Research Article

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Interrogations of the “Chinese Dream” campaign from a critical perspective: deconstruction, receptions and critiques

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Abstract: The high-profile “Chinese Dream” campaign, which appeared in the public discourse in as early as 2012, has captured worldwide attention. Various interpretations and dissections of this heavily promoted political catchphrase have been proposed by a large number of scholars, political commentators, China specialists and even policy-makers across the globe. Academic publication and popular media coverage regarding the “Chinese Dream” campaign are extensive and numerous.

However, despite the sheer amount of literature in existence, a critical deconstruction of the “Chinese Dream” is almost neglected and the crucial strategic functionalities the “Chinese Dream” campaign performs are also downplayed. Therefore, in this article, we intend to provide a series of critical interrogations and in-depth critiques of the “Chinese Dream” campaign from a more critical perspective in order to argue the following points: A) what are the true meanings of the “Chinese Dream” and what are the crucial ingredients deliberately included and excluded in the campaign; B) what are the important strategic functionalities the “Chinese Dream” campaign is designed to perform and what is the supporting understructure upon which the “Chinese Dream” campaign operates and C) what are the uncertainties and challenges facing the eventual realization of the ambitious “Chinese Dream” in the foreseeable future.

Keywords: The Chinese Dream; political propaganda; political ideology; the rise of China.

1 Introduction

The high-profile “Chinese Dream” campaign, which appeared in the public discourse in as early as 2012, has captured worldwide attention. Various interpretations and dissections of this heavily promoted political catchphrase have been proposed by a large number of scholars, political commentators, China specialists and even policy-makers across the globe. Academic publication and popular media coverage regarding the “Chinese Dream” campaign are extensive and numerous. The “Chinese Dream” has always been intimately associated with the Xi Administration and President Xi himself is the ultimate personification of this brilliant piece of thoughtfully crafted propaganda. The “Chinese Dream” campaign conveys important political messages to the Chinese populations about the values, principles and virtues the Xi Administration appreciates and intends to popularize in the Chinese society. It also serves as a glorious blueprint to guide further development in China and a nationalistic glue to bond the diverse Chinese populations together in solidarity.

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2 Critical deconstruction of the “Chinese Dream” into three key components

The “Chinese Dream” is one of the most recent political catchphrases invented by the current Chinese political leadership and it enjoys high popularity both inside and outside of China. I deconstruct the “Chinese Dream” into three key components in order to better grasp the rich meanings it implies: **A)** A Xi-centered political leadership with insightful vision and strong determination; **B)** the deliberate emphasis on the indispensable “Chinese characteristics” (中国特色) and an idiosyncratic model of governance and development and **C)** re-establishing China as a powerful and well-respected member of the international community underpinned by a unified nation through patriotism and nationalism.

The phrase “Chinese Dream” itself is conspicuously defined by its “Chineseness”. The first and foremost “Chinese characteristic” that deserves to be mentioned is the unshakable political monopoly of the CCP in China. Western-style political plurality is definitely not part of the equation. The CCP also maintains absolute domination in the public sphere, strategically important industries and almost the entire formal financial system (Zheng, 2010). Having been in power for exactly seven decades, the CCP has successfully consolidated its political base in China and perfected the propagandist apparatus to monitor and manipulate the indigenous ideological system (Hsu and Hasmath, 2013).

Political reform is implicitly included in the “Chinese Dream” campaign. However, the alleged political reform tends to be pragmatic and limited, especially comparing with the highly institutionalized political practice in advanced Western democracies (Fewsmith, 2013). The much anticipated political reform has not been *synchronized* with the rapid pace of economic development in China over the course of the last four decades (Perry and Goldman, 2007). The monopolistic status of the CCP is literally the controversial core of the political regime in China and it ultimately defines the nature of Chinese politics. Despite the fact that the CCP is under a fair amount of pressure from external criticisms and internal demand for Western-style democratization (Haynes, 2008) and genuine empowerment of the Chinese civil society (to balance the excessively powerful state) (Deng, 2010), the party maintains its strategic position. The CCP would literally go to any length to secure and preserve its political monopoly in China indefinitely because it is a shared surviving instinct by all political parties. The first and foremost message deciphered from the “Chinese Dream” campaign is the CCP’s forceful dream to stay in power as long as possible.

