



# The Political Utility of Morality

*A discourse analysis of China's 'Core Socialist Values' campaign*

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## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Core Socialist Values .....	6
Chinese Political Legitimacy .....	7
Chinese Political Communications .....	10
Preliminary Conclusions .....	13
<b>METHODS.....</b>	<b>13</b>
Selection of Primary Materials .....	14
Discourse Analysis Methods.....	15
<b>ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>15</b>
How the Core Socialist Values are Defined .....	16
Governing Through Moral Norms and Justifications .....	21
Connecting Private Morality to National Goals .....	26
<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: Primary Materials.....</b>	<b>37</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Since Xi Jinping assumed leadership in 2012, the 'Core Socialist Values' (henceforth referred to as CSVs) have been heavily promoted throughout China. Backed by the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) massive propaganda apparatus, a variety of propaganda and related activities have been used to increase the presence of values in everyday life. Posters extolling the values line the streets and public areas, video advertisements for the values are played in cinemas before movie screenings,<sup>1</sup> and school textbooks have been revised to include more CSVs content.<sup>2</sup>

The CSVs are widely recognized as a crucial component of Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' narrative and strategy, but were first articulated by Hu Jintao in 2012 during the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Hu specified a total of twelve values, which were subsequently grouped into three categories – national, societal, and citizen. Encapsulated in 24 Chinese characters, the national values include: prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony; the societal values include: freedom, equality, justice, and rule of law; the citizen values include: patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship. Prior to this, references to the construction of a 'core socialist values system' were made, but without substantive explication of what these values might be.

More than a propaganda exercise, the CSVs constitute a moral code that applies both to individuals as well as to society. As Xi Jinping said, "core values are in fact individual virtues, as well as public, social and national virtues".<sup>3</sup> Beyond posters and advertisements, the Party-state has also used the CSVs to explain its decisions to prohibit a variety of 'immoral' things, from violent video games<sup>4</sup> to 'female virtue schools'.<sup>5</sup> This latest attempt to instill values and raise moral standards comes after more than a decade of not only strong economic growth, but also widespread corruption and a general perception of moral decay within society. For example, a recent survey found that 47% of Chinese people rank moral decline as one of society's top three issues.<sup>6</sup> Xi Jinping has also responded to the perceived moral crisis within the party by initiating an anti-

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<sup>1</sup> "Chinese Cinemagoers Must Watch Propaganda Clips before Films", *BBC News*, (7 July 2017), available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-40530850/> (accessed 26 May 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Gao, "New Chinese Textbooks: Now With More 'Socialist Core Values'", *The Diplomat*, (8 September 2017), available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/new-chinese-textbooks-now-with-more-socialist-core-values/> (accessed 26 May 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Speech 3a. Please refer to Appendix A for more reference details.

<sup>4</sup> Zheping Huang, "China Is Blocking the World's Hottest Video Game Because It Lacks 'Core Socialist Values'", *Quartz*, (30 October 2017), available at: <https://qz.com/1114851/playerunknowns-battlegrounds-chinas-blocking-the-worlds-hottest-video-game-because-it-lacks-core-socialist-values/> (accessed 26 May 2018).

<sup>5</sup> "China Closes School Teaching Women to Be Obedient", *BBC News*, (4 December 2017), available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-42218618/> (accessed 26 May 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Helen Gao, "The Chinese Communist Party's Guide to Moral Living", *The New York Times*, (15 November 2017), available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/15/opinion/chinese-communist-party-xi-jinping.html/> (accessed 26 May 2018).

corruption campaign and party rectification program, and these constitute centerpieces in his political program.

The push for moral standards arguably began in the 1980s. As the harsh control systems of Maoist China gave way to economic growth and increased freedoms, a variety of social issues appeared and Marxist ideology was increasingly deemphasized. The rupture from socialist systems of morality and control meant that the values and institutions regulating people's behavior were destroyed, leaving China with an ideological and moral vacuum. Thus, Link characterized China's 'core problem' as the "lack of a publicly accepted set of moral values to define proper behavior".<sup>7</sup> It was in this context that 'socialist spiritual civilization' campaigns were launched in order to re-emphasize and outline moral norms for social conduct.<sup>8</sup>

Some may simply regard the CSVs as yet another round of propaganda by the CCP, or deem the entire exercise overly paternalistic. It is, however, worth noting that China's history is peppered with morality campaigns, and state efforts to inculcate virtue and morality amongst its citizens are not new. Morality has played a central role throughout Chinese political history and features prominently in Chinese expectations and understandings of good governance. As Pye summarizes, there is a "well-established tradition [in China] that government and politics should be thought of only in terms of moralistic ideology".<sup>9</sup> Reflecting the contemporary importance of morality in politics, Kang's survey found that 90.1% of respondents agree that "the government should be responsible for advocating good moral values", and 62.7% agree that "the government should decide whether certain values can be discussed in society".<sup>10</sup>

