Speaking in Formulae Fitting the Traditional Culture into The Current Chinese Political Discourse

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The 19th Party Congress in 2017, seen as the most important event in Chinese politics after Xi Jinping assumed the role of party secretary in 2012, proved less spectacular than expected, albeit it having had its fair share of surprises. After only five years in power, Xi's contribution to the party ideology – *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era* was enshrined in the Party Constitution as one of the guiding theories, together with *Marxism-Leninism*, *Mao Zedong Thought*, *Deng Xiaoping Theory*, the *Theory of Three Represents* and the *Scientific Outlook on Development*. The fact that Xi Jinping added his own contribution is not at all new, he followed in the footsteps of all his predecessors, but there are three elements that reveal the high degree of power he enjoys: *Xi Jinping Thought* has been officially marked as guiding ideology during his stay in power and not after[1]; it is a *sixiang* "thought", not a "theory", or "point of view", which suggests it is a comprehensive and coherent system of thought, similar to Mao's thought; it shows how Xi ranks in comparison with his predecessors, since neither the *Three Represents*, nor the *Scientific Outlook* carry the names of their proposers, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao.

The new ideology emphasizes the "overall leadership" of the Party and is said to enrich the existing ideology by encapsulating "the latest achievement in adapting Marxism to the Chinese context"; the advancement of socialism with Chinese characteristics into a New Era signals that:

> [T]he path, the theory, the system, and the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics have kept developing, blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization. It offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind (Xi 2017).

Xi's theory is presented as the living proof that the path followed by China after 1949 has been the right one, in all aspects, including the creation of a new type of culture – socialism with Chinese characteristics. However, the "Chinese wisdom" on offer is

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[1] Hu Jintao's contribution, *The Scientific Outlook on Development*, was included in the Constitution in 2002, but not as guiding principle.

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very ambiguous, and it would be easier understood as "revolutionary experience", rather than the wisdom of the old. Moreover, if one considers the continuous emphasis of the Marxist-Leninist roots of the guiding principles and the importance Xi Jinping attaches to the "correct" understanding of the world, it seems that the traditional culture mentioned repeatedly in the *Report* has little to do with traditional thinking. To achieve the socialist culture with Chinese characteristics, people should "follow the guidance of Marxism", "hold fast to the Chinese culture" and "take into account the realities of contemporary China and the conditions of the present era" so that creativity and development can "add new luster to Chinese culture". The *Report* offers no explanations of what "holding fast to the Chinese culture," or "adding new luster" mean, although the new socialist culture originates in "China's fine traditional culture, which was born of the Chinese civilization and nurtured over more than 5000 years".

Xi said repeatedly that a rejuvenated China cannot exist without its tradition, which is its soul. It seems that after forty years of fast development, the central leadership acknowledged that China needed more than muscle (economy and military power), it needed the people to support the Party out of their own will. After 1949, the communist government had various attempts to attract the people on its side, but it did not take that long for the people to grow disenchanted. Many loathed the ideological campaigns during the first decades of the People's Republic, while Deng's economic experiments left out the very strata whom the party still says it represents – workers and peasants; young people nowadays, and probably many of the party cadres, do not really believe in Marxism (Wang, 2017; Zhao *et al*., 2016). When promises of a shining future, appeals to sacrifice for the public good and the revolutionary spirit failed to ensure people's support any longer, the Party turned to the traditional culture, which proved its validity in two thousand years of imperial rule. "Without full confidence in our culture, without a rich and prosperous culture, the Chinese nation will not be able to rejuvenate itself," stated Xi Jinping in his *Report*.

It is widely accepted that Chinese Marxism incorporates elements of the traditional culture, but the relation between traditional culture and communist tradition has never been an easy one. They are not equal, the communist tradition dominates the traditional culture, and traditional culture acting only as a support for the mainstream red ideology.

