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### **Beijing's New Cultural Revolution, Ideological Guidance and Strategic Discussions**

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Summary: It is worth noting Beijing's recent intense work on developing culture related businesses domestically and exporting culture products internationally. This article and the next one, *Beijing's New Cultural Revolution, and Industrial Policies and Global Practices*, attempt to sum up the Chinese Communist regime's efforts in strategizing, planning, and implementation in the arena of Chinese culture. The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) purpose is to solidify its governance, assure the ideological guidance of socialism/Marxism in society, and expand its global influence. This article focuses on the CCP's ideological guidance and on debates among government officials and scholars. The second article will appear in a subsequent issue.

## **Beijing's New Cultural Revolution, Ideological Guidance and Strategic Discussions**

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### **Ideological Guidance**

As early as 2002, at the 16<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), then party chief Jiang Zemin mentioned both the development of culture, and the reform of the nation's culture industries. "In today's world, culture is intertwined with the economy and politics, playing a more and more prominent role in the competition of overall national strength. The power of culture is deeply rooted in the vitality, creativity, and cohesiveness of the nation. All party comrades must deeply understand the strategic significance of culture development and promote the prosperity of socialist culture." [1]

However, the major catalyst came from two more recent events. The first was during the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP in October 2007, when party chief Hu Jintao gave a report with a whole section dedicated to "Promoting the Great Development and Prosperity of Socialist Culture." The second was the *Culture Industries Reinvigoration Plan*, which the State Council, under Premier Wen Jiabao, passed in July 2009.

These two events, against the background of the global financial crisis that began at the end of 2007, shaped the regime's policies and practices in the culture arena both domestically and internationally.

In the seventh section of his speech on October 15, 2007, Hu said, “We should adhere to the direction of advanced socialist culture, embark on the upsurge in socialist cultural development, stimulate the whole nation’s creativity, and enhance the nation’s cultural soft power, so that the people’s basic cultural rights and interests are better protected, and their cultural life is more colorful, and more uplifting.” [2] The core goals as presented in Hu’s speech include the following aspects: first and foremost, adhering to the socialist/Marxist value system; second, developing various sectors in the culture industries such as the media and press, literature and the arts, and the Internet, etc. to promote patriotism and socialist ideology; third, promoting Chinese culture overseas; last, promoting cultural innovation and developing culture industries by implementing major culture industries’ projects and fostering key culture enterprises.

The Chinese Communist Party’s National Congress, held once every five years, usually sets the agenda for the direction of the nation for the next few years, in addition to appointing the personnel for its highest leadership positions. Hu’s speech set the tone for the party: socialist/Marxist ideology lies at the center and its promotion is the ultimate objective of Beijing’s culture strategy.

At a July 22, 2009, State Council Executive Meeting, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao approved *The Culture Industries Reinvigoration Plan*, which was formally issued on September 26. The *Plan*, involving more than a dozen Party and government agencies, spells out key tasks and policy measures in more detail so as to achieve the goals set by Hu’s 2007 speech. It was almost immediately implemented throughout all segments of the culture industries and other related government bodies, generating a ripple effect across the nation and around the globe.

## **Strategic Discussions**

Almost during the same time period, there were heated discussions among officials and Chinese scholars about why China should promote and develop culture industries. In Chinese society, where the Party has an iron grip on the media and freedom of expression, usually a scholar cannot publish his views without approval from the authorities. Not surprisingly, the discussions, as they appeared in the official media articles and policy papers, basically followed the tone of the Party leadership. Reading

these discussions offers a deeper understanding of the thinking of society's opinion makers.

### Culture as China's Soft Power

The discussants believe culture is a necessary strategic force for China to become a great power and to expand its international influence.

After 1989, Deng Xiaoping gave 24 characters as a guideline for the CCP's handling of international relations: 冷静观察, 站稳脚跟, 沉着应付, 韬光养晦, 善于守拙, 绝不当头, which translated as, "Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership." When Jiang Zemin took power after Deng died, he attached four more characters 有所作为, translated as "do something."