Situating the CSVs campaign within this broader political tradition, this thesis hopes to investigate the morality-politics nexus further in contemporary political practice through the lens of the CSVs campaign. My research thus aims to address the following question: what moral narrative does the CCP's central leadership construct and present through the CSVs campaign? Further sub-questions include: i) how are the CSVs defined, ii) what purpose does the CSVs campaign serve in the domestic context, and iii) what role does the CCP, specifically the central leadership, construct for itself. As my research question reflects, I have scoped my research narrowly so that it focuses on one campaign and specifically on the 'narrative' emanating from the level of the central leadership. It thus precludes state-level variations of the campaign. At the same time, however, my research has the potential to be conceptually broad as it does not fixate on a particular relationship between morality and politics but instead leaves it open-ended.

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<sup>7</sup> Perry Link, "China's 'Core' Problem", *Daedalus* 122(2), (1993), p. 192.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Keane, "Redefining Chinese Citizenship", *Economy and Society* 30(1), (2001), pp. 1-17.

<sup>9</sup> Lucian Pye, *Asian Power and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 186.

<sup>10</sup> Xiaoguang Kang, "A Study of the Renaissance of Traditional Confucian Culture in Contemporary China", in Fenggang Yang and Joseph Tamney, eds, *Confucianism and Spiritual Traditions in Modern China and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill 2011), p. 44.

The literature review in the next section addresses the academic works on Chinese regime legitimacy, especially those representing culturalist views, and Chinese political language. In the following section, I describe my primary materials and the discourse analysis methods I used. The bulk of the thesis then focuses on my findings and analysis, which are further divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the way the CSVs are described and defined, and the basis of its appeal. The next two sections illustrate the purposes of the CSVs campaign in the domestic context. Specifically, morality is an important governance tool and contributes to the maintenance of social order and social control. Morality is further presented as a matter of national importance, which reflects the belief that the population's moral character determines national strength. Finally, in the conclusion, I review the limitations of my research as well as topics that merit further investigation, before relating my findings to the broader conceptual issues I began this paper with.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned earlier, the CSVs can be positioned within a long line of moral and civic campaigns undertaken by the CCP as well as other Chinese states. For example, Chiang Kai-shek's Republican regime implemented the New Life Movement to educate citizens on morality and discipline.<sup>11</sup> State-sponsored systems to reward virtuous conduct were also common across various dynasties in the imperial era,<sup>12</sup> although the most well-known moral campaign is probably Emperor Kangxi's promulgation of moral instructions through the 'Sacred Edict'.<sup>13</sup> The morality-politics nexus has featured prominently throughout Chinese political history and it is useful to consider the CSVs in this context, rather than regard their conception as an isolated event.

In academia, the morality-politics nexus is most extensively addressed in the field of Chinese political philosophy and especially in studies of Confucianism. My research, however, focuses on contemporary political practice. It thus relates more directly to academic scholarship on the CCP's regime legitimacy and especially to culturalist views, which adapt the relationship between morality and politics as presented in traditional Chinese philosophy to contemporary governance. Additionally, the CSVs also constitute a significant propaganda exercise undertaken by Xi Jinping and the central CCP leadership. The term 'Core Socialist Values' is a political formulation or *tifa*, and my research question focuses explicitly on the 'narrative' constructed through discursive materials. A review of academic literature on Chinese political language and discourse is thus necessary. It

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<sup>11</sup> Arif Dirlik, "The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution", *Journal of Asian Studies* 34(4), (1975), pp. 945-980.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China", *Past & Present* 104, (1984), pp. 111-152.

<sup>13</sup> Victor H. Mair, "Language and Ideology in the Written Popularizations of the Sacred Edict", in David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Judith A. Berling, eds, *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 325-359.

would serve as a baseline for my discourse analysis on the CSVs, and my research findings would ultimately relate to this set of academic literature as well.

Given the newness of the CSVs campaign, academic writing on it remains limited and thus warrants only a brief review. The remainder of this literature review will then address the scholarship on Chinese political legitimacy, with an emphasis on culturalist views, before moving on to the academic literature on Chinese political language and discourse. Through this literature review, I aim to develop a comprehensive understanding of key academic publications, debates and gaps relevant to these topics, and they will in turn serve as relevant background information for my own analysis of the CSVs campaign. Given the wealth of academic literature on both of these topics, my literature review is not meant to be exhaustive. Instead, I have included the aspects that are most relevant to my research, and hope to clarify the academic concepts and debates that my research relates to.

