

# RHETORICAL FORMS OF SYMBOLIC LABOR: THE EVOLUTION OF ICONIC REPRESENTATIONS IN CHINA'S MODEL WORKER AWARDS

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*As the steadily expanding cyberpublic presents both obstacles and opportunities for Communist Party rule in China, the party has responded by adapting the rhetorical strategies of the Model Worker (MW) commendations to a changing political environment. Using role model representations to encourage particular kinds of citizen labor, the system has changed from Maoist single-lane authoritarianism to a multilane interaction between the public and the party. This essay investigates the epideictic function, adaptation, and modification of MW awards via Kenneth Burke's symbolic labor. Tracing the awards through the periods of leadership from Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao, I explore how the structure of the MW program has evolved into a rhetorical strategy capable of stabilizing party power through the moralization of party initiatives and the promulgation of party ideals despite increases in new media forms and institutions.*

A few days after a 7.9 magnitude earthquake overwhelmed Sichuan Province, and just months before the opening of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, a moving report was published in the Sichuan-based newspaper, *West China Metropolis Daily*, on the actions taken by Jiang Xiaojuan, a 29-year-old Jiangyou City policewoman. The image accompanying the

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story quickly spread through online news outlets. It showed Jiang cradling and breastfeeding two of the disaster's youngest victims, and the caption read, "wǒ de wá shì wá, zāimín de wá yě shì wá, tāmen dōu shì mā de wá" (My baby is a baby, the victims' babies are also babies, they all are mothers' babies).<sup>1</sup> A mother herself, Jiang nursed a total of nine babies among those orphaned or separated from their parents during the earthquake. As Jiang's story spread through the media, she was hailed as "China's Mother No. 1."<sup>2</sup> In true Chinese fashion, she responded to the publicity with utmost modesty, saying, "I think what I did was normal. In a quake zone, many people do things for others. This was a small thing, not worth mentioning."<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the party-sponsored media did not mirror her humility.<sup>4</sup> Anthony Kuhn, China correspondent for National Public Radio (NPR) in the United States, explains the citizen hero model, now routine in Chinese news:

This is a certain format for the media, the creation of heroes. Of course they create heroes out of ordinary workers, out of, you know, bus drivers and all this. But soldiers play a specially big role and they try to use these examples to show that these are, you know, the people's army, very close to the people, let's say; it's a standard sort of format of reporting and we're seeing an awful lot of it these days.<sup>5</sup>

Although the creation of heroes is, by now, an almost universal function of the modern media, this habit in Chinese media is influenced by its relationship to a long-standing program by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to officially recognize Chinese role models for politically persuasive purposes.<sup>6</sup> The Model Worker (MW) awards originated in 1950, during Mao Zedong's rule (from 1943 to 1976). The MW awards are representative of the ongoing use of "thoughtwork" by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). "Thoughtwork," Mei Zhang explains, is an active process that encourages people to see the Communist Party as the party that "created everything, achieved everything, [and] stands for everything."<sup>7</sup> In Mao's time, recipients were chosen specifically to exemplify the spirit of the party. Stylized images, often paintings turned into posters, would represent their strength, heroism, and virtue. Nicknames insinuated their valor, and narratives established dramatic forms of action for young people and workers to emulate. Whereas the deified image of Mao gazes at the populous from an abstract distance, the images of the common citizen hero provided more tangible role models that were closer to the life experiences of the people.<sup>8</sup>

A famous example from the Mao era was “Iron Man” Wang Jinxi, known for his actions following Mao’s decision to drill the Yumen Oilfield, Daqing’s first oil well. Wang and his famous No. 1205 drilling team worked for five solid days, battling frigid temperatures and the fatigue of extensive hard labor and injuries. Wang persevered, at one point “jumping into a vat of cement” when machinery broke down, “furiously agitating his limbs because his work unit had no mixers.”<sup>9</sup> Posters featured Wang looking strong and proud, such as the 1965 poster captioned with “Study the spirit of Daqing”<sup>10</sup> and the 1980 poster captioned with “Develop the spirit to build up industry in the face of bitter struggle.”<sup>11</sup>

The Iron Man model is still called upon as inspiration. For example, in 2005, Premier Wen Jiabao visited northern Heilongjiang province and used Wang’s legacy to rally workers. He “called on oil workers to hand down the priceless ‘Iron Man Spirit’ from generation to generation and further display and carry forward the spirit of the Daqing Oilfield, an integration of patriotism, pioneering, truth seeking, as well as dedication.”<sup>12</sup> Clearly, Jiang’s example as “China’s Mother No. 1” follows in the same tradition as Iron Man Wang.

As with all such sweeping rhetorical campaigns, actual success is difficult to measure. Zhang’s analysis of China’s model emulation programs revealed a significant disjuncture between the images of role models as they are received by the public and the actual behavior of citizens in response to those images. Of those occurring in the post-Mao “reform era” begun in 1979, she concludes that “the Party failed to identify with Chinese audiences in its presentation of socialist role models.”<sup>13</sup> Zhang notes two primary reasons for this failure. First, although stories of Model Workers give the impression of great levels of communal support, Model Workers actually dealt with significant amounts of jealousy, which in turn strained other aspects of their life. According to Zhang, “their hard work and selfless sacrifice were likely to cause family and marriage crises and their dedication to their workplace integrity lacked cadre support and could even lead to physical danger and nervous breakdown.”<sup>14</sup> Second, unlike in Mao’s time, when socialist role models were presented as center stage in the public’s mind in an almost mythical way, socialist reform representations were challenged by competing representations such as “official reform role models, but also by those of celebrities and diverse lifestyles from alternative channels of information.”<sup>15</sup> Particularly in an internet age—even one marked by censorship—such heavy-handed efforts like that using the Iron Man can hardly be expected to move great swaths of the population.

Although Zhang makes a compelling argument for the failing efficacy of Reform Era role models, the story has not yet ended. Indeed, the example of Jiang shows that since the period of reform covered by Zhang's study, the process of Model Worker selection has continued to change, developing into its present-day form as a complex and integrated affair. For Mao, the MW awards' primary rhetorical significance was their ability to signal which social and political standards were modified by observing which characteristics were chosen as commendable by the party (usually tireless efforts of labor and sacrifices in the name of heavy industry). The story of the Iron Man was thus largely a top-down product of the PRC used to explicitly sanction and motivate Mao's push for rapid industrialization, which stood in stark contrast to the cultural and economic traditions of China up until that point. Since then, as conditions have stabilized relative to the revolutionary period, the award system has grown more organic, replacing Mao's single lane with a multilane flow of communication marked by an expectant and participating public.