According to the *Report*, the Party should spare no efforts to promote and cherish the Chinese culture, encourage public participation in cultural activities, preserve and carry forward the cultural heritage, because tradition can act as a moral guide and alleviate some of the sorrows of the masses. However, the direction of this development and what to promote from the vast Chinese tradition are determined by the socialist ideology; one should look at tradition only through the lens of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the only ones able to show the correct image of the world, re-evaluate traditional values from a socialist perspective, make them suitable for the realities of the modern society and "foster a Chinese ethos and a readiness to respond to the call of our times, strengthen the guiding role of patriotism, collectivism, and socialism", stressed the *Report*.

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Formulae about Culture

Language has always been important in China. Confucius's famous statement that "If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success" (Confucius 13.3) is somehow mirrored in Mao Zedong's remark in 1963, that "one single [correct] formulation and the whole nation will flourish; one single incorrect [formulation] and the whole nation will decline" (Schoenhals 1992: 3).

A formula, as used in this paper, is a phrase that originates from an authoritative text – here, the elite political discourse, which pays close attention not only to the correct political message it conveys, but also to the linguistic form; it is short, easy to remember, with a fixed form, where not a single word, no matter how unimportant it might seem, can be changed without altering the message.

In China, elite political discourse was always at the core of the communist power; Apter and Saich argued that it played a much more important role than in other revolutionary movements, especially during the Yan'an period (1937–1945), when it helped build "a discourse community bound together by […] 'symbolic capital' and used depersonalized principles to hide personalized power" (Apter and Saich 1994: xi). In line with the long hermeneutical tradition, the early communists replaced the traditional texts with the new communist ones and started studying them as assiduously as the scholars of old to find out the truth. After 1949, the truth discovered in the Marxist classics and mainly in Mao's writings, became the general truth and a nationwide campaign of ideological education was launched to teach the masses to think and write correctly, many times by applying fixed formulae which encapsulated the new truth (Ji 2004). Old habits die hard. The practice of talking in formulae has continued until today – albeit more subdued, because in a time of ideological uncertainty it is safer to use the formulations derived from the speeches of the elite, rather than expressing openly one's particular views on a matter.

However, the elite political discourse is not easily understood by those unaccustomed with its dry and fuzzy language. In a manner reminiscent of the Confucian scholars who explained the Confucian classics to the masses, the Party intellectuals interpret the speeches in a series of articles in the Party media, in which the authors quote extensively from the party speeches and try to explain the meaning in a more didactic manner. The articles selected for this paper are written by well-known academics, from prestigious institutions, specializing in Chinese culture, society, history and Marxism. The fact that they belong to academic circles is important not only because they can reach directly to a young audience, but also because of the prestige the educator still enjoys in the Chinese society; it helps spreading the message and it also minimizes possible questioning, because the public trusts them to understand the text and convey the correct message. Due to the sheer number of articles, we analyzed only articles published in the *Qiushi* (*Seeking truth*) party journal or in nation-wide newspapers such as People's Daily and People's Weekly, China Daily, Beijing Daily or Guangming Daily.

There are three formulae analyzed in the present paper which are often used in the *Report* to the 19th Party Congress: *youxiu chuantong wenhua*, officially translated as "the

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fine traditional Chinese culture" or "China's fine traditional culture", (5 occurrences); *shehuizhuyi wenhua*, "socialist culture", (3 occurrences), modified by *xianjin*, "advanced", (2 occurrences), and by *Zhongguo tese*, "with Chinese characteristics", (5 occurrences); and *wenhua zixin*, "confidence in our own culture", "the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics" or "cultural confidence", (6 occurrences). None of them are absolutely new; *youxiu chuantong wenhua* is a common occurrence in Xi Jinping's discourse; *shehuizhuyi wenhua* has existed in the political discourse for a few decades now, but it is not as frequently used as the previous one; by comparison, *wenhua zixin* is a relative newcomer.

China's fine traditional culture

Almost ubiquitous in Xi Jinping's speeches, the origins of this concept are difficult to trace. Searching the People's Daily database shows that it first appeared in an article published in December 1959, "Unforgettable brotherly friendship"[2], where the author used it to talk about the German culture; the first article where it was related to the Chinese culture appeared in November 1983, "The Party organization of the China's Writers Association holds rectification session, launching criticism and self-criticism to eliminate spiritual pollution"[3]. The concept became extremely frequent in the political discourse after 2012, when Xi Jinping put forward his Chinese Dream and core socialist values ideology.