Deng's 24 characters were proposed right after the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre, when the Chinese Communist regime was besieged by a hostile international environment. After twenty years, the nature of Chinese Communism has not changed, as it has continued to uphold the Communist ideology, deprive Chinese people of their rights and freedom, and maintain a one-party dictatorship. However, by attracting foreign investment to convert the country into a "world factory" and building up huge foreign exchange reserves with artificially under priced exports, the regime has successfully gained more leverage against major western governments, and changed its international environment. To many officials and scholars, it is time to gradually abandon Deng's words and to embrace a more assertive foreign strategy. In the discussions of China's culture strategy, the words "soft power" are frequently used.

Zhang Guozuo, Chair of the China Research Center of Cultural Soft Power launched in July 2009, said in one of his articles, published in the *Journal of Chinese Social Sciences* (the core publication of the government think tank, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) that:

"A nation's prosperity depends on its comprehensive national strength. Comprehensive national strength mainly consists of two forces: hard power and soft power. Hard power is mainly the economic, military and technological power and

other tangible material forces. Soft power is the spiritual power that is reflected in influence, attractiveness and persuasiveness of culture and value recognition, the national spirit, theories and ideologies, public opinion, strategies and tactics, system design, policies and regulations, and national image. In a contest of international comprehensive national strength, a nation may lose a war because of weakness in hard power, but may lose without war because of weakness in soft power. ... Culture is the key and soul of soft power. ... From a fundamental point of view, cultural soft power is the determining factor among the reasons why a nation's soft power matters for a nation's rise and fall, for its strength and for people's livelihood." [3]

Ye Jun, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said:

"The games between the big powers still dominate the world. The competition has mainly taken the form of 'cross-cultural games.' Although the means of war and violence may still be the last resort, as Clausewitz points out, 'War is a mere continuation of politics by other means.' War is nothing but a means. 'The most violent and strongest wins' may for a moment be the rule of game, but not a uniform rule for all time. The war game is a transient state, while the culture game is the norm. Any big power, after positioning itself in the world, will certainly use cultural (or soft) practices to build up long-term prosperity." [4]

An article from *Outlook Weekly*, a magazine published by the official *Xinhua* News Agency, made the point clear:

"In the current international environment, the Chinese culture urgently needs to 'go out.' Just as Hollywood films bring American values into every corner of the world, Disney park uses the American aesthetic taste to influence generation after generation of young people around the world, Chinese cultural products, appealing with rich China elements, will also bring Chinese culture and spirit to the whole world through the world's culture markets." [5]

Wang Cheng, Director of State Council Information Office, the agency in the State Council in charge the nation's media, said in a conference:

“With the deepening of economic globalization and the continuous expansion of China’s opening up, (China) must strive to improve external communication capacities. The central authorities proposed to, by strengthening cultural soft power, build up national cohesiveness and solidarity domestically and enhance attraction and influence.” [6]

Quite often the discussions mention a term 话语权, translated as “discourse right,” which means the power of leading public opinion. Many scholars and officials believe that western countries now have the control of “discourse right” and set the agenda for public debates. For China to ascend as a great power, it is necessary to break up the West’s control and grab the “discourse right.”

Zhang Mingqing, an official from the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office said, “‘Discourse right’ is a concept in studies of communication, referring to the lead in public opinion. Communication involves ‘what to say,’ ‘who says it,’ ‘when to say it,’ ‘how to say it,’ and other links. Whoever has the ‘discourse right’ can set the agenda, occupy the commanding height of public opinion, guide public opinion, and lead it in a favorable direction, so as to achieve the purpose of shaping the (nation’s) image. To create a good image of the country and seek to gain a favorable position in the international competition, every country is making an effort to create a favorable public opinion environment. Therefore, the ‘discourse right’ is becoming a new strategic high ground for improving cultural soft power.” He added, “At present, the world balance of power started a third historic reshuffle following the rise of Europe and the United States. Emerging powers increasingly demand the ‘discourse right’ in international affairs, posing a challenge to the international discourse hegemony of Europe and the U.S. Europe and the U.S., threatened by emerging powers demanding the ‘discourse right,’ feel a strong sense of crisis on one hand. On the other hand, they are not willing to give up the international ‘discourse right’ with a deep-rooted sense of superiority in ethnicity, institutions, and civilization. Therefore, the struggle between hegemony and counter-hegemony of the international ‘discourse right’ has intensified.” [7]