### **Core Socialist Values**

As of the time of writing, there is only one published article that deals specifically with the CSVs, although the CSVs are also afforded substantial analysis in two other pieces of scholarship. Adopting an economic perspective, Feng evaluates the usefulness of the CSVs for China's economic development and ability to overcome the middle-income trap.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, Gow, Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova argue that the CSVs campaign indicates Xi Jinping's emphasis on culture and ideology,<sup>15</sup> in contrast to the primacy of economic development under Hu Jintao's leadership. Drawing on Gramscian concepts of hegemony, common sense, and the integral state, Gow argues that the CSVs campaign is a consensus-building exercise used to reinforce state hegemony, and is a centerpiece of the Party-state's project to transform the country's 'superstructure'.<sup>16</sup> Regarding the CSVs as 'keywords' that provide clues to Xi Jinping's ideology, Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova conclude that they signal the CCP's attempt to appeal on an emotional level and willingness to utilize ideas from a variety of sources.<sup>17</sup>

In the field of international relations, the CSVs also feature occasionally in discussions of China's cultural soft power. For instance, Chen suggests that the CSVs demonstrate potential for universal appeal, although the simultaneous narratives of Chinese exceptionalism and particularity

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<sup>14</sup> Michael X. Y. Feng, "The 'Chinese Dream' Deconstructed: Values and Institutions", *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 20, (2015), pp. 163-183.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Gow, "The Core Socialist Values of the Chinese Dream: Towards a Chinese Integral State", *Critical Asian Studies* 49(1), (2017), pp. 92-116; Kerry Brown and Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova, "Ideology in the Era of Xi Jinping", *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, (2018), pp. 1-17.

<sup>16</sup> Gow, "The Core Socialist Values of the Chinese Dream".

<sup>17</sup> Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova, "Ideology in the Era of Xi Jinping".

complicate this.<sup>18</sup> The theme of soft power does prove to be a relatively significant one in the CSVs discourse. However, because my research question focuses on the moral narrative in the *domestic* context, academic scholarship on China's soft power is not particularly relevant to my research.

### Chinese Political Legitimacy

In the field of Chinese political legitimacy, the general consensus is that the CCP regime enjoys high levels of support and legitimacy. Despite repeated projections of legitimacy crises, the CCP's one-party rule remains strong, and empirical evidence produced over the past two decades indicate high levels of regime support.<sup>19</sup> The resiliency and apparent popularity of the CCP regime has in turn directed academic debate away from the amount of legitimacy the regime enjoys and towards the sources of Chinese political legitimacy instead.<sup>20</sup>

The conventional wisdom is that, in place of the Party-state's diminished claim to legitimacy on the basis of ideology, the CCP in the post-Mao era relies on a combination of economic prosperity, nationalism, and social stability to sustain its legitimacy.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, most scholars who adopt this view suggest that the political legitimacy of the CCP remains fragile, as economic downturns are inevitable, democratic structures and procedures are weak, and the political regime is not morally justifiable.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the Party-state may be able to extend its rule, but will not be able to renew its political legitimacy indefinitely.<sup>23</sup>

However, the failed predictions regarding China's political future and continued support for the CCP regime have given rise to a newly emerging discussion regarding Chinese exceptionalism and the Chinese model.<sup>24</sup> Challenging the conventional wisdom regarding Chinese political legitimacy, some scholars propose explanations for the CCP's ability to generate, renew and sustain legitimacy over the long run. These arguments can be broadly classified as either culturalist or institutionalist.<sup>25</sup> Briefly, institutionalist arguments suggest that the regime continually innovates and

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<sup>18</sup> Qi Chen, "China's Soft Power Policies and Strategies: The Cultural Activist State", *Journal of Law, Social Justice and Global Development* 1, (2016), p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Tianjian Shi, "Cultural Values and Political Trust: A Comparison of the People's Republic of China and Taiwan", *Comparative Politics* 33(4), (2001), pp. 401-419; Jie Chen, *Popular Political Support in Urban China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Wenfang Tang and Nicholas F. Martini, "A Chinese Popularity Function: Sources of Government Support", *Political Research Quarterly* 67(1), (2014), pp. 16-25.

