 1967, p. 6.

²¹ Liu Shaoqi, “Speech Delivered to the First Class of Students of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism” (December 14, 1948), in *Selected Works of Liu Shaoqi* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), Vol. 1, pp. 410; 416.

for publication in, say, *China Pictorial*) were left with nothing to do, since by definition, given that England was still capitalist, the native speaker's command of English was less "progressive" than that of the citizen of socialist China.²² When a notion like this informed a domestic policy for dealing with political speech and writing in one of China's minority nationality languages, its impact could be devastating.

The fundamental political changes ratified by the watershed 3rd Plenum of the 11th CCP Central Committee in December 1978, altered the parameters of the state discourse within which one debated and argued.²³ Henceforth, when the Central Propaganda Department engaged with ordinary cadres in matters of right and wrong, correct and incorrect, it argued almost exclusively in *instrumental* terms and relegated ideology to a position that carried lesser weight than it ever had in the past. To appreciate just how great the change really was, one merely has to glance at the pages of *Propaganda Trends*, a classified weekly serial put out by the department after 1978 with the aim of guiding cadres in how to speak, write, argue, and respond to political questions "correctly." Like few other publications of its kind, *Propaganda Trends* throws light on the discursive regime that underpinned the work and lives of cadres in China in the 1980s and much of the 1990s.²⁴

For their part, cadres working in the nationalities affairs sector made up but a part of the ratified readership of *Propaganda Trends*. Some of their more narrow concerns were only occasionally addressed between its covers, and were dealt with more fully elsewhere, in similar serials produced under the aegis of the State Nationalities Affairs Commission and CCP Central United Front Department. Unfortunately, researchers outside China have so far had little success in gaining access to copies of the latter. In what follows, I have selected from *Propaganda Trends* texts that address two broad concerns—proscription and contextualization—with the help of examples from the nationalities affairs sector.

²² Interview with Lars Ragvald, former *China Pictorial* "foreign expert" from Sweden.

²³ Michael Schoenhals, "Political Movements, Change and Stability," pp. 598–99.

²⁴ In writing this chapter, I have made use of a complete run, from 1979 through 1992, of the now defunct *Selections From Propaganda Trends*, an annual compendium made available to cadres above a certain rank at the time.

Propaganda Trends: Proscribing the Offensive

Beginning in 1979, a clear aim of *Propaganda Trends* was to make cadres all over China become comfortable with (and themselves eventually mimic, repeat, and concur with) a new practice in which the power of words and arguments in the state discourse no longer derived from their association with Mao Zedong or the Marxist-Leninist classics, but with “the biggest politics of all”—the peaceful evolution a.k.a. economic modernization.²⁵ No other single theme involving nationalities affairs recurred more often and more regularly in *Propaganda Trends* than that of the central authorities calling on “comrades concerned” not to alienate any of China’s national minorities when expressing themselves in speech or writing. The strategic and negative long-term repercussions of alienating language *in general* were taken very seriously by the CCP Central Propaganda Department.

The representative text quoted below is a notice from March 1986.²⁶ In it, the Central Propaganda Department observed that the CCP Center and a succession of “leading comrades” had stated over and over again over the years that China’s media had to be “extremely prudent” in dealing with all matters relating to nationalities affairs, in particular the names, customs and religious beliefs of ethnic groups. Indeed, the gist of the department notice would have been very familiar to regular readers of *Propaganda Trends*. In April 1979, for example, a short piece on the same subject had stressed that “names of nationalities not formally confirmed and approved by the state, in particular names that are discriminating or insulting in nature, should not under any circumstances be permitted to appear.”²⁷ In December 1980, a notice entitled “Propaganda Must Encourage Unity Among Nationalities” had declared that “regardless of whether the topic is the ancient past or the present, there must be no references to anything that may hurt nationality

²⁵ Michael Schoenhals, “The 1978 Truth Criterion Controversy,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 126 (1991), pp. 267–68.

²⁶ “Gongkai faxing de ge zhong chubanwu bu yao deyou weifan tongzhan, minzu, zongjiao zhengce de neirong” (Statements in openly distributed printed matter must not violate united front, national minority, or religious affairs policy), in *Xuanchuan dongtai 1986 nian xuanbianben* (*Selections from Propaganda Trends 1986*) (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1987), pp. 59–61.

²⁷ “Zai xuanchuan baodao zhong yao zhengque chenghu shaoshu minzu” (National Minorities Must Be Referred to by Their Correct Names in Propaganda Reports), in *Xuanchuan dongtai xuanbian 1979* (*Selections from Propaganda Trends 1979*) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1981), pp. 36–37.

sentiment, or provoke dispute among nationalities.”²⁸ In 1983, *Propaganda Trends* had carried a notice which, under the title “The Religious Beliefs, Customs and Habits of the National Minorities Must be Handled Prudently,” had reminded all of China’s press and publishing houses that “debate in books, newspapers and periodicals relating to religious or nationalities affairs must follow policy guidelines strictly and handle matters prudently. Instructions from relevant superior-level departments must first be sought with regard to major issues that have not yet been grasped.”²⁹ And in March 1985, *Propaganda Trends* had noted that the Central United Front Department recently circulated to all cadres concerned a “Notification on prudently treating issues relating to nationalities policy and religious policy in openly distributed books, newspapers and periodicals.”³⁰

In every one of these texts, the central authorities had denounced certain nascent “phenomena” in the popular realm of speech and writing—the use of language that was certain to alienate the national minorities if it were ever to be allowed to seep into the state discourse. Yet the impact of the Center’s appeals had been limited, as *Propaganda Trends* admitted in March 1986 when, for the *n*-th time, it observed that “Recently, phenomena contradicting united front, nationalities or religious affairs policy have continued to appear in articles in some newspapers and periodicals.”³¹ In fact, things had in some parts of China gone from bad to worse, with “incidents” erupting as the direct result of alienating and offensive writings about certain customs and culture of certain national minorities:

Leading comrades from the Center recently stated that the correct handling of phenomena involving united front, nationalities or religious affairs in openly distributed publications, literature and cultural and artistic products of all kinds is an important aspect of

²⁸ “Xuanchuan yao you li yu minzu tuanjie” (Propaganda Has to Serve National Unity), in *Xuanchuan dongtai xuanbian 1980* (*Selections from Propaganda Trends 1980*) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1981), p. 291.

²⁹ “Yao shenzhong duidai shaoshu minzu de zongjiao xinyang he fengsu xiguan” (The Religious Beliefs, Customs and Habits of the National Minorities Must be Handled Prudently), in *Xuanchuan dongtai xuanbian 1983* (*Selections from Propaganda Trends 1983*) (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1984), pp. 241–43.

³⁰ “Gongkai faxing de ge zhong chubanshe bu yao deyou weifan tongzhan, minzu, zongjiao zhengce de neirong,” p. 60.

³¹ *Ibid.*

strengthening the unity of the party with personalities outside the party and unity among nationalities. In the present critical juncture in the deepening of reform and comprehensive development of spiritual and material civilizations, such unity is especially important. When handling these kinds of issues, one must proceed according to what has been repeatedly stated by the Center and by leading central-level comrades, that one definitely must be particularly prudent, absolutely not allowing mistakes to occur that endanger peace and unity or even provoke disorder (*hunluan*). All news and publications units must ardently examine how mistakes have been handled in the past, summarizing experiences and drawing lessons.³²

On this occasion, what the Central Propaganda Department ended up doing was in effect to announce the recall of some of their power of censorship from intermediate and lower level party bodies, and of vesting it in what by comparison with the past constituted a superior organ. It cracked down, in other words, on those cadres who had “provoked disorder” by failing to take calls for “prudence” etc. seriously.

Given the simple fact that central appeals like those mentioned here had to be repeated over and over again, one concludes that they had a limited impact. What is important to remember, however, is that they were nonetheless made. Though their ability to substantially change actual behaviour may indeed have been small—in particular close to the very end of the bureaucratic transmission belt that stretched from senior cadres at the Center in Beijing via provincial and ministerial-level officialdom to grass-roots and ordinary people on China’s geo-political periphery—this is not to say that what they stood for in symbolic terms can be dismissed as politically irrelevant. They stated in unambiguous terms the parameters of state discourse. They told all cadres what applied, including if and when a member of minority nationality A spoke or wrote about minority nationality B.

Contextualizing the Yellow Emperor

In addition to that which *Propaganda Trends* decreed was simply forbidden because it did not contribute to “unity and stability,” there was a wider layered

³² Ibid.

expanse of terms and chunks of words that separated the extremely bad from the altogether good. So for example, there were the many formulations the appropriateness of which depended on the setting and on who was being addressed, rather than merely overhearing something.

The post-Mao era witnessed the gradual demise of a reasoning in absolutes that had been too pervasive in PRC politics for far too long. When and where change first took hold is hard to determine, but it may well have been in the only partially public context of the posthumous rehabilitation of those cadres who had committed suicide in the Cultural Revolution. In Mao's time, the context in which they had taken their own lives had not mattered: the party had regarded the circumstances irrelevant and taken note only of the fact that they had "betrayed the revolution" and violated the code of communist ethics they had sworn to uphold, to fight for the revolution until the end of their *natural* lives. After 1976, an influential lobbying group of Central Committee member widows and bereaved children and grandchildren insisted that historical "verdicts" always had to take circumstances into account, and that there must be no automaticity in the discursive realm that included the eulogy, the epitaph, and the final entry in one's party dossier. This genuine balancing of shades of grey, and of lesser achievements in one realm against greater failures in another, came to characterize a succession of *ad hoc* "work conferences" called by Deng Xiaoping's 11th Central Committee leadership after 1978 to deal with particularly vexing and sensitive issues "left over from history," including in nationalities affairs and united front work.³³ Contextualization of people, practices, policies, and propaganda became the preferred strategy for dealing with any number of issues, ranging from the place of Mao Zedong's foes in the history books to the presence of the words "Republic of China" on illustrations accompanying a newspaper article on philately.³⁴

A telling example of how a strategy of considered contextualization was brought to bear on the discursive regime that underpinned the work of cadres in the PRC's national minority areas, centers on the expression "sons and grandsons of the Yellow Emperor" (*yanhuang zisun*). In English-language telegrams from the PRC's official Xinhua News Agency and on the pages of the *China Daily*, the Yellow Emperor (said to have lived to the ripe old age of

³³ See Xiaolin Guo, this volume.