> We should inherit and carry forward the fine traditional Chinese culture and virtues, disseminate the core socialist values and educate the people extensively, guide and encourage the people to act according to them, to respect and follow moral standards, to pursue lofty moral ideals, and to reinforce the ideological and moral foundation of socialism with Chinese characteristics. […] To cultivate and disseminate the core socialist values we must take traditional Chinese culture as the base (Xi 2014: 181).

In May 2014, after sharing with the students at the Beijing University a long list of quotations, mainly from Confucian classics, which embodied "distinctive national features", Xi asked them to carry them forward and adapt them to current times, because "[t]he core socialist values we advocate today represent the inheritance and upgrading of outstanding traditional Chinese culture" (Xi 2014: 190–191).

It is almost impossible today to talk in an official context about the traditional Chinese culture and not refer to it as "fine", but it remains extremely vague, especially due to the richness of the Chinese tradition. The epithet "fine" makes it even more complicated because it implies that there is a less-than-fine traditional culture and forces those talking about it in more specific terms to make a choice – just as Xi advised them to do: "to promote its essence and discard the dregs" (Xi 2013).

The "Guidelines on Implementing the Project to Impart and Develop China's Fine Traditional Culture"[4], issued in January 2017 by the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council are also very vague. The Party is presented as the inheritor and the continuator

[2] Gao Kelin, *Nanwang de xiongdi youqing*.

[3] *Zhongguo zuojia xiehui dangzu juxing zhengdang xuexi zuotanhui, kaizhan piping, ziwo piping qingchu jingshen wuran*.

[4] *Guanyu shishi Zhonghua youxiu chuantong wenhua chuancheng fazhan gongcheng de yijian*.

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of the long and brilliant Chinese tradition, a duty it has consciously undertook. According to the Guidelines, the year 2025 is the deadline for "forming the basic system for imparting and developing China's fine traditional culture". Carried in under the guidance of the Party, the main role of the traditional culture would be to foster the patriotic spirit and loyalty to the state (and the Party), improve public morals and build socialism with Chinese characteristics. Traditional culture can help people discriminate between right and wrong, but it must be based on the official interpretation of the traditional values and not on a personal understanding. It is worth pointing out that the main values identified in the Guidelines, which emphasize hierarchical relations and the duty of the people to the state belong mainly to the Confucian canon, such as humanity (*ren'ai*), people first (*minben*), loyalty (*chengxin*), righteousness (*zhengyi*), great unity (*datong*).

The same attitude towards tradition transpires from the measures proposed for developing it, and thus research, inclusion of tradition in school curricula and using it as inspiration for artistic creation are of particular importance. However, one must never forget its main role as contributor to social stability, and nourishment for the development of the contemporary Chinese Marxism.

The crucial importance of the *youxiu chuantong wenhua* to the Chinese Dream and, implicitly, to the socialism with Chinese characteristics gave way to a plethora of articles about inheriting and carrying it forward.

In an article published in the *Qiushi* party journal, Liu Qibao[5] said that the Guidelines "received an enthusiastic reception from both Party members and the society at large", and traced them to Xi Jinping's speeches, which

> [b]y upholding and applying the standpoint, viewpoints, and methods of Marxism, […] have provided us with scientific answers to the important theoretical and practical questions such as "where does traditional culture come from? And where does it go?" and "what cultural traits need to be preserved? And how should they be preserved?" (Liu 2017).

The author does not insist on the answers offered by the secretary-general, instead he concentrates upon the crucial relation between Confucianism and Marxism:

> [S]ome people think that preserving China's fine traditional culture is akin to worshiping Confucius and idolizing the ancients, while others advocate replacing Marx with Confucius, claiming that the guiding role of Marxism should be abandoned to give place to Confucianism in governing the country and society. Such views are doubtlessly incorrect (Liu 2017).