On April 10, 2008, *Outlook Weekly* published an article titled, “Coping with the Trend of ‘Soft Containment,’” which explained more of the rationale behind the idea of “discourse right.”

“As the Western media possess an extensive distribution network and a wealth of information resources, they have enormous influence on setting the agenda. According to statistics, over 90% of the world’s information is spread from the U.S. dominated Western countries, and over 70% is disseminated by the Western countries multinational media companies. The media of most developing countries only serve as a transit point for the secondary transmission of information from the developed countries. The Internet is no exception. China’s national image has been distorted under such agenda setting. Academic research shows that in the recent 10 years, the Western mainstream media, especially the U.S. media, have not fundamentally changed their main tone in their coverage of China. ... Some of the features of the ‘soft containment’ analyzed by scholars include the following. While recognizing China’s rise and its role in international affairs, they exert ideological pressure in their so-called dialogues and communications. Through pressure and influence in ideology, economic and social issues they affect all countries policies, including China’s, and force China to make concessions. The pressure in ideology is achieved, in particular, through the media and public opinion.” [8]

Quoting from Chinese officials and scholars, this article shows how the social elites view the western media.

“At present, the proportion of positive, objective, and accurate foreign news reports on China is still relatively small.” – Cai Wu, Minister of Culture [9]

“A lot of Western media have always recognized and judged the world in accordance with their inherent values and interests, and set the reporting ‘agenda’ on this basis. Particularly in international reporting, the general audience is rarely aware of the media’s choice. Most people will follow the agenda and choice of the mainstream media to interpret the outside world. ... [Western] media, through agenda-setting, determine which events are important, what are of secondary importance, and what are unimportant, so as to create a virtual environment. Although it is not real, it will likely have a real impact on people’s notions, behavior and decision-making. ... Some Western media, when covering the Lhasa incident, gave the pictures a false caption, or put event photos from other countries and regions beside the Tibet articles, resulting in some kind of illusion, or deliberately weakening some of the captions, etc. It was to

set the agenda for the reporting on the Tibetan issue, and thus to mislead more of the media and audience. ... At present, the flow of information in international communications is featured by the 'center – edge' model, where the information flows from developed to developing countries, from the big international media to the general media, while the flow in the reverse direction rarely happens. This means that the Western media's agenda setting on China has always taken the lead, and, consequently, affected the audience's perceptions and degree of support." – Cheng Manli, Professor and Associate Dean of the School of Journalism and Communication, Peking University [10]

"The Western media claim they pursue objective reporting, but when faced with the same facts, their reporting, including their angle of observation, tailoring of the facts, and editing of the details, are permeated with their values and bias." – Yin Yungong, Director of Press and Journalism, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences [11]

"From the perspective of news research, the Western media's distorted coverage can be approximately divided into two categories: one category is due to ignorance, confusion, or lack of understanding; the other is deliberately distorting the facts. When it is to intentionally distort the facts, there must be some political purpose or even more, a profound national interest behind it. ... The biased reporting of Western media of this type by itself is not terrible. What is terrible is that in the international arena there is only one voice, only a unified voice." – Yu Guoming, Professor, School of Journalism, Renmin University of China [12]

"Although one cannot simply infer Western strategies toward China from media reports, it is undeniable that the Western world's voices of 'soft containment' or 'soft constraints' against China are on the rise." – Gao Zugui, Director of Strategic Research Center, China Institute of Contemporary International Relations [13]

On how to break up the West's media control and gain a louder voice, the scholars have also provided their views.