³⁴ *Baozhi dongtai* (*Newspaper trends*), No. 36, December 25, 1985, p. 2.

110, some 5,000 years ago) is today uniformly described as “a legendary ancestor of the Chinese nation”;³⁵ on privately run websites outside China, in Hong Kong, and on Taiwan, one sometimes comes across descriptions of him as the “first sovereign of civilized China” and claims to the effect that he “is recognized as the common ancestor of the Chinese people.”³⁶ In this case, it is actually possible to trace back to twenty-year old instructions from the CCP Central Secretariat the subtle differences that distinguish (a) the way in which he is written or spoken about inside China, in the context of inter-ethnic relations from (b) the way in which he and his “sons and grandsons” are referred to in the context of official texts aimed at an overseas Chinese or broad foreign audience. Both ways are in turn different from references to the Yellow Emperor made by those whose hearts and minds are beyond the reach of the CCP censor.

A document reprinted in *Propaganda Trends* on April 25, 1985 described why and how the CCP Central Secretariat ended up making an official statement concerning the mythical Yellow Emperor. The document began by taking note of the fact that “in recent years, it has become increasingly common in our propaganda to use the expression ‘sons and grandsons of the Yellow Emperor’ to refer to the Chinese nation.” This particular usage, the document noted, had recently provoked negative reactions from several quarters: specifically, “an old comrade from Zhejiang province” had criticized it in a letter to the CCP Center; members of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference had “voiced their opinion”; and “several comrades from national minorities” were clearly concerned, “according to reports from the State Nationalities Affairs Commission.”³⁷

Presumably because of the nature of the “issue” in the sense of something that intersected in countless tangled ways with history, nationalism, political

³⁵ “Multinationals Donate for Tree Planting at Yellow Emperor’s Mausoleum,” Xinhua News Agency (in English), 8 April 2003; “Yellow Emperor Remembered,” *China Daily*, May 14, 2003; “Legendary Story of Huangdi,” *China Daily*, May 14, 2003.

³⁶ See the website of the “Taoist Culture & Information Centre” in Hong Kong at <http://www.eng.taoism.org.hk/general-daoism/eminent-philosophers%20accomplished-daoists/pg1-4-1.asp> (accessed by the author on March 14, 2005).

³⁷ “Guanyu ‘Yanhuang zisun’ yi ci zai xuanchuan shang de shiyong wenti” (On the Problem of Employing the Expression “Descendants of the Yellow Emperor” in Propaganda), in *Xuanchuan dongtai 1985 nian xuanbianben* (*Selections from Propaganda Trends 1985*) (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1986), pp. 196–97.

discourse, and ideology, it ended up being dealt with by the CCP Central Propaganda Department. *Could one use the expression* “sons and grandsons of the Yellow Emperor” to refer to *all of* China’s nationalities?—that was how the department framed the issue. It then proceeded to solicit the expert opinion of scholars in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Peking University, the Central Nationalities Institute, and elsewhere. Two distinct views emerged, the first of which was that, yes, one could use the expression in this way, because “as history has developed, changes have affected the implications and external spread of terms [like the Yellow Emperor], and they have now become the abstract representatives of the Chinese nation.” The second view was more sophisticated in the sense of recognizing a greater degree of ambiguity:

The other view maintains that our People’s Republic is a multi-national state, and developing the unity of all nationalities is one of our aims. Some comrades from national minorities maintain they are members of the greater family of the Chinese nation, but not that they are “sons and grandsons of the Yellow Emperor.” We must respect this kind of nationalities-rooted sentiment. The term “Chinese nation” can be understood to incorporate the people of all nationalities, and can also be accepted by all nationalities, so why can we not dispense with using the expression “sons and grandsons of the Yellow Emperor”?³⁸

In view of how far apart the two views ultimately were and presumably (though there is no information available to substantiate this) because the institutions and people they represented all carried substantial political weight, the Central Propaganda Department opined in favour of a compromise. In a submission addressed to the Central Secretariat, it argued that “in documents issued by party and state institutions and in official speeches by leaders,” it was advisable to *avoid* using the expression “sons and grandsons of the Yellow Emperor” and persist in using “Chinese nation.” However, in the narrow context of “relations with Hong Kong and Taiwanese compatriots and overseas Chinese compatriots” the expression could “be put to positive use.” Hence, it was admissible to refer to the “sons and grandsons of the Yellow Emperor” in

³⁸ Ibid.

“individually signed articles and... in normal conversation and in propaganda aimed at Taiwan.”³⁹

Upon receiving the propaganda department's submission in writing on March 27, 1985, the CCP Central Secretariat and certain unnamed “leading central comrades” expressed their full agreement. Propaganda departments across China were called upon to study the instructions and see to it that they were implemented as intended by all parties concerned.⁴⁰ From what can be gleaned in a cursory survey of the national media twenty years later, the instructions are still being enforced, though it is clear that they are not left unchallenged.⁴¹

To spell out, then, what the texts just cited are meant to illustrate, is to note that the PRC state—here indistinguishable from the post-Mao CCP leadership—in the 1980s all but ceased to argue its case in ideological terms. Its internal communications with cadres who held offices in the sector of nationalities affairs came to be framed in *realpolitik* terms of what is conducive to law and order, “unity and stability,” and the “hard truths of development.” Cadres, in turn, were expected to convey the same “truths” (*daoli*) to their constituencies. By the 1990s, communist ideology was becoming increasingly contested within the broader framework of human values and, paradoxically, it was the communist party itself that ensured that this was the case.⁴²

The Final Frontier: Purging the Language (Once More)

In 2003, the CCP Center set up three entirely new party schools in China to strengthen the “training of Chinese cadres at the intermediate and top levels.” Two of the schools were located in Jinggangshan and Yan'an—localities with considerable symbolic capital, if viewed from the perspective of CCP history. The third school was located in Pudong, in the eastern environs of Shanghai. Constructed at a cost of 800 million *yuan* RMB,

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ For an example of where, when at all, the Yellow Emperor still merits a low-key reference in the context of China's “multi-nationality,” see the discussion of what holds the country together in Li Dezhu (ed.), *Zhongyang di san dai lingdao yu shaoshu minzu* (*The Center's Third Generation Leadership and the National Minorities*) (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 1999), p. 159.

⁴² Cadres and their constituencies in economically underdeveloped parts of China are today throwing the old symbols of communist ideology—and the language of a “moral economy” in which it was couched—*back* at the state. See Xiaolin Guo's chapter in this paper.

supposedly at the initiative of the former CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin, it is directly subordinate to the CCP Central Organization Department in Beijing. A foreign visitor has described its main building as “not unlike a church: huge and impressive, meant to make the visitor feel small and humble.”⁴³

Party schools have ever since pre-“Liberation” days had a crucial role to play in the CCP’s politics of language. At the beginning of the Deng Xiaoping era, that role was affirmed when the Central Party School in Beijing published a list of things associated with the discredited Cultural Revolution that desperately needed to be “set right”: in it, “erroneous formulations” preceded “confused notions” and “inappropriate practices.”⁴⁴ More recently, in March 2007, the most vocal internal challenge to some of the key formulations from the Jiang Zemin era emanated from the very same Central Party School.⁴⁵ In its party schools, the present CCP leadership is taking its already highly developed instrumentalist approach to discourse to an even higher level. The school in Pudong is where, in March 2005, one hundred cadres from all over China (including from all of the country’s national autonomous regions) came to attend the first in a series of semi-annual “Leadership Forums” officially designed to “further strengthen the mutual interaction between leadership theory and practice circles, deepen the comprehension and understanding of the major issue of leadership, promote internationally the exchanges and cooperation of leadership research, and give an impetus to the self-support and prosperity of leadership science!”⁴⁶ Addressing the forum were a fair number of Chinese, but also some foreigners, among them, the Greater China Region Inspector General of Human Resources, Coca-Cola (China) Beverage Co. Ltd., and—on the subject of the “branding” of Chinese provinces—representatives of Signature Resources Inc., USA. Prior to the forum, the school had put together and

⁴³ Fons Tuinstra, posted on website of *China Herald* (<http://www.chinaherald.com>) on March 26, 2005.

⁴⁴ Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things With Words in Chinese Politics*, pp. 6–7.

⁴⁵ Dong Degang, “Tantan Makesizhuyi Zhongguohua zuixin chengguo de dingwei wenti” (On the Problem of Where to Position the Latest Achievements of the Sinification of Marxism), *Kexue shehuizhuyi (Scientific socialism)*, No. 1, 2007.

⁴⁶ *Handbook – Leadership Forum: Leadership in The Process of Globalization* March 24–26, 2005 (Pudong: China Executive Leadership Academy, 2005), p. 2. My warmest thanks to Timothy Cheek for sharing with me this remarkable handbook as well as his own first-hand impressions of CELAP.

distributed an official Chinese-English brochure that described the cadre school to domestic and foreign audiences alike. It is from the texts (Chinese and English) in this brochure and a selection of the speeches made at the forum that one can get closer look at what is presently happening in the PRC to a cluster of familiar keywords centered, in this case, on the very word “cadre.”

The word “cadre” in Chinese has a short history and it is one intimately linked to the rise of the communist party. In the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* we find the following passage in a text dating from 1942:

Secondly, let us absorb what we need from foreign languages. We should not import foreign expressions mechanically or use them indiscriminately, but should absorb what is good and suits our needs. Our current vocabulary has already incorporated many foreign expressions, because the old Chinese vocabulary was inadequate. For instance, today we are holding a meeting of *ganbu* [cadres], and the term *ganbu* is derived from a foreign word [Japanese *Kanbu*-ED.]. We should continue to absorb many fresh things from abroad, not only progressive ideas but new expressions as well.⁴⁷

What is happening sixty-five years down the socialist road after Mao made the above observations is that his successors no longer regard the term *ganbu* and the greater cluster of “progressive ideas... new expressions” of which it was once part as worth holding on to. On the contrary, they want to see them historicized and gone.