The evolution of Jiang's story is indicative of this change. Her narrative developed fluidly, starting with reporters on the scene, moving into the press, and then being voluntarily distributed among citizens. The image, taken by Li Xiaoguo of the Xinhua News Agency, "proved an instant hit with the cyberpublic."<sup>16</sup> Likewise, the image's circulation is credited as what "propelled her to hero status in China."<sup>17</sup> On May 22, less than a week later, the Ministry of Public Security awarded Jiang an honorary "national police model" award,<sup>18</sup> after which "she was promoted to vice-commissar of the Jiangyou public security bureau."<sup>19</sup> Just after the party's response to public enthusiasm with this official reward, the public spoke up again. The *China Daily* reported, "some citizens have criticized her 'quick' promotion online or in the media, saying moral models should not be fast-tracked up the career ladder," that promotion should not be based on "good deeds."<sup>20</sup> The party made no attempt to stop the debate; one local official even applauded it, saying concern over official promotions is good. Yet, as if to say that even good concern should not be prolonged, Jiang was then appointed as a CCP member in the Committee of the Jiangyou Public Security Bureau.<sup>21</sup>

Drawing from the work of Kenneth Burke, this essay explores the rhetorical significance of this shift in China's MW program over the decades, beginning with Mao's leadership. Through Burke's notion of "symbolic labor," I analyze how the thought work of the MW system functions as a form of epideictic speech focused on commemorating not rare ideals of aristocratic excellence but everyday practices of virtuous labor in the service of the nation. Then,

contrasting what Burke calls the “propagandistic” with the “Whitmanesque” methods for the invention and dissemination of persuasive symbolic forms, I explore the evolution of China’s MW program with an eye on its range of commendable characteristics, multiple avenues of selection, and adaptation to the disruption of voluntary public dissemination in a largely online media environment. Through this contrast, I show how the MW program—in part through the absorption of public technology use within a one-party system—has transitioned from what Burke calls “propagandistic” methods of persuasion, in which the party is known to “call the tune,” to “humanistic” methods of persuasion, in which the party has (in recent MW practice, at least) appeared to follow the motto, “The state should pay the piper, but should not call the tune.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, this paper explores not only the epideictic function of symbolic labor forms, but also how these forms adapt to changing political environments and are modified by the communication technologies pervasive in those environments. As such, this process in China should not be considered something foreign to Western experience; in fact, their example may actually predict the forms that will be adapted more explicitly in the West as globalization continues to cut across national boundaries.

## MORALITY AND SYMBOLIC LABOR

From a rhetorical perspective, the communicative form of MW commendation is identifiable as epideictic discourse. Following the schema outlined by Celeste Condit, MW awards have the “tendency to serve three functional pairs—definition/understanding, display/entertainment, and shaping/sharing of community.”<sup>23</sup> The first term of each pair corresponds to the speaker’s purpose, and the second term corresponds to the function the speech serves for the audience.<sup>24</sup> Definition/understanding “refers to the power of epideictic to explain a social world.”<sup>25</sup> Display/entertainment relates to the role of epideictic speech as an occasion for the audience to judge “the fullness of the speaker’s eloquence.”<sup>26</sup> And shaping/sharing refers to the communal process of renewal, whereby “individual values” are promoted “in the abstract,” and used to help the community restore “its conception of itself and of what is good.”<sup>27</sup> Together, the three functional pairs of epideictic discourse offer a preservation format of communication that can help a community in the midst of transition. Condit writes, “Whenever change intrudes into the community’s life, the epideictic speaker will be called forth by the community to help

discover what the event means to the community, and what the community will come to be in the face of the new event.”<sup>28</sup> Epideictic discourse provides symbolic equipment by which people can make sense of their community, engage in self-definition, shape collective memory, and participate in the selection of their leaders.

In the MW form, display/entertainment combines the techniques of myth and icon to convey meaning. Myths and icons are the stories and images of communal experience, choice, and memory and, thus, are naturally at home in epideictic discourse. For Marshall McLuhan, “icons are not specialist fragments or aspects but unified and compressed images of complex kind. They focus a large region of experience in tiny compass.” Like modern advertisements, icons tend to absorb and reflect aspects of public memory, perception of present conditions, and shared experience, in effect making them representative of “magnificent accumulations of material about the shared experience and feelings of the entire community.”<sup>29</sup> In the ideal Model Worker, the iconic representation of their image is then enriched by framing it within a mythic narrative, which McLuhan says is “the instant vision of a complex process that ordinarily extends over a long period.”<sup>30</sup> Both the myth and icon work together, referencing each other to gather cultural longevity and symbolic power.

Synthesizing functions of both the myth and icon, the award then acts as a medium of definition through which the MW representative functions to shape abstract meaning out of individual communal values. For instance, Woei Lien Chong notes how “propaganda posters,” which were so commonly used in the earliest days of MW commendations, “can be seen as agents of moral transformation by (re)presenting new values and/or behavior for emulation. They play a role in the confrontation of old and new patterns of conduct by conveying to the people at large new standards of behavior via acknowledged models.”<sup>31</sup> Aspects of these moral transformations, for instance, are indicated by the fact that new political prerogatives have necessitated new definitions, such as the change from “model worker” to “model socialist entrepreneur.”<sup>32</sup> Likewise, as new technologies allow for new means of display and new definitions necessitate new representatives, so too does the public pattern of entertainment and sharing change.

The aim of the MW form has always been and continues to be one of integration, in which the iconic symbol is incorporated into life as the civic process of appraisal, initiation, response, feedback, alteration, and judgment. However, the method of integration has shifted over the decades. Perhaps

the most striking evidence of this shift is from using manufactured images (usually paintings) created by party officials to using journalistic photos captured spontaneously during important events. Although the case of Jiang is certainly not the norm, its existence is nonetheless symptomatic of a change. In Jiang's case, the realism and power of the image itself was the most important aspect to the power of her narrative, with its visual appeal stimulating people online to label her "the most beautiful police mother."<sup>33</sup> The difference between Wang, whose heroic efforts in an isolate oil well were known only through propaganda posters, and Jiang, whose sacrifices were captured in the moment and immediately distributed voluntarily by China's "netizens," could not be more striking.