The article is less about tradition *per se* and more about the guiding nature of the Marxist ideology; at the same time, it offers a key to understanding the Guidelines. Considering the fluid character of politics, it is not strange that people avoid being very specific; identifying Confucianism, Daoism or Buddhism as components of Chinese tradition would not be a problem, but marking them as "fine tradition" would be a different matter due to its political impact. A possible definition of "fine traditional culture" would be "objective, scientific, respectful" tradition, filtered through a Marxist

[5] Liu Qibao is a former member of the Political Bureau of the CCP and the head of the Publicity Department in charge with propaganda.

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sieve – this is the key to the Guidelines, they are not about tradition, but about reaffirming the superiority of Marxist thought over tradition and showing to those responsible with "imparting and developing" the path. The fine Chinese traditional culture is tradition reinterpreted and reshaped in Marxist molds. If when talking about tradition in general, one may refer to it as "naïve" (*chun*), or "simple" (*pusu*) (Liu 2017), the fine one must be described gloriously as "the source and the soul" (*gen yu hun*) (Liu 2017; Chen 2017), or as "the origins of values" (*jiazhi zhi yuan*), "the roots of the people" (*minzu zhi gen*) and "the foundation of security" (*anquan zhi ben*) (Tu 2017).

The concept becomes slightly less opaque in analyses made by scholars such as Li Deshun[6], or Li Zonggui[7]. Although they use the same party language, the two are less formulaic, and, at the same time, stay away from anything controversial. Li Deshun (2015) accepts that one could identify specific elements, but they could not be applied overall, because they suit the needs of a specific individual, class or geographical area. Instead of being very specific in their articles, the two identify features of the fine cultural tradition. They both emphasize that tradition does not mean "things of the past", or "reviving the past"; although traditional culture is an almost boundless concept, the tradition the party talks about today is the one which resisted the test of time and continued uninterrupted over the centuries. When talking about the core socialist values which seem inspired from tradition, Li Deshun stressed that it was important to underline the distinction between the contemporary values and the old ones, otherwise people will ask:

> [I]f the content of the core Socialist values already existed two thousand years ago, what is so new in what we do and say today? What special relation does it still have with the cause of our party, with Marxism and the global historical process of Socialism? What is the difference between China today and China in the past? And this would be a big problem (Li *apud* Lin 2015: 4).

One criterion for calling something "outstanding tradition" is its impact upon the contemporary society. It is interesting to notice how the narrative of continuity plays an important role here. Tradition is not something that existed and then ceased to function; that would not be acceptable because, if it ceased to function before the implementation of Marxism, it could have not influenced it. Reviving tradition would mean accepting that Marxism had not been successful, and thus denying its guiding role. The emphasis on continuity implies that tradition coexisted with Marxism, influenced each other and resulted in the modernization of the first and the sinization of the latter. At the same time, the narrative of continuity acknowledges the failure of all the anti-traditional campaigns after 1949. The outstanding traditional culture must pass the test of times, have practical value, contribute to national identity and social stability, but, as Li Zonggui (2017) points out, it must also provide spiritual support; although contemporary society should be anchored in the post–1978 reality, the daily life and the core socialist values are based on tradition. A few decades ago, it would have been unimaginable to admit the spiritual role of tradition.

[6] Professor Emeritus at China University of Political Sciences and Law in Beijing and vice-chair of the China's Dialectical Materialism Institute.

[7] Professor of philosophy at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou.

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Li Deshun also touches upon the problematic division of the traditional culture into "dregs" and "essence" and hints that it is not the first time such an attempt was made: "In the past, it was emphasized the search for "dregs", now the "essence" is stressed out" (Li *apud* Lin 2015: 3). It happened during the May Fourth Movement and, more extremely, the Cultural Revolution, with dire consequences. Traditional culture, Li says, is not apples – one cannot simply look for the rotten one and throw it away; all elements are organically interrelated and influence each other. One cannot just erase "the drags" and expect "the essence" to remain unchanged. Let alone, that the essence of today could be the drag of tomorrow, and the other way around.