"In the United States, only a few of the elite can influence U.S. policy: Members of Congress, the President, the chief editors of major newspapers, and top university professors. These people have an impact on U.S. policies, while other people don't. In



other words, the social elite in Western societies establish the public opinion agenda to control the international political and the economic agenda. Some scholars have even developed a term, ‘momentum making,’ to describe the process: oftentimes the so-called ‘social problems’ do not always have an objective and real existence, but are known to the public through the media’s selection, sorting, and dissemination. For the media who are ‘creating the momentum,’ it’s not important whether an issue is real or not. What is important is how to attach a particular social significance to it, introduce it to the public, draw wide attention and discussion to it, and arrive at a society-wide ‘consensus building’ through a ‘commonly defined process.’” – Zhao Qizheng, former Director of the State Council Information Office [14]

“In order for the world to have an objective and accurate understanding of China, (we) must break the Western media’s agenda-setting, and broadcast China’s voice on a much wider platform. ... First, (we) should grasp the initiative in international public opinion, guide public opinion, and get rid of the passive position of letting people comment at will. This needs the support of national power and an awareness of the initiative to spread information. ... Second, (we) must rely on international media to conduct the reverse of the secondary transmission. Under the current situation, (we should) have the Western media relay China’s information for foreign dissemination, which should integrate with the Western media in language and expression. ... Third, track the international community for the focus of attention, and hot issues, participate in the world discourse system, and form a dominant force. ... Meanwhile, systematically tidy up and refine the ins and outs of China’s national image so as to achieve the effects accumulated over time. ... The overseas Chinese population is an important audience. Their recognition of China’s national image will also contribute to the force of external dissemination, spreading a good image of China” – Cheng Manli, Professor and Associate Dean of the School of Journalism and Communication, Peking University [15]

“If we can take advantage of the modern digital technology, our current means of communication, and citizen diplomacy, we can break through the hegemony of dominance in public opinion.” – Yu Guoming, professor, School of Journalism, Renmin University of China [16]

The government echoes the above ideas. “In order to meet the development needs of international communications, China should build an international communication system covering the entire globe. ... It has become a very pressing strategic task to build a technologically advanced modern communication system covering wide ranges and areas, form the capacity for international communications commensurate with China’s economic and social development and international status, and break the Western media monopoly.” – Wang Cheng, Director of the State Council Information Office [17]

### The Economic Growth Engine amid the Financial Crisis

A major factor in the formation of Beijing’s culture strategy is the economy. For three decades, China’s economy has registered a high annual growth rate. At the same time, the economy has serious problems including the depletion of natural resources, the pollution of the environment, and continued high unemployment. Since the onset of the global financial crisis, from the end of 2007, the manufacture and export oriented industries have been hit hard due to the shrinkage of demand for Chinese products in the international market. Although the government reacted by adopting an expansive monetary and fiscal stimulus policy, in the long run, the economy needs a new engine for growth. Because of its counter-cyclical nature and low consumption of resources, the central authority thus picked culture as the new industry to maintain economic growth.

This was evidenced by another *Outlook Weekly* article published on October 28, 2009. “Senior officials’ attention to and favor of the culture industries is first and foremost due to the many difficulties in national development during the mid-and-late industrialization phase, including the shortage of resources, ever worsening environmental pollution, the extensive mode of economic development, and so on. The international financial crisis is posing a severe test for China’s development mode. ... In the current financial crisis, China’s culture industries run against the economic downturn, with many culture sections showing a counter-cyclical phenomenon. With such a special advantage, the industry has received highlighted attention from the party, the government, and society. The central leadership pointed out, (we should) make the culture industries a new growth engine to cope with the financial crisis, introduce Chinese culture to the world, present the world with China’s

soft power, and step up research on how the Chinese culture industries can seize the opportunity to maintain a good momentum of development amid the international financial crisis.” [18]