The difference between the Wang and Jiang cases brings forth an important tension in rhetorical theory between ideological manipulation and democratic idealism that is highlighted in recent work by Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*. In their discussion of the function of photojournalistic icons like the Tiananmen Square "Tank Man," they argue that these images do not merely reflect reality originating from within the public sphere; they give us an idealized sense of who we are and who we ought to be. "Any public is an imaginary community," note Hariman and Lucaites, "and the imagination creates public identity when one can seem to see a world in common with others and be placed in meaningful, moral relation to that world by the act of seeing."<sup>34</sup> Clearly, however, this function is not benign. Photojournalism "might be the perfect ideological practice: while it seems to present objects as they are in the world, it places those objects within a system of social relationships and constitutes the viewer as a subject within that system."<sup>35</sup> Yet icons may be more than just propaganda. Depending on their method of production and distribution, not only may the icons produced provide "reflexive awareness of social forms and state actions that can lead to individual decisions and collective movements on behalf of democratic ideals," but also their artistic excellence may transform "the banal and the disruptive alike into moments of visual eloquence—that reproduces an idealism essential for democratic continuity."<sup>36</sup>

The challenge for a critical audience is to determine to what degree an icon performs one function over the other. Clearly, the MW icons from Mao were neither photojournalistic in form nor democratic in function. With Iron Man Wang, for instance, in the 1965 image "Study the Spirit of Daqing," as featured in Stefan Landsberger's collection of Chinese propaganda posters, Wang stands triumphantly, his head raised and teeth revealed in a full smile as he strongly

grips the ropes tied to icy tools, with snow and wind whipping around him. A single image, it connotes Wang's commitment to labor, perseverance in harsh winter conditions, and the joy he felt from completing the job Chairman Mao assigned him. Meanwhile, the narrative of his heroic efforts transmits the details of his diligence and ingenuity in the face of setbacks, as it tells the story of Wang and his team being "Undeterred by temperatures of between -20 and -30 Centigrades," "jumping into" the struggle "directly," and singing praise of Mao once the task had been completed.<sup>37</sup> This narrative is the myth, verbally spread throughout the nation and passed down through generations to be called on later, as for instance in the "1980s, to entice young people to move to hardship areas to assist in the development of China."<sup>38</sup> The portrait, on the other hand, would be an icon, a compressed image representing a complex experience, and enriched by myth. Together, they both convey a very simple, blunt message—sacrifice all in the name of Mao and the nation.

Conversely, the representation of the police woman, Jiang, is a movement to incorporate photojournalistic icons that are closer to Hariman and Lucaites's definition of iconic images, which they describe as "appearing in print, electronic, or digital media that are widely recognized and remembered, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional identification or response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics."<sup>39</sup> In the case of Jiang, iconic images add new elements, characteristic of photography, while retaining the functions of McLuhan's icon and myth. The photographic element allows icons to "retain a sense of autonomy from either popular taste or elite interests."<sup>40</sup> Even though the CCP has the final say over which icons the MW system will officially recognize, when icons originate from public understanding, they retain the possibility of creating a collective agency.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, the extent to which MW awards begin to incorporate photojournalistic images like that of Jiang's raises the question of whether the MW rhetorical form is shifting toward a more democratic and less ideological character. For MW awards also intend, and often achieve, resonance within publicly shared meanings. In the past, however, these awards relied on stylized images like that of Wang in the freezing cold, grinning as he grips part of an oil derrick. Jiang's image, showing her sitting amidst earthquake rubble with babies on her breasts, is of a different genre. Clearly, this image cannot be said to be produced entirely "democratically." MW representations are consciously chosen to reference or ignite particular shared meanings, no matter their origin. Likewise, competing images are consciously censored

to allow for optimum effect—as indicated by the fact that the iconic image of the Tiananmen “Tank Man” does not appear in Chinese media or online. Even when MW representations originate within the public sphere, by the time complete representations are formed, they have passed through the influence of party goals and will continue to reflect these goals regardless of how human they may appear.

Nonetheless, the MW program does appear to be changing as the environment in which it functions changes. In Burke’s language, the boundaries of the MW program are marked by the “propagandistic” on the one side and the “Whitmanesque” on the other. Both use art as a form of political control to “represent, form, confirm, utilize, and project the national values, ideals, and expectancies.”<sup>42</sup> But they do so in different ways. The propagandistic is associated directly and consciously with methods of advertising and political persuasion. Like the example of the Medici family in Renaissance Florence who employed “whole hordes of craftsmen to beautify and signalize their realms of action” by “specifying the selection of subjects and the nature of treatment,” the propagandistic method is explicit and forceful in its goals and methods.<sup>43</sup> However, this forceful treatment is often not by choice, but by necessity. Precisely because the environment is undergoing rapid shifts, those who aspire to gain control must simultaneously break with inherited traditions and habits to impose a new symbolic order. This is what makes their message fundamentally “impious” in the sense of willfully attacking those “kinds of linkage already established.”<sup>44</sup> No matter the ideal pieties they propose, because those pieties are expressed in contrast with inherited orientations, they are impious in the reception—and this requires authoritarian leaders to adopt the method of propaganda without compunction.

By contrast, the “Whitmanesque” form is essentially pious. Persuasion here occurs through a more natural “idealization, or humanization” of present conditions and practices, whereby artists in Whitmanesque fashion travel down the “open road” and praise all that they encounter, no matter how beautiful or ugly, virtuous or base.<sup>45</sup> In this case, the piety is expressed by simply praising all that is, spontaneously and without reflection. Thus, in a stabilized environment, leaders might pay artists simply to wander the countryside, much as Doreathea Lange had done for Roosevelt’s Resettlement Administration when she captured the famous “Migrant Mother” photo in 1936.<sup>46</sup> The Whitmanesque poet thus offers “something for everybody, making the interests of piper and tune-caller identical, hence allowing the poet simultaneously to ‘be himself’ and to act as public spokesman for his

patrons, or customers.”<sup>47</sup> However, if ideological manipulation and coercion are the drawbacks of the propagandistic method, then the drawback to the Whitmanesque style, in its purest form, is that no judgments are called for at all. It thus can function “as little more than a promiscuous flattering of the *status quo*, in its bad aspects as well as its good ones.”<sup>48</sup> Significant persuasion, that is to say, usually must combine some aspect of impiety if it is to move an audience to action to which it is not already committed.

In practice, the MW program has always tried to situate itself somewhere between these two extremes. By manipulating the honors, descriptions, and visual representations of changing social ideals, the PRC has effectually attempted to rule with authority while trying to appear as the voice of the people. The overarching goal has been to adapt the forms of piety, embodied in the attitudes of workers and citizens, to the challenges of a changing political environment. Piety, Burke explains, conveys “*the sense of what properly goes with what*” through a system of “linkages” that coordinate “all the significant details of the day.”<sup>49</sup> Specifically, the MW program focuses on that aspect of piety that deals with ethics of labor, particularly the kind of labor that is done not for utilitarian gain but national glory and power. Thus, the MW program seeks to valorize a kind of piety that does not come easy. As Burke writes, “piety can be painful, requiring a set of symbolic expiations (such as martyrdom or intense ambition) to counteract the symbolic offenses involved in purely utilitarian actions.”<sup>50</sup> In the case of Model Workers, the moral “good life” is often one of endurance. In the “significant details”<sup>51</sup> the effort of work is primary, the results are secondary. This is what Burke refers to as “symbolic labor.”<sup>52</sup> The rhetorical form holds reverence for the meaning inherent to commitment to the process, so that the “act”<sup>53</sup> itself is the “accomplishment.”<sup>54</sup> Under this form, pious actions would not merely *endure* dangers arising from labor, pious actions would *court* them.<sup>55</sup>

The process of reorienting symbols to meet new ends is a continuum that uses judgments of value and practicality as the pattern by which the past is woven into the present. At pivotal points recalcitrant aspects of an ethical structure become manifest. They come from the world of interaction and action, where piety is demonstrated and symbolic labor is courted, respectively. Any contradiction between new and old values must be reconciled. If it is always kept in mind that new values have been included to meet changing situational needs, the necessity of these additions can find value in their instrumentally. Yet, if new additions are only perceived as instrumental, without morality, social practicality, or ethical purpose, they become subservient to the values

remaining from before and the deeper ethical and symbolic meanings they carry with them. For new values to function at the same level as the old, they must be credited with the same level of reverence. As the case studies below exemplify, the challenge for China's political leadership has thus always been to continually change the pious forms of symbolic labor while maintaining loyalty to the past.