3 The “Chinese Dream” VS the “American Dream”: imitation or reinvention?

The “Chinese Dream” is often compared with the “*American Dream*”. They appear to be quite similar but have very different connotations. The latter was brought forward by James Truslow Adams in 1931 and has been popularized throughout the world along with the US global domination. It symbolizes a range of liberal democratic values, principles and aspirations upheld in the American society, including Capitalist materialistic fulfillment and social appreciation to hard-working, talented and successful individuals (Cullen, 2003).

Apparently, the “Chinese Dream” emerged much later than the “American Dream”. Could it just be a convenient imitation? It’s true that the “Chinese Dream” is also a metaphor through which aspiration and ambition are

demonstrated. However, as the previous deconstruction has revealed, the “Chinese Dream” is made of a variety of alternative ingredients. The “Chinese Dream” is a collective dream of an enduring and once traumatized ancient civilization searching for its lost glory whereas the “American Dream” is an individualistic dream of self-realization and personal achievement.

The “Chinese Dream” has its root extended deep into the history. China has suffered tremendously in the hands of foreign invasions and occupations (Ding and Xu, 2015). The excruciating collective memory of the “century of humiliation (百年耻辱)” shared by generations of ethnic Chinese has made China exceptionally eager for more power and respect in the international community (Scott, 2007; Langenbacher and Shain, 2010; Zhang, 2015). The “Chinese Dream” campaign apparently intends to *capitalize* on this powerful and extensively shared psychological complex to further unify and motivate ethnic Chinese both at home and abroad.

Promoting the “Chinese Dream” could also help to resist the encroachment of Western ideologies in Chinese society, especially those are deemed to be provocative and subversive by the Chinese political authority, such as the protection over universal human rights and political plurality (i.e. a multi-party political system) (Mackerras, McMillen and Watson, 1998; Lynch, 2006; Irvine, 2016). The CCP is fully aware of the detrimental effects these Western values and ideas could produce to undermine its political legitimacy and privilege in China once they have been introduced into the Chinese society and gained popularity among the Chinese populations (ibid.).

The self-preserving instinct of the CCP and its determination to seize the political monopoly in China are impressively strong. The resilience and adaptability of this still very much viable authoritarian political regime have surprised many pessimistic China specialists who have demonstrated little confidence in the political sustainability of the CCP in a swiftly modernizing China (Hess, 2013; Irvine, 2016). The Chinese political authority has methodically come up with numerous ideological alternatives over the years to compete with the infiltrated, or often exaggerated as “*imperialistic*” by the official Chinese media, ideologies from the West.

The “Chinese Dream” is a calculated ideological reinvention by the Chinese political authority. It is not a casual imitation of its American namesake as it appears to be. It is a sophisticated propagandist instrument with strategically important functionalities. The “Chinese Dream” campaign aims to supply ideological alternatives to both Chinese and foreign audiences. It is designed to create an ideological common ground for all Chinese to share and is fully sponsored by the state. All these intricacies have fundamentally differentiated the “Chinese Dream” from the “American Dream” in a number of ways.

4 The timing of the “Chinese Dream” campaign and its improved persuasive capacity

The “Chinese Dream” campaign was getting international media attention in mid-2013 due to an article published by the New York Times titled “Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream”, the timing of which coincided with the reemergence of the “China Threat Thesis (中国威胁论)” in the 2010s. The Communist nature of the Chinese political regime continues to attract persistent criticisms and hostilities from the global West to this day (Hoare and Pares, 2005). Despite being in a disadvantaged position with little foreign assistance, China has miraculously become the second largest economy and top trading country in the world merely four decades after the socio-economic reforms in the late 1970s (Nolan, 2013). The vigorous rise of China has simultaneously sparked admiration and fear in the international community. Therefore, the “Chinese Dream” campaign was indeed a timely declaration from the Chinese political authority to the entire world that China would pursue a peaceful rise and the country is destined to fulfill the honorary role of a positive contributor to the shared future of all mankind (人类命运共同体).