<sup>20</sup> Yun-Han Chu, "Sources of Regime Legitimacy and the Debate Over the Chinese Model", *China Review* 13(1), (2013), p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Weatherley, *Politics in China Since 1949: Legitimizing Authoritarian Rule* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Zhengxu Wang, "With the Rise of China, What's New for Comparative Politics?", *Chinese Political Science Review* 1(3), (2016), p. 516.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance, Wei Pan, "Western System versus Chinese System", *University of Nottingham Contemporary China Centre Briefing Series* 61, (2010).

<sup>25</sup> Chu, "Sources of Regime Legitimacy", p. 5.

adapts political institutions and processes, and is consequently able to satisfy and manage its people's demands.<sup>26</sup>

Proponents of the culturalist view, on the other hand, point towards China's unique cultural heritage and unanimously propose explanations that draw from China's traditional philosophies (especially Confucianism). In doing so, they implicitly or explicitly reject the wholesale application of western concepts of political legitimacy to China. Wang, for example, reiterates that political legitimacy is an alien concept to China, and applauds culturalist attempts to uncover indigenous concepts that are more applicable to Chinese politics and governance.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Guo explains the repeated failures of forecasting China's political future with western scholars' inability to comprehend legitimation in the context of Chinese political history.<sup>28</sup>

Utilizing concepts from traditional Chinese philosophies instead, culturalists point towards historical continuities in the understanding of political legitimacy and good governance from imperial times to today. For instance, Guo proposes a traditional model of legitimation that combines original and utilitarian justifications, such as benefiting the people (*limin*), rule by virtue (*renzhi*) and popular consent (*minben*).<sup>29</sup> Reflecting similar ideas, Tong argues that Chinese political legitimacy is based on a historically rooted moral bond between state and society.<sup>30</sup> Apart from fulfilling its moral responsibilities, the Chinese state also claims legitimacy on the basis of its ideological and moral authority, and enhancing the glory of the Chinese civilization.<sup>31</sup> Referring to Chinese political culture more generally, Fairbrother suggests that the institution of paternalism, which has its primary basis in classical Confucian contexts, has influenced expectations and understandings of good governance throughout Chinese history.<sup>32</sup> Adhering to these cultural rules, the CCP in turn adopt a paternalistic character by being moral exemplars and by demonstrating concern for people's spiritual and material wellbeing.

Reflecting the prominence of morality in traditional Chinese philosophies, the systems of legitimation proposed by the aforementioned scholars similarly draw attention to the moral character and responsibilities of the Chinese state. My investigation into the importance and function of

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<sup>26</sup> Gunter Schubert, "One-Party Rule and the Question of Legitimacy in Contemporary China: Preliminary Thoughts on Setting Up a New Research Agenda", *Journal of Contemporary China* 17(54), (2008), pp. 191-204; Andrew Nathan, "Authoritarian Resilience," *Journal of Democracy* 14(1), (2003), pp. 6-16.

<sup>27</sup> Wang, "With the Rise of China", p. 515.

<sup>28</sup> Baogang Guo, "Political Legitimacy and China's Transition", *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 8(1-2), (2003), p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Yanqi Tong, "Morality, Benevolence, and Responsibility: Regime Legitimacy in China from Past to the Present", *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 16(2), (2011), pp. 141-159.

<sup>31</sup> Vivienne Shue, "Legitimacy Crisis in China?", in Peter Hays Gries and Stanley Rosen, eds, *State and Society in 21st Century China* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 24-49.

<sup>32</sup> Gregory P. Fairbrother, "The Chinese Paternalistic State and Moral Education", in Kerry J. Kennedy, Gregory P. Fairbrother and Zhao Zhenzhou, eds, *Citizenship Education in China: Preparing Citizens for the "Chinese Century"* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), pp. 11-26.



morality as expressed through the CSVs campaign thus relates directly to culturalist views on political legitimacy in China. Moreover, according to ideas in traditional Chinese philosophies, the state is morally responsible for both the material and spiritual livelihood of its people.<sup>33</sup> With the exception of Fairbrother, who analyzed moral education textbooks to evince the state's concern for people's spiritual livelihoods, other scholars tend to focus primarily on the state's responsibility for the material welfare of its people.<sup>34</sup> Regarding the CSVs campaign as a form of moral education, this research addresses this imbalance in the academic literature and focuses on the state's concern for the moral wellbeing of its people, which is a feature that remains insufficiently addressed in the literature.

Findings from empirical studies and public opinion polls lend further support to culturalist claims that China's political and governance systems are based on indigenous, non-Western philosophies.<sup>35</sup> Asian Barometer Survey results, for example, show that traditional Chinese beliefs play a key role in influencing overall regime legitimacy.<sup>36</sup> Most Chinese intellectuals (including party intellectuals and government officials), however, resist such culturalist arguments, and prefer to apply western concepts and theories of political legitimacy to China instead.<sup>37</sup> This highlights an interesting cleavage in the literature, which this research paper hopes to address by comparing the contrasting views with the claims reflected in official discourse produced by the state.