### MODEL WORKER AWARD RECIPIENTS

The MW award recipients of Mao's time are not easily forgotten; they have been captured in images and legend the way one might think of a myth or parable. There was a time of transition between the widespread MW emulation campaigns of Mao's day and the publicly grown, officially accepted role models of the present day. This transition marks a time in between China's Communist and technological revolutions, when China faced large paradoxical change. In the early days of the MW award system, as they functioned on the propagandistic boundary, it was not uncommon for a worker to be officially lauded one year, only to be officially denounced or dismissed a few years later. Since then, the awards have accommodated introduction of new impieties by taking on new titles more specific to how they benefit society or the nation. For example, rather than "model worker," an awardee of today might be called a "socialist entrepreneur," or in the case of Jiang, a "hero and model police officer."<sup>56</sup> In some cases, when a person is to be recognized but no single title seems especially accurate, their success will be honored by public promotion or official admittance into the CCP. Similarly, as the availability of technology has changed, so too has the party's use of it, the public's access to it, and hence, the formation and dissemination of MW representations, all of which impacts the shape they take within the social pattern of shared meaning.

Because of the many variations of award titles and awardee characteristics, the awards do not lend themselves to strict sampling in the scientific sense. They must be seen for what they are, as part of a continuum of judgment manifest in cultural and national narratives. For example, we can look to the remnants of awards from Mao's time such as their highly stylized, propagandistic posters and slogans. Or we can look to the stories, in some cases legends, that have become woven into the present. For example, similar to Iron Man Wang, another MW from Mao's time is Xiang Xiuli, who was

awarded for her model workmanship posthumously. One December, when she was 25 years of age, Xiang was working in the pharmaceutical factory (where she had worked since she was 13), when a fire suddenly erupted. Struggling to save her colleagues and the factory, Xiang fought to keep the flames at bay until rescue workers arrived. Badly burned, the rescue workers rushed Xiang to the hospital, but her life could not be saved. To this day citizens have been encouraged to follow in the footsteps of Xiang's bravery and dedication. Posters featured her, steadfast and proud: a 1959 poster captioned with "Study Xiang Xiuli's outstanding qualities—Hold high the red banner of Communist thought to make contributions to the construction of socialism,"<sup>57</sup> and a 1992 poster that showed her bravely extending her arm to hold the flames at bay.<sup>58</sup>

Xiang had labored in that factory for twelve years. In actuality, her labor had been one of endless toil, crude conditions, hazardous materials—a harsh existence to be sure. But her labor in its symbolic sense was a rewarding one of diligent commitment to her nation, company, and fellow workers. Her death defending the factory and fellow employees was one of the "significant details"<sup>59</sup> of which Burke speaks. It was represented as an ideal piety indicative of the "good life"<sup>60</sup> by offsetting the acknowledgement of exploitation and, instead, presenting her death in terms of bravery. By choosing to highlight Xiang's valor in the face of extreme physical adversity, the message effectively deflects discussion away from the deplorable situations that created the adversity. The spotlight on her work ethic, rather than the physical risk she faced by working in the shoddy conditions of a tireless industry, operates as symbolic expiation, which allows the introduction of piety in the name of national glory and power, where reverence for suffering is intended to counter the vulgarity of utilitarian toil.

The MW representations of Mao's time approached the challenge of creating impious models of behavior by creating conditions that enmeshed the people in chaos. Thus, it could be said that Mao continued to further exasperate the disorder purposely. Confusing and retarding the potential effects of each reform (agricultural, industrial, and cultural alike) is explained by Suzanne Ogdens as part of Mao's strategy to take and maintain power.<sup>61</sup> The points of focus during Mao's time were jagged, hinging on turbulent changes in culture, society, and industry, countering inherited orientations by presenting the public with fragments of tangible foci such as particular goals and the equipment needed for achieving them. Mao sought to erase the past, to clear away all the aspects of social memory that were incongruous with the Communist Party.

Being the only “caller of the tune” during this time, Mao utilized all avenues available to him to disseminate his ideas. MW representations straddled the line between oral and written communication. They were a mixture of nicknames, narratives, posters, public reference by officials, and public commendation ceremonies.<sup>62</sup> Mao’s propagandistic MW awards were a massive single-direction dissemination of systematically tailored information, usually with the explicit purpose of negating impious reception with social and cultural consolidation. However, although “Mao Tse-tung had no doubt that it was by persuasive communication that China was won and controlled,” this does not mean he restricted himself to persuasive or educational means.<sup>63</sup> Backing his propaganda was a campaign of force that relied on the “brutality of his brainwashing techniques, deceptive spread of misinformation, strict censorship, massive execution of disbelievers, and intensive control systems.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, if propaganda failed, intimidation could always be relied upon to achieve success, whatever the cost.

Accompanying the positive role models, of course, were models of division intended to give the public suitable scapegoats. Formal denunciation served the destructive function of revolution in which the past was delegitimized by scorning, or making an example of, people and deeds of the contemporary day. During the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, denunciations chipped away at traditional notions of piety, one example at a time. Rather than a “model,” the exemplar chosen for denunciations was labeled a “ghost.”<sup>65</sup> Along with other monsters such as “capitalist running dogs”<sup>66</sup> and “snake spirits,”<sup>67</sup> “ghosts” were magnified as the blight plaguing the new revolutionary society. Like MW commendation campaigns, propaganda campaigns promulgated the public’s derision of the “ghosts.”<sup>68</sup> As Xing Lu notes, “slogans such as ‘Down with the monsters and demons’ and ‘Sweeping away all the monsters and demons’ were everywhere: on wall posters, in official newspapers, in the Red Guards’ leaflets, and in rallying cries.”<sup>69</sup> Lu explains the term “ghost” as a part of the ceremonious way “class enemies”<sup>70</sup> were identified and put on public display. She writes, “Concerning denunciation rallies, the stage where the person was denounced was called *dou gui tai* . . . (the stage of ghost). Those being denounced were made into monsters by cutting their hair into *gui tou* . . . (ghost heads) and painting their faces with black paint.” Class enemy propaganda worked alongside the campaign to “destroy the four olds” (old ideology, old custom, old culture, and old habit). The process of commendation then worked to “establish the four news” (new ideology, new custom, new culture, and new habit).<sup>71</sup> In short, Mao’s time was marked by

the pairing of overwhelming propaganda with systemic violence to shatter and remake China's political culture.

The leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the de facto successor of Mao from 1977 to 1997, ushered in a more moderate political climate. Whereas Mao thrived in political isolation, Deng sought to open up China's economy to the international world and developed the focus of model labor to respond to the public's dissatisfaction with the economic destitution and cultural impoverishment left in Mao's wake. He had to counter both ideological and social disturbances, and establish a perception of legitimacy for the regime and its new initiatives. To do this, a large-scale effort was undertaken to correct and then preserve a positive legacy of Mao. By purging the Gang of Four (a group of four Chinese officials including Mao's last wife), who were charged with treason and blamed for many of the Cultural Revolution's failings, public dissatisfaction was given a focus, and Mao's legacy was formulated around his ideals of a strong collectivist society rather than his multiple periods of failed reform. As Ogden explains, "In the most sweeping terms, the prosecution accused them [the Gang of Four] of every crime of leftism imaginable, including an overemphasis on class struggle, politics, and egalitarianism, as well as the destruction of the educational and legal systems." She goes on to explain that the trial, following four years of public investigation, was largely a "carefully orchestrated show-and-tell performance" for the benefit of the public, press, and new leadership.<sup>72</sup> A 1977 poster made for this event reads, "We must certainly wage the great struggle of exposing and criticizing the 'Gang of Four' to the end."<sup>73</sup>

By treading "delicately over Mao's body," Deng and other reformers drew a "theoretical distinction between the committed revolutionary Mao who was a good Marxist, and Mao a man who made 'mistakes.'"<sup>74</sup> Going against inherited orientations, Deng's initiatives were necessarily impious. By allowing Mao to have made "mistakes," new reform measures stood a chance at redeveloping social perceptions of piety.

In this new piety, virtue was no longer equated with the ability to labor in the midst of chaos. Economic opening meant new exposure, new public expectations, and new forms of competition for party ideals. Although Maoist virtues lived on, the public needed examples of advancement that made sense in their present world. For instance, in contradistinction to Mao's insistence that all economic disparities should be leveled, Deng acknowledged that individual wealth in the short term was necessary to achieve social prosperity in the long term. As these initial entrepreneurs were commended, the party

attempted to present them in terms similar to the West's industrial revolution, benefiting the top-most portion of society in the beginning and eventually spreading to benefit the rest.<sup>75</sup> Representations could avoid being condemned as authoritarian propaganda only through identification. The wants of the leader had to appear synonymous with those of the public. As Burke had said, they needed to share "vicariously in the role of leader or spokesman."<sup>76</sup> As Deng's government sought legitimacy under these new conditions, it sought out representations that would allow identification to take place through tangible experiences.

The new form of piety associated with reforms necessitated new representations of symbolic labor. From Deng's time, the legacy of MW awards can be found in actual businesses and innovations as much as in story and image. Two examples of awardees from Deng's time stand out. Guan De Yin received his honor for his fearless efforts to improve transportation tools, resulting in significant increases in productivity for a Shanxi mining company. Chen Yong Kang, a paddy farmer, was honored for his contribution of a new method that would allow each unit of area to yield 16.5 kg, another significant increase in national productivity. The symbolic labor of Deng's time highlighted the "significant details" of prosperity and confidence that could be obtained through advancements in productivity. The party was needed to facilitate such advancements. Innovation intermingled with the traditional focus on diligence and fearless labor ethics, as shown by Deng Xiaoping's slogan: "Reward the diligent workers and punish the lazybones."<sup>77</sup> Likewise, both officials and citizens had to demonstrate courage when facing the nation's new objectives. As Ming Ruan explains, the theories advocated by the party during times of change had to be "responsive to the needs of reform and opening up."<sup>78</sup> Officials who failed on this front were seen as cowardly. For example, Li Weihan (Luo Mai), who became a member of the Politburo in 1927, was officially "denounced as a 'coward' for attempting to terminate the ill-fated Autumn Harvest Uprising."<sup>79</sup> Diligence, labor ethics, and courage provided Deng with the vocabulary he needed to "ethicize" terms of economic advancement and integrate them into a socialist framework where the public was taught to anticipate personal benefit only after the aiding the nation.

Commendations have also been carried out retroactively, generally to exemplify the success or good forethought of previous CCP policies or leaders. Take, for example, the story of the Liu family of Gujia Village, a village in Sichuan Province that was one of the most impoverished in the

region before the Deng Xiaoping's reforms.<sup>80</sup> Now with a fortune estimated at \$3 billion, the Liu family is among China's "first-generation billionaires," a generation brought up in Maoist China, now applauded as "symbol[s] of [the] country's transformation."<sup>81</sup> As David Barboza writes for the *New York Times*, stories of this kind have been primary among "the guiding myths of China's Communist party." The Liu story is representative of the model: a family faces poverty, persecution, and failure, but finds success by following the instruction of officials and diligently working toward national goals. The Liu family was honored by local party officials as among the first of the region's "model socialist entrepreneurs," also referred to as "10,000 RMB men."<sup>82</sup>

The transformation myth is significant to the MW form because of its ability to deal with the contradictions of change. The transformation myth is powerful for its ability to work against accepted forms of national piety. As Gao Peineng, former village chief of Gujia and friend of the Liu family explains,

If you did business during the Cultural Revolution, you were the evil capitalist and you would be paraded through the street and people would throw garbage at your head. . . . But in 1982, the government began honoring what they called the "advanced wealth maker." They would ride you in a truck with red flowers and a gold medal.<sup>83</sup>

However, the major power of the transformation myth comes from its appearance as the Whitmanesque ideal, as rooted within the public sphere. In this sense, although the party encourages the piper, the piper is "himself," not a puppet, and therefore, he is successful as public spokesman, because he is perceived to call his own tune.<sup>84</sup> By resembling the Whitmanesque, the MW form enables identification between the party and the public by showing that their interests are one in the same. Awardees like the Liu family are still idealized like those of Mao's time, but their commended behaviors are no longer striking examples of moral heroism attached to great personal expense. Instead, the commended behaviors appear to arise naturally from the personal desires of the model worker and thus exemplify the connection between self-sustenance and national benefit.