The timing of the campaign is reasonably accurate and the content of the campaign is also thoughtfully packaged. The CCP has a long history of imposing preferable doctrines and values to its subjects through aggressive and oppressive methods (Leng, 1989; Cua, 2003). However, the non-coercive, non-confrontational and persuasive nature of the “Chinese Dream” campaign shows a noticeable transformation of the propagandist technique used by the Chinese political authority from aggressive coercion to skillful persuasion. The “Chinese Dream” is a much more softened and inviting reflection of the will of the Chinese political authority.

5 Critical receptions to the “Chinese Dream” campaign and its missing ingredients

The “Chinese Dream” is a romanticized signifier of the vision, determination and aspiration of the Xi Administration. Its primary purpose is to promote a more positive, progressive and non-threatening image of China to both Chinese and non-Chinese audiences and reassure them with the good will and commitment from the ruling party. However, not everybody would embrace the “Chinese Dream” without any critical interrogations. One obvious question (among others) might be: is the “Chinese Dream” the dream of the Chinese political authority or is it the dream shared by the vastly diversified Chinese populations?

China is a huge country with an enormous population. Chinese society has become much more stratified as modernization deepens (Watson, 1984; Guo, 2016). The separatist tendency across the Greater China Region (大中华地区), especially in Taiwan and Hong Kong, has cast serious doubt about the effective implementation of the “One country, Two systems (一国两制)” policy and caused afflicting identity crisis among (notably younger generations of) Taiwanese and Hong Kongers (Lee and Sing, 2019). Overall, China is an “*artificial unification*” and its complexity, diversity and persistent localism of various kinds have led to constant internal frictions (Yan, 2002; Paus, Prime and Western, 2009).

The increasingly violent and destructive pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong have received global media coverage. The previously termed “*Umbrella Revolution*” (雨伞革命) has aggravated into escalating confrontation and even physical attacks between protestors and the local authority. The volatile situation in Hong Kong is largely a damaging product of the incompatible ideological, notably political, beliefs held by (a significant number of) Hong Kongers and that by Beijing. The fundamental cause of the conflict rests precisely upon the contentious and provocative idea of democracy, which is a crucial missing ingredient in the “Chinese Dream” campaign. Even though, the Chinese political authority has publically acknowledged the potential merits of democracy, it definitely does not want to embrace the Western-style democracy any time soon with periodic, nation-wide elections amongst multiple political parties and candidates and introduce systematic scrutiny from parallel supervisory powers to regulate the almost unbounded administrative power in China, i.e. ensuring administrative accountability (Ogden, 2002).

The CCP has always been very resistant to the internal demand for Western-style democratization and the mainstream Chinese academia generally supports the political *status quo* due to its unarguable dependence on the state. Interestingly, some non-Chinese theorists also have explicitly suggested that China could effectively draw inspirations from its own political tradition and pursue an alternative model of governance other than the *standardized and universalized* Western liberal democracy (Ogden, 2002; Bell, 2015). These voices, regardless of their standpoints and intentions, have helped to justify the legitimacy of the existing Chinese political regime.

The intensifying conflict in Hong Kong has shocked the world and deeply embarrassed Beijing. The gradually accumulating “democratic deficits” (Zheng and Cheung, 2014), among other pathologies, such as the widening wealth gap and frozen class mobility (Goodstadt, 2015), under the institutional experiment of the “one country, two systems” have contributed greatly to the current situation in Hong Kong. In the limited future, it’s unlikely that the heatedly debated idea of democracy as a political governing mechanism preferred by Hong Kongers yet strongly resisted by Beijing would find the common ground to reconcile. The social order and economic prosperity of Hong Kong are in jeopardy if the delicate situation was mishandled and got out of control. Unfortunately, what the Hong Kongers are struggling very hard for is something that cannot be offered by Beijing. There is no room for bargaining in this case because Beijing simply does not play the democracy card with anybody across the board.

Nevertheless, protestors in Hong Kong are not the only pro-democracy force in China. To many of the so-called “*Chinese liberals*” based in mainland China, such as authors, investigative journalists and human-rights lawyers, Western-style democracy clearly has a very strong appeal to them (He, 1996; Pils, 2015). Even though these pro-democratization advocates have few opportunities to articulate themselves to the public due to the low political tolerance in China (Pils, 2015), their persistent struggles to popularize democratic principles and push democratization in Chinese society demonstrate that they, too, have an unfulfilled dream of what China should become one day. The only issue here is, they don’t necessarily dream what the Chinese political authority dreams or want them to dream, at least not with regard to the *nature and practice* of democracy.