The Socialist Advanced Culture

The concept of "socialist culture" has been used in the political discourse for a much longer time than the "fine traditional culture", discussed in the previous section, and it evolved over time from "socialist spiritual civilization" (*shehuizhuyi jingshen wenming*) to "socialist culture with Chinese characteristics" (*Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi wenhua*), and "socialist advanced culture", *shehuizhuyi xianjin wenhua*. "Socialist culture" does not generally appear without modifiers, unless it has anaphoric use for "socialist culture with Chinese characteristics".

Cao Guangzhang (2010) traces the "socialist culture with Chinese characteristics" back to early 1990s, and argues that it was a natural evolution from Deng Xiaoping's "socialist spiritual civilization"[8], widely used before the 15th Party Congress, in 1997. In January 1990, Li Ruihuan used for the first time the phrase "socialist culture which has Chinese characteristics" (*you Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi wenhua*), in "Several Issues About Developing Our National Outstanding Culture". Jiang Zemin used it in July 1991, when celebrating the 70th anniversary from the foundation of the Party (Jiang 2006a) and then, in 2002, at the 16th Party Congress, the formulation was revised, the verb "to have" (*you*) was dropped, and "socialist culture with Chinese characteristics" became the standard[9] (Jiang 2006c). "Socialist advanced culture" came in to use after 2000, when Jiang Zemin put forward his *Three Represents*, according to which the Party "represents the orientation of China's advanced culture" (Jiang 2006b). The three formulae are interchangeable and used together in official speeches about the relevance of traditional culture to the current state of being. They can also be used to forward a specific leader's image without actually naming him, since the formulation "with Chinese characteristics" would have readers think to Deng Xiaoping, "advanced culture" reminds of Jiang Zemin, and by adding "for a new era" one can refer to Xi Jinping.

What is the relation between socialist culture with Chinese characteristics and traditional culture? Xi Jinping stated in his *Report* that the socialist culture has its roots in the fine Chinese traditional culture and has been shaped by the revolutionary and

[8] Cao traces the formula back to Ye Jianying who used it in a speech in September 1979, to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Foundation of the People's Republic.

[9] Both *Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi* and *you Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi* are officially translated as "socialism with Chinese characteristics", although the latter includes the verb "to have" (*you*). The latter is no more in use today. From a formula's point of view, there is a semantic difference between them. While the former can be understood as Chinese socialism, a fully established system different from anything else, the latter shows Chinese socialism in the process of formation, a type of socialism amongst others.

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socialist advanced culture. The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) website informs its readers that "[t]he fine Chinese traditional culture, the revolutionary culture and the socialist advanced culture form together the base for the socialist culture with Chinese characteristics for the new era" (CCDI 2017). Most of the newspapers and website articles related to the socialist culture with Chinese characteristics do not add anything new to the political speeches they quote extensively, with only a few trying to explain the importance of the concept by identifying some of its characteristics. For example, half of the article published by Huang Yanmin[10] in the People's Weekly contains only quotations from Xi Jinping and no comments. Huang starts with a general statement about the strategic role of tradition in building socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, as underlined in Xi's *Report*, and argues for a deeper understanding of Xi Jinping's theories on tradition to achieve "the great national rejuvenation". Huang's introduction is followed by four statements, visually marked as headlines, about the fine traditional culture as the foundation of the socialism with Chinese characteristics, the main element of the Chinese soft power, the roots of the core socialist values, and the "outstanding superiority" of the Chinese people. The author does not comment on these statements, which he supports solely by inserting quotations from Xi Jinping's speeches. What stands out form this article is the constant emphasis on "Chineseness" (*Zhongguo tese*), used not only in combination with "socialism". Hung constructed his article in such a way that it transmits the idea that the "fine" traditional culture lies at the base of everything in China today, without any direct reference to Marxism.