To identify and circumscribe the typical “cadre vocabulary” that is being targeted today is as difficult as listing all of the words that the CCP slated for “cleansing” from the Chinese language in the 1950s in its “struggle for the purity and health of language.” But a rough idea of what is controversial may be had by looking at lists of political vocabulary compiled by PRC linguists, vocabulary supposedly so “alien” to begin with, in the 1950s, that after it had been incorporated into the ordinary language of ordinary Chinese, it never did more than enter most minority nationality languages in unchanged “Mandarin” form. That vocabulary includes, as one would expect, nouns like

⁴⁷ Mao Zedong, “Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing” (February 8, 1942), in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), Vol. 3, p. 60.

“imperialism, capitalism, socialism, communism, communist party...” etc. Because it is being deployed creatively by some to challenge the credibility of today’s CCP and its policies, it is now being singled out for special treatment.

What the CCP is busy doing is searching for a new language—one that will work in concert with its new practice.⁴⁸ Such a search is not in any sense unique to PRC politics, or to late socialism. Viz. the following excerpts from an internal memo used by the Republican Party in the United States to teach the cadres of the neocon revolution how to market *its* policies: “We have spent the last seven years examining how best to communicate complicated ideas and controversial subjects. The terminology in the upcoming... debate needs refinement.” “The term... has far more positive connotations than either of the other two terms, It conveys a moderate, reasoned, common sense position.” “The words on these pages are tested—they work! But the ideas behind them—translated into actions—will speak louder than words.”⁴⁹ (In response, activists supporting the Democratic Party are in turn hiring linguists to help them “rearticulate... core values,” “recast [their] approach to messaging,” “recontextualize debates and change the way the public views an issue, or the world,” and “reframe” issues “in a way that they have more traction, more importance.”⁵⁰)

In state discourse in the PRC today, the language inherited from the past no longer conveys the desirable “position” and in effect no longer has much “traction” when “translated into actions.”⁵¹ Not only does it fail to communicate much of late socialism’s controversial practice; from the CCP

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Sentences excerpted from page 142 of the infamous GOP “talking points” on “The Environment: A Cleaner, Safer, Healthier America,” produced by The Luntz Research Companies and included in their compendium *Straight Talk*. PDF document downloaded by the author on March 28, 2005, from http://www.mcgladrey-family.us/kayne/archives/2003/03/15/bush_and_republicans_on_the_environment

⁵⁰ From article on George Lakoff, professor of linguistics at University of California, Berkeley, and his role in diagnosing weaknesses in the “environmental movement’s communications strategy,” posted on the website of *Grist Magazine: Environmental News and Commentary* on March 29, 2005 (<http://www.grist.org/news/muck/2005/03/29/little-lakoff/index.htm>). Accessed by the author on April 2, 2005.

⁵¹ Timothy Cheek has pointed out in his analyses of the discursive realm within which so many of China’s public intellectuals today position themselves that here too, a utility-driven “search for theory” is under way. See Timothy Cheek, “Xu Jilin and the Thought Work of China’s Public Intellectuals,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 186 (June 2006), pp. 402–420.

Center's viewpoint, it can be downright subversive in the sense that it gives critics of that practice numerous formidable discursive weapons and symbolic capital. And so it is that the trusty old "cadre"—whose existence both by the *OED* and Mao Zedong had been so inextricably linked to socialism "as we once knew it"—has been slated for removal from the active lexicon, together with additional language that had come to be associated with him/her. The process is not yet fully visible in Chinese or in any of China's minority nationality languages, but it is very visible in official translations into English. It began with low-key commentary in the media in the late 1980s, in which professional translators pointed out that, in their experience, "cadre" was a term "the precise meaning of which people in the English-speaking world find very difficult to grasp."⁵² In late 1992, in typical fashion, one of the CCP's most senior translators was asked personally by Jiang Zemin to come up with an English language alternative to the word "propaganda" (as a translation of the Chinese *xuanchuan*) "in propaganda targeting foreign audiences," because of the far from "neutral" flavor of this word in English.⁵³ The process has gathered pace in recent years, as the following examples from Pudong illustrate.

The name of the Pudong party school in Chinese (*Zhongguo Pudong ganbu xueyuan*) should be, by any and all existing standards, translated into English as the China Cadre Academy, Pudong. Yet it is not: *ganbu* has, in a total break with all the fixed formulations of the Mao and Deng Xiaoping eras, been translated as "executive leadership." On the cover page of the bilingual brochure describing the *China Executive Leadership Academy, Pudong* (CELAP), the word *ganbu* in the phrase "*xinxing de ganbu peixun jidi*" (literally "novel training base for cadres") has been translated as "novel training base for leadership." Under the heading "Main Mission," the brochure speaks in Chinese of "Training... various categories of cadres (*gelei ganbu*) such as managers of enterprises, professionals and specialized technicians, etc." In English, the translation reads: "executives and managers of enterprises, professionals and specialized technicians, etc."

In the Chinese brochure text describing CELAP, there are few signs of anything out of the ordinary, save for the absence of explicit references to

⁵² *Wenzhaibao* (Press Extracts), No. 494, February 11, 1988.

⁵³ *Baokan wenzhai* (Newspaper Extracts), January 11, 1993.

socialism—an absence by now so common in many settings as not to be deserving of much attention. In the English translation, however, a number of ideologically consistent changes in wording are noteworthy. Firstly, there is a downplaying of the central role in the PRC of the institution of the communist party, to a point where it is being made all but invisible. This is particularly remarkable since the academy itself was, after all, set up following a decision taken, not by some government or non-CCP body, but by the highest party leadership. For example, on one page, the Chinese text states very unequivocally that “At the beginning of the year 2003, the Party Center decided to establish the China Cadre Academy, Pudong.” On the facing page, the English language translation, however, reads “At the beginning of the year 2003, the Chinese Government decided to establish the China Executive Leadership Academy...” Lest this should be interpreted as a total *identification* of party *with* government, rather than a *disappearance* of party, the loss, in translation, of the history of the CCP suggests otherwise. Under the sub-heading “Available Courses: Public Administration,” the brochure lists a total of eighteen courses—their names in Chinese and in English on facing pages. In Chinese, one of the courses (the fourth) bears the name “Party History and Party Building” (*dangshi dangjian*); in English, while the names of all the other seventeen courses are translated very faithfully, not to say mechanically, the name of this one course is given as “Quantitative Analysis”!

What do subtle and not so subtle changes like these indicate? Is there any point, even, in speculating how and when words like “communist,” “cadre,” and “revolution” will disappear from the party’s active lexicon *in Chinese* as well? And will that disappearance eventually symbolize the conclusion of the change for which the “conditions of possibility” in the PRC first emerged in the 1970s? The staff of CELAP clearly believes there is everything to be gained from speculating intelligently about the future. In what has to count as a telling meta-text on the processes at work in the PRC today, one doctor of economics and teacher in the academy addressed the aforementioned “Leadership Forum” on the very subject of change. Her paper (the text of which is only available in Chinese) bore the title: “Benchmark System Study of Leading Behaviors Based on the Divinatory Symbol of Qian from the *Book of Changes*.” (The *Book of Changes* is a divination manual and work of

philosophy traditionally said to have been written by the legendary Chinese Emperor Fu Xi [2953-2838 B.C.].) Her paper ends with the following observation:

In the midst of progress of the self, the meaning of common development (*gongtong fazhan*) stands out as particularly important in view of the fact that only through it will we be able to extricate ourselves from idol worship and ego-inflation. It is the sole way whereby, in the relationship of leaders and led, we shall manage to develop a singularly unique self-hood (*zixing*) while fully partaking of the achievements of the collective body (*qunti*) and in the process return to as well as realize a humanized (*renxinghua*) development path.⁵⁴

By any standard, despite emanating with an institution set up by the CCP Center, this (and the rest of her speech) is not traditional communist “party discourse” any longer, lacking as it does even the most cursory references to the canonical texts of Marxism or Leninism or Mao Zedong Thought or the Theories of Deng Xiaoping, and employing a language that is miles away from the conventional one still on display in the pages of the *People's Daily*.⁵⁵ How did this CELAP “reframing” resonate with the “executive leadership” in the audience whose first languages were Mongolian or Tibetan? Is it, as one strongly suspects, the shape of things to come? Once all of the familiar words and chunks of words that once spelled out the parameters of left and right, good and bad, have been redacted from the “cadre vocabulary” in Chinese, will they then disappear altogether from state discourse in the PRC?

⁵⁴ Guo Yannan and Dong Jing, “Jiyu Yijing qiangua de lingdao xingwei biaogan tixi yanjiu” (Benchmark System Study of Leading Behaviours Based on the Divinatory Symbol of Qian from the *Book of Changes*), in *Proceedings – Leadership Forum: Leadership in The Process of Globalization* March 24-26, 2005 (Pudong: China Executive Leadership Academy, 2005), p. 147. The *Proceedings* do not contain an official English-language version of this text; the translation is mine.

⁵⁵ On a lighter note, see the *People's Daily's* list of “49 obsolete Chinese words” serialized in its English-language online edition in 2006 http://english.people.com.cn/200609/25/eng20060925_306112.html (accessed by the author on September 27, 2006).

In Lieu of a Conclusion

The founding of the PRC witnessed the creation of a new discursive regime concerned with the explanation and propagation of socialism within a broad constituency—one encompassing, in Mao’s words, “all the forces that can be united, excluding the running dogs of imperialism.”⁵⁶ In due course, “actually existing” socialism rendered the flaws in this regime “of national unity” plainly visible and cadres in particular had to face up to the fact that, as an explanation, the state discourse was becoming increasingly atrophied and restricting in its relationship with political practice. No foreign observer perceived this more succinctly than J. Marcuse, who wrote in *The Peking Papers* of how by the early 1960s there was in China “no such thing as a misnomer. There are only *misfacts*. The Word is always right.”⁵⁷ Political “theory” in the form of the Marxist-Leninist canon and the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (which at the time included only texts from before 1949), had made no prediction to the effect that any of this would happen: eventually, Mao began to ask himself and his colleagues *why* this was so. In 1962, the first elements of his response began to take shape, elements that matured into the catastrophically misguided—but theoretically consistent—“Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.” When he picked up Mao’s tattered mantle a decade and a half later, Deng Xiaoping no longer assumed that, just because the steps used to obtain results in the real world had up to a certain point coincided with those prescribed by the theory of Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought, it was by necessity the case that the latter therefore amounted to a correct description of the real world.⁵⁸

“There never can be,” as Caroline Humphrey has put it, “a sudden and total emptying out of all social phenomena and their replacement by another way of life.”⁵⁹ As this chapter has sought to illustrate, ideological change—the emergence of new and novel ways of manipulating the body of ideas and ideals that up to a point had served the political interests of the CCP—has

⁵⁶ Mao Zedong, “Some Experiences in Our Party’s History” (September 25, 1956), in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1977), Vol. 5, p. 329.