In spite of its monumental significance, democracy is only one of the missing ingredients in the “Chinese Dream” campaign. Other missing ingredients, such as protection over universal human and property rights, political

accountability and tolerance to political dissidents, are also deliberately excluded from the campaign. Without these widely recognized and appreciated ingredients, the “Chinese Dream” campaign could conceivably meet resistance or even rejection outside mainland China. The Greater China Region has a long-standing propensity to internal frictions and conflicts largely as a result of the different modes of governance in function and the divergent value system and ideological arrangement inside people’s minds despite the apparent fact that the region has become much more economically integrated over time (Sung, 2005; Lei and Yao, 2009). It’s almost inevitable that the “Chinese Dream” campaign would encounter harsh cynicism or even outright denunciation in reality by certain subgroups of the Chinese populations and, in this unfavorable scenario, the propagandist efficacy of the campaign is considerably compromised. In summary, the receptions towards the “Chinese Dream” could indeed vary significantly across geographic localities, ethnic backgrounds, institutional arrangements and even social-economic categorizations.

6 The de facto political infrastructure underlying beneath the “Chinese Dream” campaign

The “Chinese Dream” campaign cannot operate autonomously by itself. It depends on the support of the official propagandist apparatus. Propaganda does not imply negative meanings in China and this term is widely used in formal political discourse. The *Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China* (中宣部 *the Publicity Department in short hereafter*) is a highly secretive and much valued governmental organ that is under the direct control of the CCP. It systematically monitors and regulates all the media that are operating within the national boundaries of the PRC, including both Chinese and foreign (Brady, 2008). Therefore, it’s evident that audiences could only receive information that is officially approved by the Chinese political authority if their sources of information are subjected to the *de facto* censorship of the Publicity Department (ibid.). In general, the Chinese media are well-disciplined and most of them play strictly by the rules.

Over the years, all the deemed politically controversial and provocative information has been systematically removed from the public domain under the close directions of the Publicity Department. However, thanks to the popularization of digital technologies, especially the internet, and the cross-border interactions between the Chinese populations and the rest of the world, controlling the flow of information has become much harder, if not completely impossible (Conrad and Poole, 2012). Even the Great Fire Wall could not deter the curiosity of the Chinese people to know the outside world (Griffiths, 2019). It only creates lucrative business opportunities to providers of VPN renting services (ibid.). In the age of the digital, engineering people’s minds through the manipulation of old-fashioned or even outdated propagandist instruments and techniques is both insufficient and ineffective (Shambaugh, 2008).

In short, propaganda needs to keep up with the swiftly changing world. Although the operations of the Publicity Department remain little known by outsiders, empirical observations have shown that propaganda in China has evolved significantly over time to better adapt itself to the constantly transforming Chinese social realities, which is exactly the reason why it can still exert considerable influence in shaping both the mentality and behaviors of the Chinese populations (Brady, 2008; Shambaugh, 2008). The propaganda system is the political infrastructure upon which the “Chinese Dream” campaign operates.

The Publicity Department serves the dual roles of watchdog and gatekeeper on behalf of the Chinese political authority (Callahan, 2006). It uses its propagandist capacity to popularize orthodox ideologies, such as the “Chinese Dream” campaign, to fill the dangerously enlarging “spiritual void” in the seemingly faithless Chinese society (Sullivan, 1995; Lu, 2004; Yang and Tamney, 2012) and, simultaneously, to promote an idealistic image of China to the rest of the world. This is a bi-directional and coherent propagandist strategy targeting both Chinese and foreign audiences. It skillfully addresses the need of the public for information and certain ideological products, not just in a reactive fashion as it used to be, but in a much more proactive manner.