Dai Yue (2017) identifies three main features of this culture: continuity (*jichengxing*), affinity with the masses (*renminxing*) and practicality (*shijianxing*). Normally, *renminxing* would denote something that is in accordance with the believes and the behavior patterns of the masses, something that fits naturally and can be easily internalized. Dai considers the socialist culture has been created to serve the masses, to improve people's morals, their culture and the level of scientific education. If we accept Li Zonggui's argument that tradition lies at the base of the daily life, the attempt by socialist culture to remodel people's behavior might find itself at odds with tradition. As explained by Dai, the new type of culture is not something that acts from within, but an external force which might collide with the existing beliefs. When talking about "continuity", Dai Yue quotes from Xi Jinping and underlines the importance of the traditional culture to the revolutionary and advanced socialist culture. However, some of his statements are quite puzzling:

> The revolutionary culture and socialist advanced culture created by the people under the guidance of the party, in revolution, construction and reform have the same origins with the outstanding traditional culture. […] It can be said that the outstanding traditional culture forms roots of the revolutionary culture and the socialist advanced culture; without of the revolutionary culture and the socialist advanced culture, the outstanding traditional culture might die out (Dai 2017).

Dai Yue seems to forget all the ideological campaigns and the anti-traditional movements after 1949. If tradition survived Mao's era, it is not because of the

[10] Huang Yanmin teaches at the Marxist School for Education at Capital Normal University and was awarded "The Most Influent Teacher for the Ideological and Political Theory in China", in 2014.

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revolutionary culture, but in spite of it, because it was too deeply rooted in the people's consciousness to be eradicated. The question of common origins of the revolutionary culture and the traditional culture is also questionable, since it conveniently overlooks the Marxist roots of the Chinese revolution. Such statements show how history and tradition can be reinterpreted so that they fit the new political discourse.

Cultural Confidence

The newest entry in the political discourse on culture, "cultural confidence" (*wenhua zixin*) can be traced back to the beginning of the 21st century, but it did not become popular until the second decade. Delia Lin (2017) traces it to 2003[11], and shows how it peaked first in 2011, and then again after 2015.

The cultural confidence is Xi Jinping's contribution to Hu Jintao's "three confidences", proposed at the 18th Party Congress: confidence in the chosen path, the guiding theory and the existing system (Hu 2012); in 2014, "the three confidences" became four, and in 2017 they entered the Party Constitution. The new confidence fits naturally in the current political context thanks to the constant emphasis on the importance of traditional culture:

> [t]he entire Party must remain confident in the path, the theory, the system and the culture. Out of all the political parties, countries and peoples in the world today, the Chinese Communist Party, The People's Republic of China and the Chinese people have most reasons to proud (Xi 2016).

Xie Chuntao[12] explained need for cultural confidence in a lecture published on the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Website. His narrative of success begins with Deng's coming into power, with little reference to Mao – described as a period of difficult explorations; Deng put China on the right path and laid the foundations of the system. Even more interesting is the explanation of the guiding theory which seems to have very little to do with Mao or the original Marxism-Leninism; it is a new type of Marxism-Leninism with Chinese characteristics, based on Deng's *Theory*, different from the dogmatic ideology that triggered the fall of the USSR and the regimes in Eastern Europe. Why the need for cultural confidence? Because culture is the power behind the other three elements: "our advanced culture, including the fine traditional culture, the revolutionary culture and the advanced socialist culture that develops continuously. Our cultural power is essential, profound and lasting" (Xie 2017).

Xie Chuntao uses the cultural confidence to explain the appeal of the party to the masses. Mythical stories such as "The Great Yu controls the waters", "The Old Fool and the mountain", "Nü Wa patches the sky", "Hou Yi shoots the suns" are ideal models to be followed by the party cadres, who must be as dedicated to their cause as the mythical heroes, and reflect the party ideal of selflessly serving the people and loving the motherland. This is the fine traditional culture the party inherited and carries forward.

The discourse about the importance of traditional culture to "cultural confidence" is almost identical with that of "socialist culture with Chinese characteristics"; the

[11] A search through the People's Daily database came out with two more articles, dated 1998 and 2001, where the formula was used; the articles were not on political topics.

[12] Xie Chuntao is a professor and the director of the Central Party School's academic department, in Beijing.