With the succession of Jiang Zemin to state president from 1993 to 2003, attention shifted to modernizing the image of the Communist Party.<sup>85</sup> As Bih-jaw Lin and James T. Myers explain, following the crackdown in Tiananmen Square in 1989, the government had to deal with the political reality

that its actions had “gravely damaged the relationship between PLA and the people.”<sup>86</sup> Initially, of course, the response was to enact policies reminiscent of Maoist centralized control. First, it sought tighter boundaries on censorship. Yuezhi Zhao explains this renewed interest in the party’s approach to paid journalism, saying it was associated with “money worship” and “moral corruption,” yet many of the concerns could be more accurately rooted in “political and morale reasons.”<sup>87</sup> He continues, “Journalism in China is a repressive institution, especially since 1989.”<sup>88</sup> Second, the party made a renewed effort to crack down on dissent in its Law on Protecting Military Installations was aimed at “forestalling subversive schemes by hostile forces at home and abroad,” “safeguarding solidarity,” thwarting “any illegal activities that may jeopardize and sabotage military facilities,” and promoting “patriotism,” as well as “respect for the military.”<sup>89</sup> But these heavy-handed techniques were crude tools for an increasingly modern population eager to participate in the global political economy.

Jiang’s goal was thus to change the face of the Communist Party from a reactionary party to a progressive one. What Geoffrey Murray refers to as Jiang’s “signature campaign” was his “blueprint” for “spiritual civilization,” released in 1996, three years after he took office.<sup>90</sup> Murray defines this concept of “spiritual civilization” as follows:

[It is] capitalism minus capitalist excess, strong central control, a Confucian respect for authority, a citizenry that competes in the marketplace like Adam Smith, but behaves like a troop of boy scouts. The principal document insisted “literature and art should adhere to the direction of serving the people and socialism.” Since then, the quest for ideological purity has been largely prescriptive: strict censorship of anything controversial, critical or bawdy.<sup>91</sup>

A major part of this “spiritual campaign” was the incorporation of the “theory of the ‘three represents’ (*Sange daibiao*).”<sup>92</sup> First presented in 2000, Stefen R. Landsberger explains, the “Three Represents” included the requirements of advanced production, orientation with advanced culture, and the broad interests of the masses.<sup>93</sup> They gave the CCP a way to lessen the burden of ideological contradictions between the past and present by severing the party’s association with its “revolutionary credentials” and “stressing its relevance in the post-revolutionary period.”<sup>94</sup> Notably, the importance of the “Represents” was stressed by making use of dissemination of messages through new media. Landsberger explains:

In June 2003, the media started to promote a new campaign to study Jiang Theory with the call to “whip up a new high tide to study and implement the important thought of the ‘Three Represents.’” Numerous Chinese Internet portals opened special sections carrying relevant and educational essays devoted to this event.<sup>95</sup>

The “Represents,” explains Landsberger, sought “to replace ideology with loyalty” and thus make the party “forever undefeatable.”<sup>96</sup> The only conceptual goal the “Represents” held for the public was to make the party appear to be the backbone of national progress.

The use of role models would once again play a central role in this public relations campaign. Geoffrey Murray writes that Jiang “sponsored an elaborate revival of Confucianism and traditional Chinese ethos. The masses are once again told to emulate models: model cadres, model workers, model farmers, model soldiers, model mothers, etc.”<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, many of these examples were updated versions of old heroes. For example, Jiang revived the story of Lei Feng, “a selfless model soldier” who was lifted to “virtual sainthood” by Mao’s propaganda chiefs.<sup>98</sup> Lei’s greatest virtues were said to be his “unthinking obedience and devotion to the people.”<sup>99</sup> Mao called on the “Lei Feng Spirit” to help regain control after the Great Leap Forward. Lessons of his “spirit” were transmitted in story and song, and most notably in “a diary, which cynics allege was actually written by army propagandists.”<sup>100</sup> The diary “was ‘discovered’ after his [Lei’s] death, and it immediately entered the Chinese Communist canon as a weapon against waning revolutionary ardour.” The “Lei Feng campaign,” Murray notes, “was a key step on the road to the Cultural Revolution,” and was reinvoked in 1989 when “embattled leaders needed an example of unswerving, even superhuman zest for the Communist cause” following Tiananmen Square.<sup>101</sup> In the late 1990s, the “Lei Feng spirit” was called on again, but this time was interpreted “in the context of the new ‘spiritual civilization’ campaign.”<sup>102</sup> Murray writes, “Instead of presenting Lei as the avatar of Maoist virtue,” he was reinterpreted in the 1997 blockbuster *My Time After Lei Feng*, a movie about the man, Qiao Anshan, who caused Lei Feng’s death in an automobile accident. In the movie, party officials clear Qiao of any wrongdoing, and Qiao promises to assume Lei’s integrity in his stead. The president of the film’s production company, Wang Zhu, explains Lei’s transition from an exemplar of social unity in the 1960s to an exemplar of “attachment to the common cause” in the 1990s.<sup>103</sup> As Murray explains

of the film: “The scenes represent a China that the leadership would like to see today, which is unified by common cause, with black-and-white values and effective leadership.”<sup>104</sup>

It is with Hu Jintao, who took office in 2003, however, that the MW awards have begun to diversify at a much more rapid rate. With the relative stabilization of the Communist Party in the 1990s, the MW awards no longer had to play a central role in consolidating party leadership. Instead, Hu has used the MW awards to honor people who have demonstrated a general commitment to unity and stability. Awardees can demonstrate this commitment in a variety of ways, whether by assisting the advancement of classes previously untouched by the benefits of economic growth, or by showing that citizens with grand achievements in the global community are integral to the well being of the working class. Award recipients are honored for contributions on the local scale, such as Tong Li Hua, director of a Beijing Zhicheng law firm, who built an office that specializes in offering legal aid to migrant workers in Beijing. Or, take the example of Yao Ming, who like “China’s Mother No. 1,” was lauded in the media before he was officially commended. The global NBA star and multimillionaire demonstrates that even famous citizens are still part of the socialist community. Model Workers who have directly aided in the rejuvenation and modernization of China receive particular focus, such as Xu Zhenchao, a team leader at the Qingdao Qianwan Container Terminal, who was awarded for revamping wharf operations, bringing the bustling wharf up to European and Western standards. Academics like Huang Boyun, honored for scientific and technological innovations, have also received especial attention. Posters focused on the same topics, such as the 2003 poster captioned with “Be fond of health, fight against ‘SARS’—believe in science, depend on science, SARS can be guarded against and cured, 2003.”<sup>105</sup>

Hu Jintao has symbolically sought to mark labor of this period as a balanced combination of socialism, modernization, and harmony. In part, these qualities are emphasized to build a sense of national pride for broadcast on the international stage. Likewise, whereas Mao sought to break free from the past to legitimate a new authoritarian, Communist rule, Hu has struggled to perform a symbolic balancing act between international and economic initiatives and party stability. Just as in Deng’s time, Hu has dealt with the incongruities of reform, but his challenge has been to translate the economic values encouraged by previous leaders back into the ethical and traditional values upon which the party structure relies.