Furthermore, in contrast to culturalists' tendencies towards interpretive arguments and explanations,<sup>38</sup> this research avoids applying a predetermined interpretive framework to the analysis of the CSVs campaign. This minimizes the risk of reading culturalist claims into the discourse where there are none, and leaves open the possibility of understanding the morality-politics nexus in other ways. The latter point is particularly salient as the relationship between morality and politics also surfaces prominently in discrete works that relate to different academic discourses, beyond the debate on Chinese regime legitimacy. Thornton, for example, illustrates how central authorities construct and impose moral agendas in order to regulate local political life and consolidate state

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> See for instance, Elizabeth J. Perry, "Chinese Conceptions of "Rights": From Mencius to Mao—and now", *Perspectives on Politics* 6(1), (2008), pp. 37-50; Guo, "Political Legitimacy and China's Transition"; Dingxin Zhao, "The Mandate of Heaven and Performance Legitimation in Historical and Contemporary China", *American Behavioral Scientist* 53(3), (2009), pp. 416-433.

<sup>35</sup> Yun-han Chu and Yu-tzung Chang, "Culture Shift and Regime Legitimacy: Comparing Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong", Shiping Hua and Andrew J. Nathan, eds, *Chinese Political Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), pp. 320-347; Tianjian Shi and Jie Lu, "The Shadow of Confucianism", *Journal of Democracy* 21(4), (2010), pp.123-130; Doh Chull Shin, "Confucianism as a Government of Paternalistic Meritocracy", in *Confucianism and Democratization in East Asia* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 106-140.

<sup>36</sup> Chu, "Sources of Regime Legitimacy".

<sup>37</sup> Jinghan Zeng, "The Debate on Regime Legitimacy in China: Bridging the Wide Gulf Between Western and Chinese Scholarship", *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(88), (2014), pp. 612-635.

<sup>38</sup> See for instance, Guo, "Political Legitimacy and China's Transition", as well as Shue, "Legitimacy Crisis in China?".

power.<sup>39</sup> Analyses of moral education in China also highlight the historic conflation of ideology, politics and morality,<sup>40</sup> although recent trends suggest that moral education is becoming increasingly depoliticized.<sup>41</sup> These academic works similarly present the Chinese state as a moral agent, and offer arguments that are potentially relevant to the analysis of morality in the CSVs discourse.

### Chinese Political Communications

In the wake of Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening up policies, the landscape of Chinese political communications has changed significantly over the past few decades. These changes are important because they relate directly to the effectiveness of the Chinese government's 'thought work' (*sixiang gongzuo*), which is defined as the struggle to control information flows and structure the "symbolic environment" from which people derive their worldviews and values.<sup>42</sup> There are several academic debates in this field, but I will focus primarily on the academic scholarship regarding Chinese political language and the role of official discourse in this literature review. These issues are particularly relevant to my own research because the term 'Core Socialist Values' is a *tifa*, which is an important feature of Chinese political language, and because of my upcoming analysis of official discourse materials.

The importance of language in Chinese politics is widely recognized. The fixation with politically correct forms of language was evident during imperial times and persisted through Mao's era to today.<sup>43</sup> Schoenhals was among the first to draw attention to the formalized nature of Chinese political language, and in particular, the rigidity of the language in terms of form rather than content.<sup>44</sup> The resulting impoverishment of language reflects the extent of the CCP's discursive control,<sup>45</sup> and produces monotonous political discourses consisting of carefully worded texts that cross-reference each other.<sup>46</sup> *Tifas* or political formulations, in particular, are the epitome of such formalization and highlight the care with which words are chosen. Characterized by their fixed forms and political correctness, *tifas* have been a constant and important feature of Chinese political life.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Patricia M. Thornton, *Disciplining the State: Virtue, Violence and State-Making in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> Li et al., "Deyu as Moral Education in Modern China: Ideological Functions and Transformations", *Journal of Moral Education* 33(4), (2004), pp. 449-464.

<sup>41</sup> Wing On Lee and Chi Hang Ho, "Ideopolitical Shifts and Changes in Moral Education Policy in China", *Journal of Moral Education* 34(4), (2005), pp. 413-431.

<sup>42</sup> David C. Lynch, *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and 'Thought Work' in Reformed China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> John Delury, "'Harmonious' in China", *Policy Review* 148, (2008), pp. 35-44; Joseph J. Alvaro, "Political Discourse in China's English Language Press", *World Englishes* 32(2), (2013), pp. 147-168.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things With Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Institute of East Asian Studies, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Alvaro, "Political Discourse in China's English Language Press".