⁵⁷ Jaques Marcuse, *The Peking Papers: Leaves from the Notebook of a China Correspondent* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1967), p. 87.

⁵⁸ Cf. Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), p. 87.

⁵⁹ Caroline Humphrey, “Does the Category ‘Postsocialist’ Still Make Sense,” in C. M. Hann (ed.), *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 12.

been accelerating in China, even though its speed, were it possible to measure it in any other way than subjectively, may not yet be comparable to that at which the country's globalizing economy has changed. As the image of acceleration suggests, change has been not sudden but gradual, and if history is anything to go by, it is likely never to be total. To the extent that it is discernible in language, ideological change is proceeding far from uniformly or in any single common direction, and it would certainly be a mistake to assume that what is the case with respect to its articulation in Mandarin metonymically represents *the* trend nationwide. Equally mistaken would be the assumption that what is today happening in English in Shanghai will one day render "socialism" totally unrecognizable. But between the present and the future, it is hopelessly lost in translation.

II. Warming to Socialism in the Cold Mountains

Xiaolin Guo

Introduction

State building on the PRC periphery began with a program that sought specifically to establish local autonomies in the areas where ethnic minority populations were concentrated. The program encompassed the identification of minority nationalities (*shaoshu minzu*) and the classification of ethnic minority societies in terms of developmental stages, with the two tasks being mutually underpinning. In Yunnan province, an ethnic minority population of some five million was identified as belonging to two-dozen nationalities, and their respective societies seen as ranging from the “simplest” to the more “advanced” forms, based primarily on different modes of production. Conforming to the social evolutionary discourse to which the CCP subscribed for its nation-building, the “backward” societies at lower developmental stages were set to catch up with the “advanced”; *socialism*—ideology and practice—was to play a central role in merging the gulf that separated them.

Challenging this socialist transformation was the indigenous rule that had persisted for centuries irrespective of repeated attempts at political integration by the central government from the imperial Qing to the Republic of China. To cope with extensive social and economic diversity, PRC land reform on the periphery followed a separate timetable and according to quite different policies in Yunnan’s “interior”, inhabited largely by Han-Chinese, and on the “frontier” inhabited predominantly by ethnic minorities. On the frontier, the “simplest” societies, where class distinctions had not evolved, were deemed suited to a “direct transition” to socialism, whereas the remainder were to undergo a reform labeled “peaceful consultation” applicable to what had been classified as “slavery” societies including the Yi, Tibetan, and a few others. Political integration here would prove the most demanding.

Critical to the new government at the time of its power consolidation in the extremely volatile frontier region was winning over the ethnic elite, whose personal prestige was essential for maintaining the stability of the region. In contrast to the fate of the old gentry elsewhere in China, the ruling class in the frontier areas was invited to join newly organized local governments that were given autonomous status. This arrangement facilitated the reach of the state into frontier society; yet at the same time it generated tension within the bureaucratic system. As a uniting point, the socialist ideology upheld by the ruling Party came to dominate the government administration. Socialism at this stage was not simply a political ideal but, more importantly, it constituted a particular design of policy implementation.

The center of this study is the Cold Mountains (Liangshan), a cultural area straddling the present border between the provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan, where the local population is predominantly Yi. The main concern of the chapter is the learning process of the Yi cadres in their adaptation to the political system (of which they are part) underpinned by socialist ideology. The study is, however, not about socialism *per se* (as a theory); nor is it a Yi ethnography. It deals with the political phenomenon of discursive transformation in a specific Chinese context, and seeks to explain how a state discourse of development, designed to achieve political integration, has been (and continues to be) exploited by ethnic cadres on China's periphery to make claims on the state, and to what extent this practice interacts with PRC nationalities policy and the national strategy for economic development. What has been identified in the former Soviet Union as a "dynamic conception of knowledge" that explained the day-to-day juggling by individuals in adaptation to Party ideology and their surroundings, is equally discernible in the political life of ethnic cadres in China.⁶⁰ As we shall see, what Party ideology means to the ethnic cadres and what they actually "do with it" are totally different matters. Yet, the Soviet experience stands in marked contrast to what China has achieved. One explanation may be found in the structure by which state and society interact, and in mechanisms that are able to absorb the tension within the bureaucratic system.

⁶⁰ For the Soviet experience, see Alexei Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (July) 2003, pp. 480-510.

From Local Headmen to Civil Servants

The designation of the Yi (alternatively the Lo-Lo, as known in the past) nationality in the early years of the PRC is legendary. The story has it that CCP Chairman Mao Zedong personally favored the name Yi, because the Chinese character in question is made up of parts symbolizing “rice” and “silk,” implying that the Yi people will have food to eat and clothes to wear.⁶¹ The new name that identifies its people signified the beginning of major changes in Yi society.

The Yi on both sides of the provincial border between Sichuan and Yunnan are related by kinship and united by a rigid class system. The southwest Sichuan Yi community has a larger population, and hence goes by the name Big Cold Mountain; the population of the Yi community in northwest Yunnan migrated from Sichuan beginning some two centuries ago, and so bears the name Small Cold Mountain. Presently, Big Cold Mountain is under the jurisdiction of Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture established in 1952, while the Small Cold Mountain is under the jurisdiction of Ninglang Yi autonomous county established in 1956. Prior to these dates, local dominance in the Cold Mountains had constantly shifted in the course of recurring feuds between the dominant families, whose power was built solely on the basis of kinship and private armed forces.

Traditional Yi society was highly stratified and the principle of class endogamy kept its population segregated. The Small Cold Mountain Yi community used to be dominated by five Black Yi families, each the overlord of households ranging in number from a few hundred to over a thousand, including commoners as well as domestic slaves. Warfare between the Black Yi intensified competition for resources, goods as well as human labor. Mainly through opium production and trade, the Yi consolidated their power and expanded their territories. During the decades of civil war between warlords following the fall of the Qing dynasty (1911), the Cold Mountains on both sides of the provincial border were virtually impenetrable to government forces as well as to merchants from outside the community. Amid this Yi territorial expansion, many other ethnic communities were forced out of their homes and moved southward. State building under the

⁶¹ Wu Jinghua, *Women shi zheyang zouguolaide: Liangshan de bianqian (The Path We Have Travelled: Transformation of Cold Mountain)* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2002), p. 89.

Republican government turned the Small Cold Mountain Yi enclave into a para-county administration, but Yi resistance—in the form of systematic non-cooperation with, and sporadic sabotage of government work relating to taxation, land registration, and control of opium cultivation—effectively kept the state at bay. Harsher policies adopted by the provincial government to subdue the Yi led to further confrontation. The situation inadvertently provided a window of opportunity for the CCP to gain access to the Cold Mountains, allying the increasingly disaffected Black Yi in the fight against the Nationalist (KMT) government. On the eve of the founding of the PRC in 1949, three eminent members of the Black Yi from the Puyu family and their armed forces joined the CCP-led Northwest Yunnan Regional Self-Defence Corps. This alliance paved the way for the Yi elite to play a leading role in the new government in the days to come.

The Yi dominance in the Cold Mountains bore out the role of military power in determining and advancing the social and political power of local strongmen on the periphery, where the government was indisputably weak. Based on their military supremacy, the Yi formed a formidable challenge to the power of the state, and their dissidence facilitated the CCP revolutionary cause in the frontier. For the CCP regional leadership, whose ultimate goal was to eliminate opposition, the goal in winning over the Yi elite was predominantly tactical. In other words, the aim was to neutralize the frontier rather than turn the Black Yi into revolutionaries. As much as the CCP counted on the co-operation of the Black Yi to undermine KMT rule, the Black Yi allied with the CCP to settle scores with the incumbent government. This tactical alliance hardly constituted a base of loyalty and trust. As much as the role of the Yi military in the battle against KMT forces on the eve of the PLA entering Small Cold Mountain was dubious, the loyalty of the Yi to the CCP was to hang in the balance in the years of political transformation that followed.

Once land reform had been concluded in the interior of Yunnan, the socialist transformation on the frontier was set to proceed. At the onset of the land reform in western Sichuan at the end of 1955 an ethnic uprising led mainly by the Yi in Big Cold Mountain erupted. It soon spread across the border, and by spring the following year, the Yi of Small Cold Mountain had joined the rebel forces. One of the Small Cold Mountain Black Yi, who had joined the

CCP revolution at the last moment and served in the provisional county government after 1949, threw in his lot with the rebels and led hundreds of his followers to overthrow the new government. The Cold Mountain rebellion, in which over 10,000 men took part, was met with suppression by the PLA and local militia. Noteworthy was the development wherein, less than six months after the Cold Mountain rebellion had flared up and long before military campaigns were concluded (mid 1958), the Yi autonomous county in Ninglang was inaugurated. A Black Yi assumed the post of county magistrate; of his ten deputies, six were Yi. The establishment of a Yi autonomous county ultimately presented a win-win solution to the political transition for both the state and the Yi elite. The Yi dominance in the government reflected the essential power balance in this ethnically diverse region.⁶²

Once the Yi autonomous county was in place, land reform was carried out in the name of “peaceful consultation democratic reform.” Instead of mobilizing the masses to overthrow the landlords as in most other parts of China, in the Cold Mountains land reform took the form of “uniting the feudal to fight feudalism”—affirming the role of the ruling class as a central player in socialist transformation. Land reform, nevertheless, abolished many privileges of the Black Yi by allocating their land to the landless and setting free their domestic slaves.⁶³ At the same time, being a target of CCP united front work, the Black Yi were granted special treatment, allowing them to retain certain material wealth such as their own residences and limited movable property, in addition to necessary labor help on the farm. Those who worked for the government were duly put on the government payroll.⁶⁴ All of this special treatment was necessitated in a situation where maintaining political stability hinged critically on the role of the ethnic elite. Regardless of how their class status contradicted Party ideology, the ethnic cadres came to represent the state to the local society in the frontier area all the same. The privileges accorded to the ethnic elites by the state, in turn,

⁶² The jurisdiction of the county includes a dozen or so ethnic groups other than the Yi. Other major competing ethnic groups at the time were the Mosuo and Pumi, in addition to the Han.