## THE WHITMANESQUE MODEL

China's rhetorical communication is grounded in the use of idioms. Based predominantly on ancient literature, philosophy, history, and myth, Chinese idioms are an extensive range of short expressions native to the Chinese culture that are commonly used to express complex cultural ideas and socially shared meanings. Because of the speed and ease with which idioms allow complex concepts to be stated and understood, they've often been favored by officials as a means of solidifying public support for a decision or for introducing the rationale for new party ideals. A popular idiom that speaks to the notion of cultural continuity is 老馬識途, *lǎo mǎ shí tú*, meaning, "the old horse knows the way." The story behind this saying involves soldiers who left their land to fight a battle. Quick victory set them on the path home in the dead of winter, much earlier than they anticipated traveling. Confused by snow storms, the soldiers became disoriented and lost their direction. They decided to let the old horses go out front, for surely they would know the way.

The MW award system is predicated on this same idea—that reliance on past precedent can bring stability to times of disorder and change. In the MW form, living people take shape in epideictic discourse as the conduit for relevant lessons from the past. The image of Jiang in uniform, nursing babies, taps into long-standing characteristics of duty and self-sacrifice heavily encouraged by Mao. Although China has gone through many changes since the party's formation and Mao's death, Jiang's story resonates with Maoist ideals and, by doing so, calls out his song. It is from future-looking imperatives that the adaptive and epideictic character of the MW award system has been so important to its continued functioning and navigation through the very real threats explained by Zhang, and also to its persistence as a rhetorical form. The rhetorical form is enabled by epideictic expression of the Whitmanesque model, based on the ability of citizens to see their interests and abilities reflected in the narratives and visual representations of the MW awardees. The reflection allows for realization of persuasion's "human element,"<sup>106</sup> thus allowing for public "idealization"<sup>107</sup> of the representation. This aspect of the form sets it apart from a strategy of propaganda because it confers a human element that is both versatile and dynamic. Rather than being a passive conduit for information, the MW epideictic form operates more like a sieve, taking the coarse material of already sanctioned values and refining them down to small granules malleable enough to fulfill new needs.

Yet, as explained by Jack Linchuan Qiu, the possibility for anything authentically new to arise from the mingling of old and new would be determined by “who articulates/interprets which part of the . . . rhetoric under what kind of political circumstances with what purposes, to mention just a few contingents.”<sup>108</sup> It is also dependent on whether the MW epideictic form can move away from patterns of political persuasion and operate in the public as a mode of reflexive communal interaction. Its ability to function rhetorically has been expanded with every new public resistance, every sought-out reflection, and every new contribution to award criteria.

Jiang’s image arose much like a weak photojournalistic icon. However, once formally recognized, it became subsumed into party propaganda. Then, paired with censorship of negative icons and myths, the form reached its persuasive potential. Although censorship is still very much at work, the public’s permitted involvement in the process of generating additions to the MW epideictic form indicates the party’s movement toward self-censorship, whereby the public participates in the formalization, social promulgation, and thus, preservation of the party and its initiatives and ideals.

Finally, what stands out about the MW award process in Hu’s time is the way in which the structure of the media has influenced its form. Although the party continues to exert significant central control over messaging, authoritarian attempts at control must take into account the presence and use of new technological mediums and the rise of commercial journalism. One reaction has been to shift from a model of censorship and suppression to one of replacing the source of messages. As Zhao explains of China’s commodity programming:

These programs are politically both safe (in that they do not explicitly deal with politics at all) and expedient (in that they fulfill the Party’s and government’s objective of making the media instruments of economic development). They are also easy to produce. Most importantly, they generate revenue. Thus, it is perhaps no surprise that some have suggested that broadcasters should condense regular news content, cut news broadcast time, and increase paid business information broadcasting.<sup>109</sup>

Even as commercialization grows, “journalism in China remains static in many respects.”<sup>110</sup> As Zhao notes, in 1992 the party showed an “unreserved embrace of a market economy,” which created the “current mix of Party logic and market logic—the defining feature of the news media system. It is a scene full of contradictions, tensions, and ambiguities.”<sup>111</sup>

Over recent years, China's media situation has grown even more complex as the censorship of media, particularly new media, is increasingly "outsourced" from government to commercial hands. This has resulted in a shift away from direct censorship and toward a more Whitmanesque model of self-censorship. As Joshua Kurlantzick and Perry Link write,

As part of its ongoing experiment in authoritarian capitalism, the Chinese Communist Party has developed a 21st-century media model that is proving to be both resilient and repressive. It includes a form of "market-based censorship," in which the authorities have reinvigorated control over old and new media alike by threatening outlets with economic repercussions—in addition to the traditional political and legal penalties—if they stray from the party line.<sup>112</sup>

Thus, whereas in Mao's time the content of messages was directed from above, it is now guided by looser, informal controls. Kurlantzick and Link explain, "[N]ow that the Chinese media industry has been commercialized, relying on advertisers for revenue rather than on government subsidies alone, publications must also consider the financial danger of displeasing powerful business interests with close official ties."<sup>113</sup> Similarly, these "ties" often run very deep, with nepotistic connections or, in some cases, where business people themselves are the officials. Such connections are not uncommon as "wealth remains largely in the hands of a political-economic elite that has successfully co-opted business and intellectual circles."<sup>114</sup>

This ideal of self-censorship applies equally to matters of political agency. Despite efforts "to increase social consultation and to implement local self-governance," Zhao observes that "power is still viewed as monistic and indivisible, and the politics of compromise that is vital to democratic governance is still not accepted."<sup>115</sup> Compromise has grown more risky within the paradoxical system Hu is trying to balance. Oftentimes, the term "self-government" operates in much the same way as "democracy," as a word that has been kept for its buzz appeal, but has been "twisted beyond recognition and stripped of the values that have traditionally defined it." As Kurlantzick and Link explain, "While the blunt instruments of media control—harassment, intimidation, and imprisonment—are still used, the Chinese authorities have also developed more nuanced methods to manipulate content and induce self-censorship." Beyond market-based

censorship, other methods include “an ambitious, multibillion-dollar plan to upgrade its overseas broadcasts.”<sup>116</sup>

Still other methods are designed to encourage the people’s self-government, such as “guidance of public opinion” and “soft power.” Fellows at the China Media Project explain guidance of public opinion as a “cardinal control concept” in the party since 1989.<sup>117</sup> It includes such things as restrictions on “content that in policy or spirit is at odds with the Party,” the media’s responsibility to actively guide the public “if public opinion differs from the Party on any matters,” and assurance that the media will “provide journalists with a foundation of expert knowledge and research in propaganda techniques in order to improve the results of propaganda guidance.”<sup>118</sup> “Soft power” refers to a “renaissance in China’s global power and influence, not just a re-awakening of arts and letters.”<sup>119</sup> A range of cultural initiatives have been developed in China and abroad in the name of soft power, including such large-scale projects as the spread of Confucius Institutes to teach the Mandarin language and Chinese culture in foreign nations. Another example is the video that played in Times Square during Hu Jintao’s visit to the United States. It was part of a soft power creation called the “Cina Experience,” which was explained in *China Daily* as “a promotional display that is part of a major campaign to promote a truer image of China abroad.”<sup>120</sup> Both at home and abroad the intent is the same—for the community to feel engaged in the conversation, but ultimately, to arrive at the party’s pre-approved conclusion.