<sup>47</sup> Schoenhals, *Doing Things With Words in Chinese Politics*; Falk Hartig, "Political Slogans as Instruments of International Government Communication – The Case of China", *The Journal of International*

Given its formalized and scripted nature, Chinese political language transmits political signals very effectively. As Delury writes, “because of the care with which the CCP scripts itself, changes in terminology signify shifts in power or policy with greater predictability than is the case in more anarchic linguistic environments”.<sup>48</sup> *Tifas*, especially, serve as important political signposts; they are crafted and employed deliberately, and even subtle changes could indicate shifts in prevailing politics and policies.<sup>49</sup> As important tools in China’s governing process, *tifas* also help to frame policies and issues of Chinese governance,<sup>50</sup> and are used to direct the nation in particular ways.<sup>51</sup>

Beyond political signposting, the formalized nature of Chinese political language also represents an exercise of political power.<sup>52</sup> Through formalized language, the state regulates what is said and written, and makes the “language of the state the sole legitimate medium of political expression”.<sup>53</sup> Those who insist on using inappropriate or politically incorrect formulations may not be given the opportunity to voice themselves, and may be subjected to the coercive powers of the state instead.<sup>54</sup> More powerfully, the impoverishment of language can translate into the impoverishment of thought.<sup>55</sup> Formalized language contains “intrinsic power [because] ... they cut off alternative ways of thinking and limit the conceptual horizons of the people who adopt them”.<sup>56</sup> Language thus has the power to remold thought, perpetuate thoughtlessness, and exert ideological and social control. This aspect of Chinese political language was especially salient during the Cultural Revolution, which was the height of ideological fervor and language formalization, and the wealth of literature on political language during this period is thus unsurprising.<sup>57</sup>

Since the Cultural Revolution and Schoenhals’ seminal work in 1992, Chinese political language has evolved but the nature of its evolution continues to be a matter of debate. Schoenhals himself predicted a decline in the use of formalized language.<sup>58</sup> Some scholars have confirmed this

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*Communication* 24(1), (2018), pp. 115-137; Perry Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Delury, “‘Harmonious’ in China”, p. 36.

<sup>49</sup> Gang Qian, *Watchwords: Reading China Through its Political Vocabulary*, translated by David Bandurski, (2012), available at: [http://chinamediaproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/WATCHWORDS\\_Reading-China-Through-its-Party-Vocabulary.pdf](http://chinamediaproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/WATCHWORDS_Reading-China-Through-its-Party-Vocabulary.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> Susan Trevaskes, “A Law Unto Itself: Chinese Communist Party Leadership and Yifa Zhiguo in the Xi Era”, *Modern China* 44(4), (2018), pp. 1-27.

<sup>51</sup> Alvaro, “Political Discourse in China’s English Language Press”.

<sup>52</sup> Schoenhals, *Doing Things With Words in Chinese Politics*.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*; Alvaro, “Political Discourse in China’s English Language Press”.

<sup>55</sup> Xing Lu, “An Ideological/Cultural Analysis of Political Slogans in Communist China,” *Discourse & Society* 10(4), (1999), pp. 487-508.

<sup>56</sup> Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese*, p. 275.

<sup>57</sup> See for instance, Xing Lu, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), as well as Fengyuan Ji, *Linguistic Engineering: Language and Politics in Mao’s China* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

<sup>58</sup> Schoenhals, *Doing Things With Words in Chinese Politics*, p. 29.

prediction, and suggest that contemporary citizens are repulsed by ossified political language.<sup>59</sup> An expanded political vocabulary consequently provides more political actors with access to platforms of expression, as well as increased freedoms to act.<sup>60</sup> Some, however, point to the continued importance of *tifas* and watchwords,<sup>61</sup> as well as the level of precision and nuance that goes into their formulation.<sup>62</sup> They also highlight the CCP's ability to adapt its language to more politically sophisticated audiences<sup>63</sup> and utilize popular culture to increase the appeal of its *tifas* and ideology.<sup>64</sup>

Accompanying the evolution of Chinese political language, the CCP's propaganda and political communications system has also undergone significant changes since the era of Mao. The academic debate regarding the level of control that the CCP retains over information flows remains inconclusive. Some argue that the CCP's control has weakened due to processes such as the commercialization of media, reducing the importance of the role of propaganda in contemporary Chinese politics.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, others suggest that the CCP has expertly adapted to new structures and systems, and remains firmly in control.<sup>66</sup> For example, Zhang argues that the Party-state has successfully constructed hegemony through coercive and co-optative methods, thus becoming "one of the world's most sophisticated in the management of the media".<sup>67</sup>