⁶³ *Ninglang Yizu zizhi xianzhi* (*Gazetteer of Ninglang Yi Autonomous County*) (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe 1993), p. 299.

⁶⁴ *Zhongguo gongchandang yu shaoshu minzu diqu de minzhu gaige he shehui zhuyi gaizao* (*CCP and the Democratic Reform under Socialism in Minority Nationality Areas*), 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2001), Vol. 2, p. 708.

served to sustain their social prestige and perpetuate their influence in society, and ultimately strengthened their position vis-à-vis the state.

The socialist transformation that began with the establishment of the Yi autonomous county incorporated the ethnic elite into the state bureaucracy, and effectively transformed the local headmen into civil servants in the new government. As part of the state apparatus, ethnic cadres are called upon to implement policies on behalf of the state. At the same time, they remain part of society, ready to defend and uphold local traditions. In all aspects (political, social, and cultural), the ethnic cadres are essential to the maintenance of a functioning government at the local level in a frontier area like the Cold Mountains. In this administrative set-up, politics and culture interact. Part state and part society, the duality of ethnic officialdom complicates policy implementation at the local level as well as policymaking by the state, yet provides ample room for maneuvering.

Encountering Socialism

Land reform may indeed have been a component of the socialism that China's periphery was experiencing, but the Yi in the Cold Mountains need not have been aware of the connection at the time. Like much of the new political terminology, "Socialism" (*shehuizhuyi*), same as the "Cooperative" (*hezuoshe*), were in the early years of the PRC introduced to the Cold Mountains without being translated into the native language. The reception of these novel concepts at the grassroots then depended entirely on the imagination of the ground-level cadres. The New China News Agency (*xinhua-she*), for instance, was taken to be an "Advanced Cooperative" (*gaoji-she*), not only because that it incorporated the same Chinese word *she* (generally used for any organized body) as in "Cooperative," but also because a visiting reporter was seen wearing suits made of fine woolen material.⁶⁵ In the days when the popular slogan "Socialism is good" (*shehuizhuyi hao!*) dominated Party documents as well as public media, socialism came to be associated with a person of many virtues. As rumors would have it, (the person) *shepho zhuyip* ("socialism") had "walked" as far as Xichang (the then government seat of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture), but was

⁶⁵ Wu Jinghua, *The Path We Have Travelled*, p. 177. A native Yi from the Big Cold Mountain, Wu Jinghua worked in the county leadership during the 1950s.

stopped by the mountain mass from reaching Zhaojue (the heartland of Big Cold Mountain).⁶⁶ Indeed, the reach of socialism to the Cold Mountains had its own unique timetable, laid out by the CCP leadership,⁶⁷ albeit not solely for geographical reasons. When socialism finally came to the Cold Mountains, like elsewhere in China, it took the form of collectivization (proceeding from the Elementary Cooperative via the Advanced Cooperative to finally the People's Commune), a task of immense political import and one vividly likened by the Yi to "running after the Warm Mountains,"⁶⁸ the metaphorical habitat of the Han.

By and large, the conclusion of socialist transformation in agricultural and industrial-commercial sectors across China in the mid-1950s ended the kind of united front that the CCP had earlier established with various social forces (e.g. Chinese intellectuals and democratic personages inside and outside government, and ethnic elites on the periphery) that had supported the Party and in various ways facilitated its nation-building effort. This notable turning away from its own tradition has been analyzed as a failure by the Party to incorporate a new vocabulary based on economic relationships into its ideology.⁶⁹ Echoing the radicalization of policy nation-wide in the wake of the CCP's 1957 rectification campaign, the Yunnan provincial Party Committee called into question the "peaceful consultative reform" previously adopted and implemented in selected frontier areas, and urged ethnic elites to "make up for their missed lessons" (referring to the class struggle to which the old ruling class in the interior had been subjected). Formulations of "frontier particularity" and "minority nationality backwardness", previously cited to justify the postponement of land reform in the frontier areas and to grant special treatment to ethnic elites, were now officially abandoned. Hundreds of ethnic elite members across Yunnan were summoned to the provincial capital, taking part in the political study that was part of the national rectification campaign.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *Xuexi ziliao (Study Materials)* (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1967), Vol. 1, pp. 228-231.

⁶⁸ Wu Jinghua, *The Path We Have Travelled*, p. 196.

⁶⁹ Tony Saich, "Conclusion: Uncertain Legacies of Revolution", in Timothy Cheek and Tony Saich (eds.), *New Perspectives on State Socialism in China* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 303-20.

⁷⁰ *Yunnan minzu gongzuo sishi nian (Forty Years of Nationality Work in Yunnan)*, 2 vols. (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 1994), Vol. 2, pp. 99-104.

Underscoring the policy overhaul was a resolution passed by the CCP Central Committee in 1958 in the wake of wide-spread ethnic insurgencies in China's northwest and southwest, which declared the issue of minority nationalities to be, ultimately, one of class.⁷¹ With this policy shift, ethnic elites came to bear the brunt of a political campaign against "local nationalism." Those branded as "local nationalists" were charged with: (a) resisting socialism in the name of ethnic particularities, (b) adopting an exclusionist approach to ethnic relations, (c) discriminating against Han cadres in the name of exercising local autonomy, and (d) attacking the Party's cadre policy.⁷² As collectivization reached its climax with the establishment in 1958 of the People's Communes across China, political radicalism gained momentum and the class struggle intensified in the frontier areas. Similar campaigns in the name of class struggle, with devastating consequences, reoccurred in Yunnan during the heyday of the Cultural Revolution, including the "second land reform" and "political frontier defence."⁷³

In the beginning of the post-Mao economic reforms, the CCP leadership renounced the class ideology that had been its principal doctrine for the better part of half a century and discarded many of the labels with which it had previously branded its enemies, including those of "landlord and rich-peasant elements," "Rightist," "local nationalists," and others.⁷⁴ In 1980, in the wake of a work conference on Tibet convened by the CCP Central Secretariat, the 1958 formulation that linked the issue of nationalities to class struggle, and guided PRC nationalities work for over two decades, was formally repudiated.⁷⁵ The following year, central work conferences

⁷¹ Guo Jiaji, *Yunnan de minzu tuanjie yu bianjiang wending* (Unity of Nationalities and Border Stability in Yunnan) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1998), p. 156; Li, Ziyuan, *Zhongguo gongchandang minzu gongzuoshi* (History of CCP Nationalities Work) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 2000), pp. 330-37.

⁷² Guo Jiaji, *Unity of Nationalities and Border Stability in Yunnan*, p. 157.

⁷³ The campaign was a local variant of the nationwide "cleansing the class ranks" movement, carried out by the Yunnan provincial Revolutionary Committee. See Michael Schoenhals, "Cultural Revolution on the Border: Yunnan's 'Political Frontier Defense' (1969-1971)," *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, No. 19 (2004), pp. 27-54.

⁷⁴ *Sanzhong quanwei yilai zhongyao wenxian huibian* (Collected Important Documents since the Third Plenum), 2 vols. (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1982), Vol. 1, pp. 76-77. *Zhongguo gongchandang yu shaoshu minzu diqu de gaige kaifang* (CCP and Economic Reforms in the Minority Nationality Regions), 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2001), Vol. 2, p. 845.

⁷⁵ *Collected Important Documents since the Third Plenum*, Vol. 1, p. 565.

concerning the southwestern provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou were held, further establishing guidelines for the rehabilitation of ethnic elites and for nationalities work in general. These work conferences marked yet another turning point in PRC nationalities policy. The subsequent implementation of a preferential policy by the central government—including financial subsidies earmarked to local autonomous governments and quota allowances to individuals in education and birth-control programs—prompted applications by millions for reinstatement or correction of their nationality status.⁷⁶

Along with the implementation of the PRC *Minority Nationalities Regional Autonomy Law* (1984), the leadership (i.e. the posts of both the governor and the first Party secretary) of the Yi autonomous county government in Small Cold Mountain shifted from non-natives and Han to natives and Yi. Government reorganization in the wake of the abolition of the institution of the Revolutionary Committee, created during the Cultural Revolution, brought ethnic cadres to the forefront in economic reform, reminiscent of the situation during the socialist transformation of the 1950s. Reaching out to the state as well as to society is at the center of exercising autonomy. To fulfill that task, it is imperative for the ethnic cadres to command the state discourse in their daily work, and effective use of state discourse not only serves to facilitate the implementation of state policy, but also opens ethnic cadres to the leeway desired to elicit support from the state. Unlike in the 1950s, cadres of all ethnic groups nowadays working in the government are able to meet a minimum schooling requirement. Proficiency in the Chinese language provides obvious advantages when it comes to employing state discourse. Training received in the institutes for nationalities or Party Schools and personal experience accumulated while working within the bureaucratic system make up an important learning process and provide cadres with the bureaucratic skills needed to fathom the latitude available for maneuvering with the aim of advancing local interests in mind.

⁷⁶ See Xiaolin Guo, “Marking out Boundaries: Politics of Ethnic Identity in Southwest China,” in Flemming Christiansen and Ulf Hedetoft (eds.), *The Politics of Multiple Belonging, Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe and East Asia* (London: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 185-204.