7 The “Chinese Dream” as a political remedy to the deteriorating citizen-government relationship

Anti-corruption has been intimately associated with the “Chinese Dream” campaign from the very beginning, even though it is not officially included in the campaign as an integral part of it. Crackdowns on administrative corruption could restore justice and fairness in the increasingly profit-oriented Chinese society and emotionally repair the deteriorating citizen-government relationship. If the “Chinese Dream” campaign aims to illustrate a glorious outlook that could bring everybody together, then the anti-corruption movement should be a supporting sidekick, not as a systemic reform but as a political remedy.

According to Transparency International, China ranked 87 in the global corruption index in 2018, significantly below Taiwan (31) and even slightly below India (78). Administrative corruption is a common practice in the Chinese political system. It is one of the major threats to the legitimacy of the CCP because it undermines the trust and good will between the ruling party and the general public (Wang, 2009; Zhou, 2010) and also sacrifices collective welfare for personal gains. The Chinese central government has further tightened the control over the extractive tendencies of the Chinese bureaucrats at all levels since Xi became the new Chinese president in early 2013 (Loeb, 2014). Unsurprisingly, Xi’s tough measures against administrative corruption are generally regarded as a positive and welcoming effort to cleanse the Chinese political system by many members of the general public (Fang and Li, 2018).

Nevertheless, imposing strict self-discipline rather than subjecting the Chinese bureaucrats under constant supervisory scrutiny does not seem to be a convincing alternative to ensure good and clean governance (Kroeber, 2016; Lai, 2016), especially considering the fact that administrative power enjoys a privileged status in China without institutionalized checks and balances in function. Despite a healthy dose of skepticism regarding the long-term efficacy of the anti-corruption movement led by Xi, it is a serious message from the Chinese political authority to its own people that the CCP still has the best interests of all Chinese people at its heart and it is committed in self-improvement to better serve the people.

The conflict of interest between the elites and masses is prevalent across societies. The resurgence of populism has caused political turmoil and controversy in Western democracies, such as in the cases of Brexit and the electoral victory of Donald Trump in 2016. Alienation of the ruling elites from the masses could conceivably cause even more detrimental disturbances in the rapidly transforming Chinese society due to institutional deficiency or lacking of institutional capacity (Studwell, 2013; Tang, 2016). The amounting repulsion and resentment the Chinese public has towards corrupt and exploitive bureaucrats and their close associates could literally shake the very foundation of the Chinese society if no effective counter-measures have been sought (Wu and Lansdowne, 2009; Kingston, 2015).

Empirical evidence shows that “mass incidents” (群体事件) and other forms of citizen-government confrontations have increased in recent years as a result of property rights disputes, employment disputes and even ethnic tensions (Milne, 2012; Wang and Madson, 2013; Irvine, 2016; Yu, 2016) etc. Media coverage of these incidents tends to be brief and limited due to their provocative nature. In other words, these politically sensitive incidents are minimized in the publically available discourse. The concern is, once they have gained extensive exposure, the public would inevitably question the integrity and competence of the government officials at various levels (Simon, 2015). In comparison with the enthusiastic promotion of the “Chinese Dream” campaign, the ugly side of the reality is deliberately omitted to avoid negative public repercussions.

The “Chinese Dream” campaign is designed to be a strategic package deal to restore trust, cohesion and solidarity in the constantly evolving Chinese society and repair the deteriorating citizen-government relationship due to issues such as corruption and malfeasance. In summary, the “Chinese Dream” campaign is not a panacea to the pathological symptoms existing in the disoriented Chinese society but a temporary remedy to ensure civil cooperation indefinitely.

8 The “Chinese Dream” and the emerging Chinese middle class

China has long put the Marxist class struggle aside to focus on economic development and modernization (Chen, 2003). However, the concept of class has not become absolutely irrelevant in China. On the contrary, multifarious class labels have been introduced into the Chinese society from the outside world, such as the working class, the

middle class, the upper class, the leisure class and even the creative class. Class has been depoliticized in both the formal and informal discourses in China due to the top-down strategic shift from being politically-oriented to economically-oriented (Wang, 2018). The alleged emergence of the Chinese middle class has become a fascination for political economists, business persons and even policy-makers. Its economic potential and political significance in the Chinese society has been widely acknowledged (Cheng, DeLisle and Brown, 2006).