Another article published by *Qiushi* journal, the flagship publication of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCCCP), discusses the relationship between the financial crisis and the broadcasting, film, and television industries. “In the two major crises in history, the Great Depression in the 1930s and the Asian financial crisis in the 1990s, the radio and television industries in the U.S., Japan, and Korea registered extraordinary development in response to the crisis and made unique contributions for the economies to step out of the crisis. After the 1929 crisis, the U.S. culture industries ascended against the downturn, with the performing arts, film and television industry becoming the highlights in the economic growth of the Great Depression era. The emergence of Broadway, Hollywood, Disney, Time Warner and a few culture jumbo giants at the time eventually made the U. S. the world’s culture super power. After the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Japan and South Korea adopted the “building the nation by culture” strategy. Japan rapidly developed creative culture industries with animation as the core. The scale of their culture industries rank second in the world. The size of South Korea’s culture industries expanded five fold within ten years, making it a top power in culture. The “Korean Waves” have swept the world. [19]

### Socialist Ideology as the Core Value

Last but not least, as the party leadership always stresses, the foremost element of culture is the value system the culture is advocating. In essence, it is the control the party cannot relinquish. During the 1966-1976 Great Cultural Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party successfully severed the ties between Chinese people and their roots in traditional values so as to establish and reinforce the communist ideology, a philosophy foreign to the nation of the China. More than 40 years later, the same party is apparently attempting to bring back and promote Chinese culture. However, the political U-turn does not lead to the conclusion that the party is giving up communist ideology. The fact is the Chinese culture is a mere convenient outfit that the party wears to advance its governance and ideological dominance both

domestically and internationally. That rationale has been clearly expressed in the debates about culture strategy that have shown up in official publications.

“Cultural leadership is essential for either a revolutionary party or a ruling party. ‘A theory can produce material power as soon as it is grasped by the masses.’ In fact, one of its important tasks for either the revolutionary party or the ruling party is to find people to identify with its culture. If the culture of a political party dominates the social order, and dominates the way people think, in their attitude and behavior, it will naturally assume a leading position in society’s life. Therefore, the Marxist political party shall, through building up cultural leadership, seek a cultural identity, win the legitimacy of grabbing power and ruling, and consolidate the foundation of governance. ... While leading China’s socialist revolution and development, the Chinese Communist Party emphasized: ‘Culture is both a reflection of and guidance for the political and economic struggle. Culture is indispensable in any society, as no society can be built up without culture.’ ‘We should build a high degree of material civilization and, at the same time ... build a high degree of socialist spiritual civilization.’ ‘Our party has always attached importance to ideological work. Whether this work has been well handled directly matters for the success of the socialist cause.’ All these statements have strongly promoted the development of the Chinese Communist Party’s culture leadership, and China’s socialist revolution and development. Therefore, it is vitally important for further strengthening the buildup of our leadership in culture to realize that ‘building up cultural leadership is a mission for Chinese Communist Party.’ ... At the same time, Western developed capitalist countries, taking advantage of their early entry into the industrialization and information society, engaged in a comprehensive cultural infiltration of the socialist countries. The socialist countries are faced with the severe test of how to effectively defend their cultural security, in addition to catching up economically with ‘first-move’ countries.” [20]

“The core of culture is the value system, which dominates and constrains cultural development at all times and everywhere. Adhering to a strategy dominated by a value system is not only a scientific conclusion of our party’s practical experience in leading cultural development over the long-term process of revolution and development, but an inevitable choice under the cultural diversity in our country. To develop cultural soft power, we must adhere to the socialist core value system and lead the diverse

cultural development of the advanced culture. It is also an important experience of cultural development around the world to adhere to the strategy dominated by the value system. The cultures of countries around the world, despite the differences in historic traditions, national characteristics, and cultural characteristics, have one thing in common: the pursuit of the values of the nation and the class has always been carried out and embodied through their cultural development.” [21]

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[9] *Ibid.*

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[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Ibid.

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