New Era of Development

The shift away from the highly ideological agenda characteristic of the Maoist era to a more pragmatic approach to socialism in the post-Mao reform period involved a re-definition of the forces driving the on-going transformation. By the mid 1980s, a new discourse of development centered on the word *suzhi* had emerged in the post-Mao Party propaganda and public media. As a compound word, *suzhi* literally means “quality” and notably carries with it a certain flavor of the evolutionary approach to development. Contrasting to the old class ideology that had been focused on revolution, *suzhi* discourse was adopted to grapple with the pace of modernization.⁷⁷ It was often used with reference to the overall competence of an individual, or a group, measured by level of education, degree of skills, and the like. The *suzhi* discourse appeared in combination with population, culture, leadership, management, and so on. The social groups subject to *suzhi* scrutiny included students (or adolescents), teachers, workers, peasants, cadres, women, and last but not least, minority nationalities.⁷⁸ Having “poor or low quality” (*suzhi cha*, *suzhi di*, alternatively *suzhi bugao*) was deemed to be a key factor impeding development. Hence, “quality” elevation was urged and regarded by the government, as well as by society, to be a precondition for modernization. Education was prioritized as the means to elevate *suzhi*. Agencies responsible for facilitating quality elevation ranged from the Ministry of Education, the State Nationalities Affairs Commission and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences to the CCP Party schools, the All-China Women’s Federation, the Communist Youth League, and the Trade Union, in addition to all levels of government.⁷⁹

Unlike some other jargon of the 1980s, *suzhi* discourse has remained fashionable. Its abiding popularity may well be attributed to its “user-friendliness.” It can be employed by any level of leadership as a scapegoat to deflect from its policy failures (simply by blaming the “poor” *suzhi* of the

⁷⁷ For changes in the PRC discursive regime in the post-Mao era, see Michael Schoenhals in this paper.

⁷⁸ Ellen R. Judd offers an account on women and *suzhi* in her book *The Chinese Women’s Movement between State and Market* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

⁷⁹ Many universities in China have in the meantime established “*suzhi.net*” websites. One refers to the elevation of *suzhi* as “synchronized action taken by the Party, society, and government” (*Xian dianzi keji daxue*: <http://www.info.xidian.edu.cn>, accessed in February 2005).

social forces under its command); equally it can be employed by individuals and social groups as a tool to make claims on the state (either flaunting the desirable or indeed undesirable *suzhi*). As the *suzhi* discourse was being popularized and widely engaged in by all social forces, its application became increasingly creative and instrumental. The further from the center, the more dynamic the skills of improvisation tended to be. In the areas that had been the major recipients of financial subsidies from the central government, *suzhi* discourse was subject to manipulation by local officialdom to piggyback on the state. In the most instrumental use of political rhetoric, “poor quality” has been effectively transformed into a moral right and an entitlement to economic benefits. While in an ordinary social setting a charge of “poor quality” from another party would be perceived as abusive, in the state beneficiary mode the same term seemed to bear no negative connotations. Poverty-alleviation work in China illustrates this intricate socio-political entanglement.

China classified poverty-stricken counties for the first time in the mid 1980s, once its economic reform had achieved initial success. The poverty-alleviation program that was subsequently launched bolstered financial support from the central government to local governments in the poverty-stricken areas. Currently, China has 592 poverty-stricken counties, and the number has remained unchanged since 1994, despite a notable decline in the poverty-stricken population overall.⁸⁰ Underlining this paradox is the practice wherein the county government is the basic unit to which poverty-alleviation funds are appropriated. As the policy links the status of a poverty-stricken county directly to financial subsidies from the central government, for the local government to retain the status of “poverty-stricken county” guarantees access to an important source of revenue. In many areas, financial subsidies have become a major source of income depended upon by local government in economic construction as well as for paying salaries.⁸¹ Under the circumstances, those that have been classified as poverty-stricken

⁸⁰ Between 1986 and 1994, China’s population living below the poverty line was reduced from 125 million to 80 million; by 2000, it had been further reduced to 34 million (Liu Jiang (ed.), *Zhongguo nongye fazhan zhanlüe (China’s Agricultural Development Strategies)* (Beijing: Zhongguo nongye chubanshe, 2000), pp. 619-23.

⁸¹ The practice has in part stimulated government spending and encouraged expansion of government apparatus at the local level.

counties will do everything to hold on to the poverty-stricken county title, whereas those that have not been designated a poverty-stricken county will desperately seek to become one.

Of the total poverty-stricken counties in China, Yunnan province claims 73. The Small Cold Mountain—the Yi autonomous county Ninglang—has managed to keep its “poverty-stricken county” title since 1986. The first decade of poverty-alleviation work injected tens of millions of *yuan* RMB in financial aid to the county government, designated to relieve financial strain on the government operation and facilitate local economic construction. A decade later, figures showed that the size of the poverty-stricken population in the county had in fact increased rather than decreased.⁸² The sluggishness of poverty alleviation work reflected the typical pattern of administrative behavior dominated by the *suzhi* discourse. It could not be more revealing than what has been maintained by the head of the county government poverty-alleviation office: “Ninglang had a very low foundation to start with,” he began, alluding to the old image of “slave society” accorded to the Cold Mountain Yi during classification of social development in the 1950s. There followed a rather predictable statement that “the quality of the local populace was poor and it lacked the commodity-science-technology-competition-innovation spirit.” The bottom line is, as the official wrapped up in his speech: “We can only rely on the support of the state; without support from the state, the Small Cold Mountain will never be lifted out of poverty by the year 3000, much less by the year 2000” (the goal set at the time for the Ninth Five-Year Plan).⁸³ The references to “slave society” and the “poor quality” of the local population were deliberate and tactical with a clear intention to hold the state accountable for economic development in the local community that wears two hats: ethnic minority autonomous county and poverty-stricken county.

The practice of applying *suzhi* discourse to local development, as managed by ethnic cadres in Small Cold Mountain, was so effective that it prompted the Han officials in a neighboring county to challenge the ownership of the

⁸² It was 114,800, or roughly 63 percent of the total population in 1986; ten years later the poverty-stricken population had grown to 145,000, corresponding to 67 percent of the total population (Interview by the author with the head of the county government poverty-alleviation office, 1996).

⁸³ *ibid.*

discourse, as economic reform proceeded. The county in question largely shares a similar mountainous topography, but it had been excluded from the preferential treatment available to Small Cold Mountain, as its population is overwhelmingly Han. The Han population is made up predominantly of the descendents of the Ming garrisons, originally from the Central Plains that settled here at the end of the fourteenth century; some garrison men brought their spouses from home whereas others married the indigenous women, hence the customary saying: “Yi mother and Han father.”⁸⁴ This Han settlement is generally rich in agricultural produce, but sustained a serious setback in tobacco production in the 1990s. Aiming at an economic breakthrough, the younger generation of county leaders lobbied the provincial government for designation as a poverty-stricken county. Their argument dwelled on the *suzhi* discourse. As they maintained, *suzhi cha* (“poor quality”) should not be the exclusive privilege of the minority nationalities. Counter-intuitive to the common assumption of the Han superiority prevalent in Western studies of China’s national minorities, the Han in Yunnan are more than ready to identify themselves with the indigenous peoples under various circumstances. Whether or how much the *suzhi* discourse helped their case cannot be substantiated, but the fact remains that the Han neighbors of Small Cold Mountain did in the end win the title of a state designated poverty-stricken county. Ultimately, this special treatment is attributable to a new strategy of development that puts the emphasis on the development of China’s western region rather than on ethnicity *per se*.

“Socialism Is Good!”

Socialism indeed “walked” a long distance before reaching the Cold Mountains. While its vocabulary has lost much of its popular appeal elsewhere in China in the course of economic reform and marketization, socialism is something that ethnic cadres in the Cold Mountains increasingly identify with as they have come to grasp the full meaning of it. What is good about “socialism,” however, hardly has anything to do with its original ideological content. Rather, it is the policy of preferential treatment that

⁸⁴ The Yi here is not the name of a PRC officially classified nationality, but refers to “non-Han” or “indigenous” as in the traditional use.

socialism entails. Even the most nationalistic Yi cadres are prepared to reiterate: “Socialism is good!” because, as they themselves explain, “Socialism takes good care of us minority nationalities.” As a moral right, socialism embraced by the ethnic minority cadres defines their relationship with the state, central to which is the financial subsidy regularly allocated from the central government. The absence of such preferential treatment, on the other hand, would mean, as a Yi county government official once insinuated, “Yunnan... or even the Big and Small Cold Mountains could end up launching a nation of our own.” This notion of “nation making” is ethnically specific, referring, as it does, to the cultural area of the Cold Mountains, constructed on kinship based community sentiments. It does not necessarily resonate with other ethnic groups living in the same area, given the complexity of ethnic relations in history; as indeed a Pumi official present went completely silent upon hearing the radical remarks made by his Yi colleague.⁸⁵ The contrast is illustrative of the somewhat uneasy ethnic relations in an ethnically diverse region like northwest Yunnan, and has implications for local nationalism and inter-community relations vis-à-vis the state.

As commonly observed in multiethnic Yunnan, local nationalism is often an expression of local dominance found in communities where one ethnic group is more influential, in terms of population size, political representation, and economic power, than others. Assertion of local dominance by that single ethnic group automatically drives the other(s) to ally with a more powerful entity, usually the state. The Cold Mountain Yi enjoyed a “glorious past” by virtue of having asserted military dominance over much of the plateau straddling northwest Yunnan and southwest Sichuan. Bearing in mind the history of ethnic relations in the area, nationalist remarks like those made by the Yi cadre above are likely to be received with sufficient wariness among the elite of other less powerful (past and present) ethnic groups, like that reflected on the face of the abovementioned Pumi official. Similarly, in a different location a nationalist assertion by a Yi can be very different from the one made by a Yi in Small Cold Mountain.

⁸⁵ The author's observation in a government office, 1998.

In an ethnic Hui (Muslim) autonomous village in northeast Yunnan, a middle-aged Yi, a village doctor, was home together with his wife entertaining a guest from Beijing. Like many educated rural residents, he was keen to discuss national and international affairs with an outsider as a way of distinguishing himself from the majority of villagers. On this occasion, the national news was dominated by China reclaiming sovereignty over Macau. Reflecting on the happy event and echoing the triumph of Chinese nationalism, the Yi doctor began to lament what he called “a big mistake made by the Communist Party” with reference to the CCP policy in favor of independence for Outer Mongolia dating back to the 1920s. He was adamant that all designated autonomous regions were without exception part of the PRC.⁸⁶ By those remarks, he identified himself with the nation state of China, and with Chinese nationalism in a broad sense, both standing in sharp contrast to the assertion of launching a Cold Mountain nation.