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arguments are the same: continuity, re-evaluation, judging tradition according to its contribution to the present social order and looking at it through the lenses of historical materialism. It can also be used as a counter-argument for Westernization because of its heavy reliance on concepts such as Chinese uniqueness. Socialist culture with Chinese characteristics and cultural confidence seem to refer to the same phenomenon – the re-evaluation of both traditional and Western cultures, and their adaptation to the modern Chinese realities, using sinicized Marxism as a filtering tool[13]. The difference between the two is that cultural confidence is the result of putting the socialist culture with Chinese characteristics into practice, it is less theoretical and more practical.

The practical nature can also be seen in the articles in newspapers which abound in calls for the literature and art to cater more to the needs of the people. Cultural confidence involves artistic creations made for the people (Li 2018 and Fan 2018). Culture in "cultural confidence" is much more than what we usually understand when using the word "culture", argues Li, it is a type of superior culture which reflects the height of the party line, has a rich historical background, blends in the old with the new, contains the deep national values and warms the hearts of the people by "placing the people at the center". Fan states that "cultural confidence" is not "an abstract concept", it is reflected in cultural production. Cultural production is responsible for strengthening confidence, must contain "overall and political awareness", should maximize the cultural gains of the people and satisfy their yearning for a beautiful life. He also warns that some cultural enterprises concentrate only on material gains, ignoring the social impact of the fragmented cultural products of vulgar quality that lack the ability to act as correct artistic guides.

Xinhua published the comments made by two well-known cultural critics and professors, Yi Hong from Tsinghua University and Zhang Yiwu from Beijing University, about the TV program "I want to go to the Spring Gala"[14], hailing it as successful example of bringing forward the artistic essence of the people, answering the artistic needs of a new era and promoting cultural confidence on TV. The show has been running since 2010 and gives the people the chance to show their artistic talents on stage, in front of the judges; the item selected by the jury at the special edition in the eve of the Spring Festival is included in the official program. All the items identified in the article as examples of cultural confidence rooted in the fine traditional culture are performed or belong to the national minorities – two Uighur songs – *The Youth Song*, (in which the choir inserted a few lines from Secret Garden's *You Raise Me Up*), and *The Flowers of Tianshan*, one Mongol – *The Eternal Song of Praise* and a Tibetan dance from the Tingri county. All of them were given a contemporary twist by adding Western musical instruments, a choir, or touches of the socialist (red) culture – a waving flag, the red background etc. Thus, the program embodies all elements required – the traditional roots, re-evaluation and modernization and the incorporation of the current political and social realities. It is not an easy task, and this is reflected in the type of vocabulary employed by the commenters which contains quite a few military terms –

[13] In the official translation of the *Report*, *wenhua zixin* is translated twice as "the culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics".

[14] *"Wo yao shang Chun wan" yin zhuanjia reyi. Baixing wutai jianding wenhua zixin.*

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the scene is a battlefield, the show advances bravely, there is a call to cultural confidence and the instruments achieve general mobilization.

Conclusions: Why using formulae?

It would be easy to dismiss the formulae above as empty words, without impact upon the daily life of the Chinese people, but that would not be right; the formulaic speech used by the party propaganda machine is a form of power and the only accepted way one can express political views. For one, the formulae fit nicely in the narrative of scientific development. Schoenhals points out that all formulae employed by the Communist Party in its discourse are considered scientific (1992: 9). The question is how to understand the scientific character of the formulae. Going back to Li Deshun's arguments, it is basically impossible to quantify how "outstanding" a specific traditional element is; for example, filial piety could be seen as "outstanding" in a rapidly aging society, but the degree to which it should be done and how much it should be allowed to impact the life of the young generation remain open to discussion. The same is valid for other formulae; if the songs identified as examples of outstanding traditional culture fail to arouse cultural confidence in someone, does it mean that they were wrongly identified or that the person suffers from a deficit of "Chineseness"? How can one verify the truth value of such a formula?

The scientific character of formulae lies in their ability to produce political effects. They are used as tools of political manipulation, and their aim is to channel the receptors' thinking onto a certain path. They also function as beacons, signaling the correct political direction one should follow. Today, not using the formulae does not necessarily imply opposition to the system, and it is highly improbable that this kind of language penetrated deep into the private discourse, as it did forty years ago in the Cultural Revolution[15]. For it to be "scientific", the context and the status of the speaker are crucial.