Yet, although the party maintains the final say, the public’s participation edges closer to the process of humanization. For example, when a Model Worker awardee is selected from the community, the action of a unified community, joining together to honor a citizen like themselves, is an exercise of public voice. Even if the voice is eventually muffled, the citizens have now had the experience and potentially have the expectation to do it again, with an awareness of a new path of communication directed toward the government, rather than the traditional single-direction communication of authoritarianism. Furthermore, by altering the path of communication to include the public’s voice, the CCP grows less capable of muffling all voices. The varying origins of MW awardees stress the party’s position by positioning the CCP in a dual role, as both initiator of government-selected Model Workers and responder to communal Model Workers. Although the party can respond, it cannot control the pattern to which it is responding. The state cannot anticipate the rhetorical climate communal Model Workers

will create, thus rendering official responses less able to limit inconsistencies arising from representations and becoming more likely to make errors when responding to them. Likewise, having developed an expectant public that is now accustomed to using its communal voice, public contestation could erupt if the representation is perceived as problematic. Yao Ming is indicative of this problem. Although his award as a local Model Worker was accepted, his award on the national level was criticized for exceeding the accepted range of the MW awards in light of his status as a western capitalist superstar.<sup>121</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Rhetorically, the Whitmanesque model functions to idealize and humanize particular conditions and practices, and thus, to form lines of identification between the people and the state. Epideictically, this form enables the Communist Party to stabilize its power despite the increase of new media technologies and the public's changing expectations. The Whitmanesque model is successful because of its intuitive rationality; it appears spontaneous, is highly suggestive, and instills in its audience the feeling of natural inclinations. Recently, the newest format of the Whitmanesque Model Worker was exhibited when Bob Dylan played a concert for 6,000 people in Beijing's Workers' Stadium. Beijing correspondent for the *Guardian*, Martin Wieland, asked if Dylan's gig was "a simple twist of fate?"<sup>122</sup> He was referring to the timing of Dylan's performance, just days after dissident artist Ai Weiwei was arrested, which in turn, reinvigorated criticism of the CCP about Nobel Peace Prize awardee and jailed dissident Liu Xiaobo. Western editorials jumped at the hint of irony and quickly paired the persecuted artists of contemporary China with Dylan, "the grandfather of the protest song."<sup>123</sup>

Dylan's concert was strange if considered in light of the fact that he was later denied permission to perform. The party's oscillation between open liberalism and closed control does account for some of the all-too-frequent "change[s] of heart"<sup>124</sup> in Chinese officialdom. As Shi Baojun, former culture ministry official told Wieland, "You have to understand, the government's always balancing the need to look liberal with the need to keep control. . . . They have so many audiences."<sup>125</sup> He then continued to say, "there's often no point in looking for logic because there isn't much, or any,"<sup>126</sup> but that depends entirely on what kind of logic you are looking for. Epideictically,

the decision about Dylan makes complete sense. Wieland notes how one concert-goer described Dylan:

As he left, a young Chinese man, Gong Ping, used a distinctive Chinese word of respect: “People say he’s out of date, but he has experience and wisdom. He’s a *sheng ren*, a sage, like Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King.”<sup>127</sup>

Dylan is similar to the Whitmanesque Model Worker in many ways; the primary difference between Dylan and the police mother is the suggested audience.

In 2010, the government initiative was caught between calls for political reform and towing the socialist line.<sup>128</sup> More recently, the majority of the party’s attention has been focused on bubbles of social unrest caused by widening economic disparities and a variety of other problems associated with wealth-related scandal, crime, and corruption.<sup>129</sup> Bob Dylan is an American hero. Like Gong Ping said, he is known as a voice of “experience and wisdom,” as “a *sheng ren*, a sage.”<sup>130</sup> More important, however, Dylan is an American sage, and no matter what protest legacy he might have in the American memory, he has not been the face of protest for a long time. Rather, Dylan represents another American ideal that the CCP thinks China hasn’t seen enough of. Dylan represents the proud working man, who could achieve the luxury lifestyle but doesn’t want to. In this sense, Dylan is an example of the epideictic Whitmanesque model. He gives the Chinese audience a window into a different western ideal, and in so doing, presents a population that is newly experiencing all the possibilities of material wealth and an alternative way of approaching it. Meanwhile, the party stands on the sidelines, liberally allowing concerts to happen, whenever it chooses.

## NOTES

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3. Jiang Xiaojuan quoted in Riminton, "Officer Breast-Feeds Quake Orphans."
4. "Quake Heroes Visit Expo Exhibition Center," *World Expo Shanghai 2010 Official Website*, June 22 2008, [http://en.exp02010.cn/expo/expo\\_english/pe/ln/userobject1ai51586.html](http://en.exp02010.cn/expo/expo_english/pe/ln/userobject1ai51586.html) (accessed February 3, 2010). Jiang's story was also beneficial from the perspective of China's leaders, who pursued President Hu Jintao's platform for a "Harmonious Society" in the midst of disaster. Her story offered the additional benefit of countering stories that may have pointed to the shoddy construction of the school building that collapsed on children with a heroic tale of citizen sacrifice. Jiang's story was so beneficial from this perspective that it was hardly a surprise when she was invited to tour the 2010 World Expo Center as a member of a "quake hero" delegation and sent on a national speaking tour a month after the earthquake.
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16. Zhu Zhe and Hu Yinan, "Policewoman Rises to Hero Status for Breastfeeding," *China*

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17. Zhu and Hu, "Policewoman Rises to Hero Status for Breastfeeding."
  18. Zhu and Hu, "Policewoman Rises to Hero Status for Breastfeeding."
  19. Zhu and Hu, "Policewoman Rises to Hero Status for Breastfeeding."
  20. Zhu and Hu, "Policewoman Rises to Hero Status for Breastfeeding." "Such an exceptional promotion fuels speculation," one typical web post read in a forum on the Xinhua News Agency website. Although criticism came from only a segment of the public, Jiang's superiors responded by saying "Jiang's actions had proved she was a 'good public servant.'" Jiang herself responded that, "her promotion was not 'exceptional' as it was simply a 'class 2' officer becoming a 'class 1' officer, and explained she had been expecting the move even before the May 12 earthquake."
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