The Yi are culturally diverse: those living in the Wumeng mountain range are more unified, whereas those living in the Ailao and Wuliang mountain ranges are more diversified; and the Cold Mountain Yi are very different from all other Yi groups in terms of social organization and economic structure.⁸⁷ Despite the one single official title assigned to them, the Yi across the rugged terrain in China’s southwest do not normally identify with one other.⁸⁸ The cultural differences between the various Yi socio-cultural segments are duly reflected in their perception of local history.⁸⁹ Self-perception in turn interacts with the relationship between a particular group and the state. Across ethnic boundaries, self-perception and identity are similarly variable. Fluidity in self-perceived cultural identity, constrained by a wide range of factors, underscores the complexity of ethnic relations on the periphery. This complex whole amounts to a major administrative challenge.

⁸⁶ Conversation with the author, New Year’s Eve 1999-2000.

⁸⁷ Zhongyang minzu xueyuan, *Zhongguo shaoshu minzuzhi jianbian: chugao* (Concise Gazetteer of China’s Minority Nationalities: Draft), 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu xueyuan, 1961), Vol. 1, pp. 144-154.

⁸⁸ For a parallel case of Zhuang identity, see Katherine Palmer Kaup, “Regionalism versus Ethnonationalism in the People’s Republic of China,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 172, 2002 (December), pp. 863-84.

⁸⁹ See Harrell, Steven and Li Yongxiang, “The History of the History of the Yi, Part II,” *Modern China*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2003 (July), pp. 362-396.

To manage affairs in multi-ethnic communities and the tension within them, socialism has a role to play, and the effectiveness of socialism has a direct bearing on the expression of local nationalism. In multi-ethnic communities, the organization of the autonomous government—requiring representation of all ethnic groups according to their share of the total population—operates together with a community-based policy implementation to keep the local dominance of one particular ethnic group in check. In this framework, the practice of socialism serves to balance group interests. If preferential treatment to the minority nationalities is part of socialism, then as long as socialist ideals are upheld and promises are delivered (by the state), local dominance and consequently local nationalism can be contained. Conversely, if socialism diminishes in terms of balanced policy implementation and containment of local dominance, local nationalism is likely to arise. The dialectic of socialism and local nationalism is thus played out on a scale where the direction to which socialism moves changes the magnitude of local nationalism—as the former descends, the latter ascends, and vice versa.

Marketization is a force potentially disrupting the balance. Growing competition for economic resources and opportunities to get rich notably undercuts the power of socialism, resulting in infringements upon the interests of the national minorities, as has become increasingly common in sectors where the state has lifted its monopoly and supervision. Skyrocketing tuition fees have, for instance, prevented many including minority nationality students from entering institutions of higher learning; in the business sector, minority nationalities have come to bear the brunt of redundancy; and disputes over property rights have notably provoked some forms of ethnic conflict.⁹⁰ As the intrusion by various societal forces upon the interest of minority nationalities intensifies, ethnic conflict is likely to escalate, although the situation is understandably uneven across China: it is less acute in Yunnan than in other autonomous regions, owing to the province's ethnically diverse population and balanced policy implementation. Amid the inexorable socio-economic transformation, as much as the non-Han have lost out to the Han, the less powerful minority nationalities (in

⁹⁰ Tiemuer and Mao Gongning (eds.), *Xinjiang yanjiu lunwenxuan (Research Papers on Xinjiang)* (Beijing: minzu chubanshe, 2003).

terms of population and political representation) are becoming increasingly disadvantaged vis-à-vis the more powerful ones.⁹¹

As socialism has retreated in the face of an advancing market economy, the development discourse that dominated the social transformation on China's periphery during the 1950s has been revived, albeit given a different spin. Research has shown that in the beginning of the economic reform, a revival of religious activities was put at the forefront by some ethnic minority populations; two decades later, the priority has shifted to economic development and the prosperity of the local community.⁹² The issue of the "rights and interests" of China's minority nationalities now revolves around development, and the growing economic disparity has been held responsible for the awakening of ethnic consciousness.⁹³ China's economic reforms began with a pragmatic approach to "let some get rich first", aimed to maximize economic efficiency. Different development plans drawn up by the central government for the eastern, interior, and western regions in the 1990s came to witness an enlarged economic disparity between the regions.⁹⁴ For the central government, mindful of the strategic position of China's western region bordering on a dozen countries, a widening gap in wealth and living standards was not merely an economic concern, but ultimately a political one. The "Grand Development of the Western Region"—a scheme launched by the central government at the turn of the century—was essentially an effort to reinvigorate the socialism that had lost some of its momentum in the early period of the economic reforms. By maintaining a regional balance, the central government reengaged with local governments. The scheme covers some 70 percent of China's territorial expanse and up to 80 percent of the country's minority nationality population.⁹⁵ In this development

⁹¹ In this regard, Xinjiang is more prominent than other regions.

⁹² *CCP and Economic Reforms in the Minority Nationality Regions*, vol. 2, pp. 543-44.

⁹³ Tiemuier and Mao Gongning, *Research Papers on Xinjiang*, pp. 236-39.

⁹⁴ An estimation shows that the rural per capita income in 1998 was 3,000 yuan RMB in the eastern region, 2,000 yuan in the interior region, and 1,500 yuan in the western region; the ratio 2: 1.33: 1 was a notable enlargement compared to 1986 when the ratio was 1.52: 1.2: 1. Liu Jiang (ed.) *Zhongguo nongye fazhan zhanlüe (China's Agricultural Development Strategies)* (Beijing: Zhongguo nongye chubanshe, 2000), pp. 11. In terms of regional contribution to the national GDP (2001), the eastern region claimed 59.6 percent, the interior region 26.9 percent, and the western region 13.5 percent (*Zhongguo nongcun pinkun jiance baogao (Poverty Monitoring Report of Rural China)* (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2002), p. 10.

⁹⁵ Wu Shimin, *Xibu dakaiifa yu minzu wenti (Developing the Western Region and Nationality Issues)* (Beijing: minzu chubanshe, 2001), p. 1.

ethnicity matters, but ethnicity alone does not account for all problems in central-peripheral relations in China.

Tension of Ethnicity and Bureaucracy

Ethnicity is difficult to handle, owing to geographic and cultural distances, which are essentially tension generating. In the frontier that had traditionally been dominated by local strongmen prior to PRC land reform, the state tended to be ethnicized as Han. The “Han” was, however, a vague category, basically including individuals (irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds) who were regarded in the local community as different in terms of occupation and experience. The label was equally applicable to those from outside the community, such as the government work team personnel on missions to implement government policies, with little reflection on the actual ethnic membership claimed by each individual. Central to this perception of ethnicity is a power relationship in both political and economic terms. Nowadays, many ethnic cadres are themselves members of the CCP, the political party that in the past had been dubbed the “Han people’s Party”; some even occupy positions as heads of the CCP organization in local government institutions, or at higher levels.⁹⁶ That the ethnic elite itself has become part of the state has to some extent mitigated tension between the state and society, though not enough to alter the base of personal loyalty on the part of the ethnic elite that continues to be part of society. This dialectic is at the core of the relationship between the state and the ethnic elite serving in the local government.

The territorial expanse of China, its hierarchical bureaucracy, and the distance between the center and regions all impose considerable strain on the relationship between the state and local governments (Han and non-Han) beyond the national capital. The further away from the center, the more constrained the relationship is likely to become. Such constraints have been characterized in terms of loyalty/disloyalty versus trust/distrust, and the tension is perceived as having a distinct ethnic basis that has a bearing on

⁹⁶ Wu Jinghua, the author of *The Path We Have Travelled*, a native Yi from the Big Cold Mountain, became a deputy Chair of the State Nationalities Affairs Commission in the 1990s. Around the same period, a native Yi from the Small Cold Mountain, was promoted from a county Party boss to a member of the prefectural leadership, and later to a provincial government office.

policy making in minority nationality affairs.⁹⁷ The tendency to ethnicize government operation disguises the complexity of Chinese politics and the political system of which nationalities policy-making is part. From a historical perspective (moving away from the modern concept of the nation state), loyalty/disloyalty and trust/distrust would reflect the tension within the bureaucratic organization itself that was highly centralized on the one hand and geographically separated on the other. The Yuan emperor Kublai's categorization of the four peoples of his Chinese realm in the order of most trusted to most distrusted in government administration, marked cultural as well as geographic distances.⁹⁸ During the Qing, the provinces south of the Yangzi Delta remained largely beyond the interest of the emperors who held deep misgivings against the overlords there.⁹⁹ Throughout much of the Republican period, the southwest under the rule of warlords turned out to be the least cooperative with the Nationalist government in fighting either the Japanese or the Communists.¹⁰⁰ Notwithstanding the extent of PRC political integration that has been by far the most thorough, the tension within the bureaucratic system has persisted. Understandably, the further from the center, the weaker the foundation is for trust and loyalty.

Geography in combination with ethnicity complicates immensely the relationship between the center and the periphery. The organization of the local autonomous governments and the dual role of the ethnic cadres further add difficulty to the bureaucratic tension created by geography. Loyalty at the local level is thus multifaceted. To secure the means of livelihood in

⁹⁷ See, for example, Robert Barnett, "Beyond the Collaborator-Martyr Model: Strategies of Compliance, Opportunism and Opposition within Tibet," in Barry Sautman and June Dreyer (eds.), *Contemporary Tibet: Politics, Development, and Society in a Disputed Region* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2006), pp. 25-66.

⁹⁸ The Mongols and the Central Asians (*Semuren*) preceded the Northern Chinese (*Hanren*) including the Jurchens, and finally the Southern Chinese (*Nanren*), in order of conquest.

⁹⁹ This refers specifically to the Kangxi emperor's war against the 'Three Feudatories', Yongzheng's reform to the native chiefdom in the southwest, and Qianlong's suspicion of lineage organizations in Fujian. See contributions by Jonathan D. Spence, Madeleine Zelin, and Alexander Woodside, to Willard J. Peterson (ed), *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 9, Part One: The Ch'ing Empire to 1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁰ In the 1930s, the Red Army twice penetrated Yunnan and crossed the Jinsha without encountering substantial resistance. For this, the governor of Yunnan was held responsible by the nationalist government. During WW II when Yunnan was the only remaining entry port to un-occupied China, the provincial government imposed special tolls on imported goods, detrimental to the interests of the central government. The defiance and lack of cooperation from the Yunnan governor finally led to his removal by Ching Kai-shek in 1945.

addition to a range of privileges, ethnic cadres may be unconditionally loyal to the offices they serve, while their loyalty to the state (in a hierarchical order: to the provincial-level government, the central government is the state; to the county-level government, the provincial government represents the state) remains conditional. As far as the state is concerned, having the ethnic elite serve in government is a practical solution to political integration. Such an arrangement, however, jeopardizes, from time to time, the role of ethnic cadres as representatives of local traditions and values. Under these complex socio-political circumstances, socialism delivered in the form of preferential treatment enables ethnic cadres to justify their relationship with the state to local society, and, in turn, facilitates the implementation of state policies.