The definition of the Chinese middle class is inherently ambiguous and it is a heterogeneous socio-economic category (Goodman and Chen, 2013). According to a report conducted by Credit Suisse, 109 million Chinese adults are included in the middle class in the year of 2015, slightly more than their American counterparts of 92 million. Another business mapping report conducted by McKinsey in 2013 stated that the emerging Chinese middle class is likely to grow larger in size and become more affluent in the next decade.

Having a solid and sizeable middle class in society generally contributes to social stability and economic prosperity according to mainstream developmental theories (Li, 2010). The Chinese middle class tends to be better educated and have more sophisticated professional skills (*ibid.*). Apart from being an indispensable economic force, it is also a major source of bottom-up ideological production and a critical mobilizer of public opinion (Hsiao, 2013). If the “Chinese Dream” campaign intends to unify and motivate the Chinese populations to work together towards a glorious future, then it definitely needs to convince the Chinese middle class and get it on board.

9 The uncertainties of China’s economic future

The “Chinese Dream” campaign conspicuously reflects “the political legitimacy justified by economic performance” rhetoric in the Chinese political discourse. Despite massive reduction of poverty and dramatic elevation of living standard throughout China, there is still ample room for future economic progress, both quantitative and qualitative. After all, China is still a less affluent country in terms of, for example, “adjusted net national income per capita”. This crucial indicator has reached 6568 USD in 2017 for China according to the statistics available from World Bank. Nevertheless, China has ranked relatively low in the world, behind Russia (8519USD), Brazil (8397USD) and even Malaysia (7804USD).

In the not distant past, the Chinese political leadership was deeply inspired by the successful experiences of the Eastern Asian developmental states, notably Singapore and South Korea (Kim, 2017). These emerging economies have completed industrialization at an accelerated pace with heavy state interventions (*ibid.*). China’s idiosyncratic model of governance and development has clearly shown the traces of imitation of these aforementioned foreign models. Due to its tremendous success so far, some economists believe China has already marginally passed the infamous “middle income trap” because the GNP per capita for China in 2017 has reached 16760 USD, which was higher than the upper limit of the middle income range of 12000 USD (Lewin, Kenney and Murmann, 2016). According to the law of diminishing marginal return, the growth of the Chinese economy is inevitably to slow down over time simply because it is an unbreakable, universal economic regularity (Sloman, Guest and Garratt, 2018). In addition to adjusting the projection of the economic growth rate to a significantly lower level, the Chinese political authority needs to work out a viable and sustainable strategic plan to secure economic well-being on both the macroscopic and microscopic levels and provide enough employment opportunity in the forthcoming period of reduced economic growth.

It’s no exaggeration to say that there are both serious challenges and great opportunities lying ahead of the Chinese economy. The “China Dream” campaign has illustrated a promising avenue, i.e. building a sustainable Chinese economy with higher level of productivity and sophistication. However, the high danger of an economic stagnation over an extended period of time or even a sudden collapse of the entire economy is indeed possible, even though the chance for the latter to happen could be rather slim (Garnaut et al., 2015).

As many have agreed, the unique Chinese model of economic development adapts to the Chinese national conditions almost perfectly (Hsu, Zhao and Wu, 2011; Yip, 2012; Hong, 2016). The vigorous rise of China has genuinely impressed many under-developed countries in the Global South (*ibid.*). Their admiration turns into a wider recognition and acceptance of this one-of-a-kind model of governance and development with Chinese characteristics. China’s admirers and followers have created more strategic space of maneuvering for the rising superpower to re-establish itself

in the international community with respect and honor, which is the ultimate goal as the “Chinese Dream” campaign has ambitiously declared.

It’s noteworthy that China’s idiosyncratic model of governance and development doesn’t necessarily guarantee long-term success in the future since it has a number of detrimental limitations, such as arbitrary interference of spontaneous market mechanism, lacking of robust rule of law and weak protection over legitimate human and property rights (*ibid.*). With the gradually diminishing demographic dividend, the more expensive labor cost at home, the overstressed natural environment (Xie 2009; Delang 2016; Shapiro 2016) and the social tensions and conflicts among vested interest groups largely due to the exacerbating inequalities in the Chinese society and so on, the miraculous “China Model” is likely to exhaust all its charm in the predictable future and meet a disastrous fate. All these uncertainties and problems present pressing challenges to the Chinese political leadership and they should be properly addressed as quickly as possible or otherwise the “Chinese Dream” will always remain a dream without realization.