It is in turn necessary to reconsider the role and function of official discourse within the context of this broader debate. The arguments put forth by scholars on either side of the debate center primarily on the state's management and control of newer forms of media. Thus, despite the spectrum of views on the effectiveness of the overall propaganda system, the general consensus is that the Party-state continues to retain strong control of official discourse and its transmission through the state's traditional communication apparatus. Despite changing ownership and profit incentives, the main forms of Chinese media remain hyper-managed by the state.<sup>68</sup> For example, newspaper editorials in main newspapers such as Xinhua News and People's Daily are subject to extreme vetting. The CCP's Propaganda Department sometimes drafts the editorials first, as well as

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<sup>59</sup> Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova, "Ideology in the Era of Xi Jinping".

<sup>60</sup> Peter Hays Gries and Stanley Rosen, "Introduction: Popular Protest and State Legitimation in 21<sup>st</sup> Century China", in Peter Hays Gries and Stanley Rosen, eds, *State and Society in 21st Century China* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-23.

<sup>61</sup> Qian, "Watchwords: Reading China Through its Political Vocabulary".

<sup>62</sup> Alvaro, "Political Discourse in China's English Language Press"; Trevaskes, "A Law Unto Itself".

<sup>63</sup> Alvaro, "Political Discourse in China's English Language Press".

<sup>64</sup> Marie-Anne Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> Lynch, *After the Propaganda State*; Jonathan Hassid, "Controlling the Chinese Media: An Uncertain Business", *Asian Survey* 48(3), (2008), pp. 414-430.

<sup>66</sup> Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship*; Anne-Marie Brady and Wang Juntao, "China's Strengthened New Order and The Role of Propaganda", *Journal of Contemporary China* 18(62), (2009): 767-788.

<sup>67</sup> Xiaoling Zhang, *The Transformation of Political Communication in China: From Propaganda to Hegemony* (Hackensack, NJ: World Scientific, 2011), p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> Brady and Wang, "China's Strengthened New Order".

dictates the exact wordings or formulations that journalists are allowed to use.<sup>69</sup> Collectively, these official and semi-official texts provide official rationales, positions and guidelines on government policies, and attain canonical status within public political discourse.<sup>70</sup> Belonging to a specific subset of political discourse and communications, these texts are characterized by a distinctly 'conservative mode of discursive reproduction', and represent the CCP's attempts at maintaining stability and continuity.<sup>71</sup>

## Preliminary Conclusions

In this literature review, I have outlined the main academic debates surrounding China's regime legitimacy and Chinese political communications, as well as identified ways in which my research relates to and contributes to the existing literature. Specifically, my focus on morality in the CSVs campaign could potentially release evidence to support or reject culturalist claims regarding Chinese political legitimacy, while my discourse analysis of contemporary *tifas* and Chinese political language provides a timely update to the existing literature.

Proponents of the culturalist view seek ultimately to complicate conventional understandings of the authoritarian label in China by employing native political concepts and foregrounding the responsive features of moral politics in China.<sup>72</sup> In a similar vein, I hope to further nuance understandings of the authoritarian state and its propaganda practices by regarding the CSVs campaign as more than a simple propaganda exercise. In particular, my research suggests that the CSVs campaign can be more meaningfully understood in terms of China's indigenous political frameworks and beliefs about governance.

## METHODS

This research paper seeks specifically to uncover the moral narrative that the CCP's central leadership has constructed through the CSVs campaign. Given the *narrative* focus, I decided to address the question by conducting a discourse analysis of relevant textual materials as opposed to analyzing relevant policy moves. Additionally, in order to obtain a comprehensive view of the narrative that the central leadership aims to construct, I selected textual materials from various official and semi-official sources, and excluded propaganda materials and articles produced at lower political levels. The selected materials include policy documents, speeches by top CCP leaders, and articles from *People's Daily* and *Seeking Truth (Qiushi)*. These can be described as 'closed texts'

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<sup>69</sup> David Shambaugh, "China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy", *The China Journal* 57, (2007), p. 53.

<sup>70</sup> Qing Cao, "Introduction: Legitimation, Resistance and Discursive Struggles in Contemporary China", in Qing Cao, Hailong Tian and Paul Chilton, eds, *Discourse, Politics and Media in Contemporary China* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2014), p. 11.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Pan, "Western System versus Chinese System".

that are produced within the discursive confines of official discourse, and are characterized by what Cao terms the ‘conservative mode of discourse reproduction’.<sup>73</sup> A total of 94 articles and speeches produced between 2012 and 2017 were identified, and a complete list of these materials can be found in Appendix A.