For the state, a unified ideology, such as socialism, serves the purpose of political integration while allowing it to maintain control over society. In contrast to the Chinese intellectuals, who are by and large loyal to the state but often find themselves at odds with the Party in ideological matters,¹⁰¹ ethnic cadres may not be the most enthusiastic supporters of the state but they are surely the ones least concerned with the formulation and rhetoric of Party ideology, or simply state discourse. Loyalty or a lack of loyalty on their part often mirrors the tension in the relationship between the central and local governments. In the present situation, the means to mitigate this tension is through the allocation of resources by the state, and gaining access to the largesse of the state hinges on subscription to Party ideology. Geographical distance, decentralization of power, and the implementation of preferential policies have created the space, enabling the application of Party ideology to be either magnified or minimized, depending on local initiatives. Generally speaking, the further from the center, the greater the latitude tends to be, and hence the more dynamic the application may become. As local administrators, ethnic cadres are placed in a position to impose constraints on the state by exploiting local sentiment. The preferential policy and the tension within the bureaucratic system have jointly shaped a particular mode of administration that seeks to draw extra funds from the central

¹⁰¹ See Edward Gu and Merle Goldman (eds.), *China's Intellectuals Between State and Market*, (London: Routledge, 2004); also Timothy Cheek, "Xu Jilin and the Thought Work of China's Public Intellectuals," *The China Quarterly*, No. 186 (June 2006), pp. 402-420.

government by constantly playing upon its concerns with political stability in the region.¹⁰² In this structure, development discourse conveniently and effectively facilitates claims by ethnic cadres on the state.

No matter how alien the concept may have been at first, socialism has over the decades transformed the Cold Mountains, most fundamentally, in the mode of production and livelihood. Three decades of collectivization hardly brought prosperity to the Cold Mountains (the same goes for the whole of rural China), but decollectivization did not from the start seem to provide much relief either to the Yi. The Yi in the Small Cold Mountain were notably unenthusiastic, in sharp contrast to peasants elsewhere who embraced the agricultural reform that took the form of contracting land to rural households; on the contrary, they appeared “totally at loss what to do with the assigned right to cultivate the land contracted to them.”¹⁰³ This situation changed as the economic reform proceeded, and the local cadres quickly realized that the reform meant new opportunities as the state was getting richer and had more wealth to transfer to the periphery. The question has become one of how to employ the development discourse and hold the state accountable. For the state, constantly preoccupied with political integration and national security, responding to demands of an economic nature from below is its bounden duty, so to speak.

Less than a decade after forestry management in Yunnan was transferred from the provincial government to the county level, forestry in the Small Cold Mountain began to decline (due to factors mainly relating to market and over logging); to elicit the support of the state, the county leadership submitted a proposal to build a pulp mill. Being an ethnic autonomous county and concurrently a poverty-stricken county, the project encountered little resistance in securing investment funds, despite the lingering concerns for technicalities relating to production and sale, and protests from a neighboring county troubled by water pollution. Tens of millions of *yuan* RMB were invested in the initial construction phase. The funds consisted, in part, of special appropriation from the provincial government and the

¹⁰² This practice has been observed in Tibet and Inner Mongolia, albeit the key players are said to be “ethnic Chinese officials” (Robert Barnett, “Beyond the Collaborator-Martyr Model,” p. 47).

¹⁰³ *CCP and Economic Reforms in the Minority Nationality Regions*, Vol. 2, p. 673

Ministry of Forestry in Beijing, and the rest was made up by bank loans. Barely two years after it went into operation, the pulp mill declared bankruptcy and subsequently closed down, despite the existing package of tax reduction and exemption offered by the provincial government. The bankruptcy was squarely blamed on the financial strain on production inflicted by overdue loans. At the end of the day, the catastrophe was held to be no one's fault, but just unfortunate. Financial losses incurred were in time absorbed by the continuous financial subsidy appropriated from the higher level of state. Even in hindsight, the provincial government would not have regretted its initial support for the project, given the delicacy of the matter involving the ethnic minority autonomous government and its initiative in economic planning. Even when development is the hard truth in China's quest of market economy, on the periphery profit does not really constitute the central concern in policy-making vis-à-vis development.

Policy implementation in China's periphery is, to a great extent, the result of manipulation of discourses by *both* state and ethnic cadres. Bureaucracy creates tension between state and society, and the tension has been mitigated, ironically, by the very system that generated it in the first place. The device of local autonomies provides a crucial channel for the state to reach society, and at the same time for ethnic officialdom to engage with the state. The system requires two-way adaptation, society to state, and state to society. By accommodating society through policy implementation, the state maintains its relevance to the elite and the population of the minority nationalities on the periphery. By manipulating the state discourse, the ethnic cadres are able to exert influence on state policy making, even at times going so far as to turn the state discourse on its head. Interaction between the state and the ethnic elite, united by the same discourse (development-socialism-development), seems to have produced results that are acceptable to both. Notably, Yunnan has been successful in drawing financial support from the central government by subscribing to, on the one hand, the state discourses about the uneven social development and economic backwardness and, on the other, by emphasizing colorful ethnic cultures. The rapid economic development as a result has effectively contained local nationalism.

Conclusion

Socialism, like dialectical materialism, in a sense, embodies “a self-contained system of analogous thought.”¹⁰⁴ In the Chinese context, it is not just the worldview of the ruling Party, but also a key mechanism that sustains a particular type of rule. As a framework for policy-making, the practice of socialism in China from the outset rested on a number of contradictions from “uniting the feudal to fight feudalism” (by which the ethnic elite joined the government) to pitting the “backward” against the “advanced” (by which ethnic minority societies were contrasted against that of Han), and finally to the implementation of preferential policies that lifted the profile of ethnic minorities vis-à-vis the Han.¹⁰⁵ Contradictory elements like these nevertheless have come to be reconciled with one another in the course of China’s ever-changing politics. From rebelling against socialism to embracing the system, ethnic cadres in China’s periphery experienced a transformation from local headmen to representatives of the new Chinese state. In the process, socialism created a uniting point where the political interest of the state and the economic interest of ethnic elites came to be accommodated.

With the introduction of economic reform, CCP policy shifted from ideological control to economic development as a means of achieving and sustaining political stability. By incorporating the vocabulary of economic relationships into its ideology, the Party overturned its radical approach to political integration of the 1950s that bore the name of socialism. Instead of class struggle, the issue of nationalities is now an issue of economic development. Despite this shift in the state discourse on an ideological level, socialism, as a form of practice, lives on in a changing political context. This may indeed offer an explanation to the question—ultimately the sustainability of the CCP and state socialism in China—on which many

¹⁰⁴ Werner Meissner, *Philosophy and Politics in China: The Controversy over Dialectical Materialism in the 1930s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 174.

¹⁰⁵ Seeking to make sense of the preferential treatment that seemingly put the Han in a less advantageous position, a CCP veteran who devoted his career to nationalities work in Yunnan offered this explanation: “Without the so-called ‘inequality,’ there will never be true equality.” See Wang Lianfang, *Yunnan minzu gongzuo shijian yu lilun tansuo* (*Exploring Theory and Practice in Nationality Work of Yunnan*) (Kunming: minzu chubanshe, 1989), p. 25.

scholars of the China field dwelled in the wake of the collapse of Soviet state-socialism and the disintegration of the “socialist bloc” in Europe.¹⁰⁶

Despite the lingering questions surrounding their loyalty to the state, ethnic cadres have upheld the ideals of socialism, and their coming to terms with the ideology mirrors the “heteronymous shift” experienced during the late socialist period in the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁷ Unlike the Soviet experience, however, the decoupling process has not undermined the foundation of the political system, and socialism in China has survived a major transformation in the discursive regime. The difference in China lies with the ability of the CCP to reinvent itself through the re-formulation of discourses with an aim of affecting the life of the populace in changing socio-economic conditions. As part of the same process, state discourse has been subject to constant repackaging by the cadres who occupy various government offices and whose presence makes the state bureaucracy meaningful; their maneuvering ultimately serves local interests. More than simply a survival strategy, as in the Soviet Union, the creative “heteronymous shift” in the Chinese political system has in actuality rendered changes desired by the central government as well as local agents on the periphery.

The post-Mao economic reform may have initiated a new era of political thought that abandoned political movement in favor of economic development. It constituted a massive transformation, but did not in any way represent the end of socialism. The discourse centering on development, in vogue today, as this chapter has shown, emerged as an extension of socialism. The practice of socialism in China has illustrated how ideology interacts with bureaucracy and how its shift mitigates tension within the system. As far as bureaucratic tension is concerned, ethnicity matters, as does geography; and tension is ultimately absorbed by the system itself. Socialism embodies the CCP leadership, but the foundation that sustains the Party's rule is the policy that the ideology prescribes. What makes Party ideology “stick” on the ground is the implementation of policy that may be imbalanced on a national level, but is by and large balanced on a local level.

¹⁰⁶ Timothy Cheek, “Introduction: The Making and Breaking of the Party-State in China,” in Timothy Cheek and Tony Saich (eds.), *New Perspectives on State Socialism in China* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 3-19.

¹⁰⁷ Alexei Yurchak, “Soviet Hegemony of Form,” p. 481.

The economic reform in the early period that encouraged “some to get rich first” and the more recent development of China’s west that has reversed the direction of investment from the central government are both part of a combined strategy that has so far been effective in moving the whole nation forward in a reasonably coordinated manner. The region-biased strategy has in time fostered contrasting government behavior: whereas it is generally shunned in the eastern region, “state meddling” is embraced along the western periphery. Two decades of China’s economic reform have seen to it that the further from the center one goes, the more relevant the central government becomes to economic development in the locality. On the periphery, socialism is alive not merely as a slogan; when they say “Socialism is good!”, as the Yi cadres in the Cold Mountains do, there is hardly any tone of sarcasm.

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