10 The “Chinese Dream” beyond the national borders of China

In addition to acute and complicated domestic issues, the external environment is rather unsettling for China too. China’s strategic intention to forcefully expand its international influences beyond its national borders in order to become a true global great power is strongly hinted in the “Chinese Dream” campaign. To many constantly alert, strategic hawks based in the US, the “Chinese Dream” is just a sugar-coated euphemism of China’s ambition to dominate Asia and even beyond. From their perspectives, all the increasingly evident signs, such as China’s controversial maritime expansion in the South China Sea, have indicated that it’s almost inevitable for China’s weaker neighboring counties to subordinate their national interests to that of the rising giant if they are left on their own devices, which explains perfectly why the re-balance policy of the US in Asia Pacific would stay much longer in whatever new forms with even more intense power game against China.

It is a difficult task for the “Chinese Dream” campaign to effectively convince China’s insecure neighbors and the hegemon that the rise of China would be a “positive sum game (正和博弈)” with no losers but winners. It’s always easier said than done and the validity of this claim is almost impossible to be confirmed in any realistic way. The overwhelming majority of the diplomatic rhetoric and propagandist campaigns are only self-proclaimed vehicles filled with persuasive words, including the “Chinese Dream” campaign. They do not carry the same weight as formalized policies and guiding strategies as we should always remind ourselves. China is a firm believer of strategic realism rather than idealistic romanticism. The ambition and aspiration embedded in the “Chinese Dream” campaign should be regarded as an unmistakable signal that China won’t stop moving forward and the country is actively seeking much more power and influence to achieve whatever it aims at with single-minded determination.

11 Conclusions

In conclusion, the high-profile “Chinese Dream” campaign is a propagandist instrument targeting both Chinese and non-Chinese audiences. The ambiguous nature of the “Chinese Dream” has induced various interpretations from a large number of commentators both inside and outside the global academia. The “Chinese Dream” has rich and subtle connotations. It is highly adaptive to the complex and constantly evolving domestic and international environments of China. It is also designed to be highly selective to perform certain strategically important functionalities. Although the receptions of the “Chinese Dream” could be skeptical or even cynical, especially outside mainland China, it has successfully captured the attention of its intended audiences nonetheless.

The political legitimacy of the CCP mainly depends on two things: **A)** the economic performance on both the macroscopic and microscopic levels and **B)** nationalism in the form of collective identity and shared aspiration. The “Chinese Dream” campaign clearly reflects the awareness of the Xi Administration about the strategic importance of economic well-being and national pride. The emergence of the “Chinese Dream” is not random and casual in any sense. The campaign is thoughtfully designed and cautiously planned under the direction of the Xi-centered core leadership.

The “Chinese Dream” is a reinvention of China’s own political heritage by the Xi Administration to fulfill carefully selected, strategic functionalities as having been argued in the main section. However, its actual efficacy to effectively convince and reassure the audiences outside the institutional matrix of mainland China is rather dubious due to the comprehensive presence of Western ideological establishment.

The packaging of the “Chinese Dream” is very appealing with an innovative application of sophisticated propagandist techniques. However, the campaign itself lacks equally appealing substance due to the fact that it has excluded some of the widely appreciated Western ideals, values and principles on a selective basis due to political considerations.

The demand for substantial reform of the Chinese political system towards a more transparent and accountable end and better protection over human, especially minority, right are not effectively addressed by the “Chinese Dream” campaign. On the other hand, other positive elements associated with the campaign, such as anti-corruption, inclusive development and egalitarianism, have added credits to the Xi Administration. Overall, the “Chinese Dream” campaign does not touch upon the monopolistic status of the CCP in the Chinese political ecology and it remains to be the first and foremost “Chinese characteristic” to be considered.

To summarize, the “Chinese Dream” campaign is a propagandist instrument invented by the Xi Administration to unify and motivate the heterogeneous Chinese populations to work together towards a glorious future. The “Chinese Dream” campaign is indeed a mix of now and the future, merits and flaws, power struggles and soft techniques and even hopes and despairs.

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