When speaking publicly and officially about traditional culture, one must use the correct expressions to make oneself heart. All media channels "must bear the name of the Party", asked Xi, meaning that everything made public must follow the official line. Since the party discourse on traditional culture is always framed in formulae, the speakers have no choice but to reproduce them. This does not mean that all speakers are forced to use the formulae, but the ability to demonstrate one's mastery of "ideological literacy" (Yurchak 2006) is also a matter of identity and it proves one's belonging to the dominant group, it permits the access to a community bond not necessarily by shared beliefs, but by a common language. The people entrusted with explaining the formulae are invested with a type of authority they might not enjoy otherwise. They are seen as "experts" able to explain the correct meaning – the "keepers of the truth". This functions very well when it comes to traditional culture; the excesses during the Cultural Revolution work in favor of today's political elite. Years of anti-traditional discourse have left the people without a real understanding of tradition. The party can select certain elements and discard others to its own advantage, reinterpreting tradition and presenting it to the masses as authentic. The lack of knowledge regarding genuine tradition makes the masses accept it is. The fact that most of those responsible with

[15] See Ji Fengyuan (2004), letter written by a rusticated youth to his family, p. 237.

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explaining it belong to the academia is a plus in a culture where traditionally educators have been held in great esteem.

It is not a surprise that the formulae are not clearly explained in the articles for the masses; this type of language originates at the topmost echelon of the party and it cannot be critically analyzed. By constantly repeating the same formulae, the speakers borrow from the authority of the leaders, and there is no room for personal interpretation. In a very Confucian manner, the speakers are transmitters, not creators of knowledge, and by doing so, reinforce the ideology transmitted top-down. There is, of course, another benefit of repetition – one can avoid crossing the line and being held responsible.

The formulae are extremely vague and open to interpretation; at the same time, it is very difficult to interpret them, because what is accepted today could become unacceptable tomorrow. Ideological literacy helps people identify the borders within which the formulae can be explained. As long as they remain within safe borders, the formulae could be explained even in contradictory ways. This is possible because, as Yurchak pointed out,

> [w]ith the increasing normalization of authoritative discourse and the decoupling of form from meaning, even shifts in party policy could be represented by the same formulations (Yurchak 2006: 53–4).

According to Yurchak, the formulae are less constative, they do not describe reality, and more performative, they do things, they tell the receiver how to behave. But for a formula to function, it must be uttered by the right person in the right context. Just as those speaking in formulae borrow the voice of the top echelon, the party borrows the voice of the sages of old and uses it to legitimize otherwise unrelated concepts.

The formulae are easy to memorize; they do not combine with just any modifier. The traditional culture can only be "fine", socialism is only "with Chinese characteristics" or "advanced", and confidence, when not "cultural", can only be "in the path", "the guiding theory", or "the system". In case the modifier is an adjective, it is, most of the times, a superlative. The use of modifiers creates implicatures – a socialist advanced culture with Chinese characteristics presupposes that China's story is a successful one; China has always been proud of its cultural inheritance, however, the party managed to fuse Western ideology with its traditional culture creating something new and even better. This might also be the reason for dropping the verb "to have" from "Socialism with Chinese characteristics"; the no-verb formula presupposes that socialism has been successfully sinicized and states an irrefutable fact.

The formulae reflect efforts of legitimation. They bring forward an outstanding past when China was the cultural and political center of the world, and at the same time, they remind the people that bringing it back to life is possible only with the guidance of the party and its revolutionary tradition.

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Abstract

Starting from the report the Secretary General Xi Jinping delivered at the 19th Party Congress, the paper analyzes the relation between traditional culture and socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era. Since socialism with Chinese characteristics has always been discursively related to the Chinese tradition and political speeches abound in references to tradition, we intend to find out what role tradition plays in the "new era" and what makes it important. The paper discusses the relation between the guiding Marxist ideology and tradition and looks at how the importance of tradition is explained to the masses by employing ritualistic formulae. The analysis is based on the elite political discourse and subsequent academic discourse acting as commentaries to the political discourse.

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