### **Selection of Primary Materials**

Textual materials from official sources include Hu Jintao’s report at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, which is when the CSVs were first coined, and multiple speeches by Xi Jinping, including his report at the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2017 as well as speeches published in the chapter “Culturally Advanced China” from *The Governance of China* (English edition). This chapter was chosen given the categorization of the CSVs under the cultural sphere in both the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Reports. Since *The Governance of China* is a government publication, these speeches were especially useful sources of official translations for standard formulations and descriptions used throughout the CSVs discourse. Beyond speeches, the two policy documents released by the CCP General Office concerning the CSVs were also identified for analysis.

To supplement these official materials, I also selected articles from *Seeking Truth* and *People’s Daily* for analysis. *Seeking Truth* is the party’s authoritative ideological journal, while *People’s Daily* is widely regarded as a mouthpiece for the CCP.<sup>74</sup> To identify only the most relevant articles, I selected those that included the term ‘Core Socialist Values’ in its title. The search for *Seeking Truth* articles was easily conducted through the online archives. *People’s Daily* articles were similarly identified through the *Seeking Truth* website archives. This indirect access is unlikely to affect the primary materials significantly. In fact, the appearance of these articles on the *Seeking Truth* website indicates an additional layer of political endorsement. This selection process yielded a total of eight *Seeking Truth* articles and 75 *People’s Daily* articles.

It is also important to recognize that there is a hierarchy of sorts amongst these textual materials. Policy documents and speeches by top CCP leaders possess clear authority and exert strong influences and direction on the entire discourse, whereas *Seeking Truth* and *People’s Daily* articles are typically written by party intellectuals or lower level bureaucrats in response to central leadership directives to signal their obeisance and loyalty. The first policy document on the CSVs released at the end of 2013 served as a strong signal for the political importance of the CSVs. It is thus unsurprising that 2014 was by far the most prolific year, as a majority of selected *Seeking Truth* and *People’s Daily* articles were published that year. Responding to official speeches and documents, *Seeking Truth* and *People’s Daily* articles tend to imitate the language, echo similar messages and quote extensively from official texts. However, these articles also sometimes offer

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<sup>73</sup> Cao, "Introduction", p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> Shambaugh, "China's Propaganda System", p. 53.

more elaborate explanations as well as provide concrete examples of campaign efforts at grassroots levels. An awareness of this hierarchy in turn contributes to a better understanding of how the state-sponsored CSVs discourse is shaped.

### **Discourse Analysis Methods**

Discourse analysis denotes a theoretical and methodological approach to language and language use. Born out of the field of linguistics, discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach that aims to uncover implicit or hidden ideologies in discourses, and examine how actors use language to reproduce power relations.<sup>75</sup> Applying discourse analysis methods to the selected primary materials, I began my analysis by testing a preliminary set of coding categories on the speeches and policy documents. Given their ‘canonical’ status within the CSVs discourse, these materials were likely to contain the main themes, narrative strands and standard formulations that run consistently throughout the entire discourse. They thus served as a suitable sample of textual materials for the testing and refinement of my coding categories.

Having identified the main themes, I conducted a survey of relevant secondary literature in order to refine my coding categories further. In the second and final round of discourse analysis, all selected materials were coded according to the following questions:

1. How are the CSVs defined and what is the basis of its appeal?
2. What is the relationship between the CSVs and traditional Chinese culture?
3. How do the CSVs relate to social governance and the socialist rule of law?
4. Why are the CSVs important for the nation?
5. How is the party represented?

### **ANALYSIS<sup>76</sup>**

Across the different sources and over the five-year period, language and messages remained fairly consistent. While the repeated use of standard formulations and descriptions produced a rather monotonous discourse, it also made it easier to identify key themes within the discourse. In the subsequent sections, when referring to standard formulations or messages that appear in multiple places, I provide examples of specific articles or speeches where they can be found but this list is not exhaustive.

The following analysis sections are organized thematically. The first section focuses on how the CSVs are defined and described throughout the discourse. The CSVs are vaguely and imprecisely defined, thus enabling the term ‘Core Socialist Values’ to be used flexibly to refer to a

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis”, in Teun A. van Dijk, eds, *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 258-284; Teun A. van Dijk, “What is Political Discourse Analysis”, *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* 11(1), (1997), pp. 11-52.

<sup>76</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

moral code bereft of substantive rules. Furthermore, the appeal of the values stems from its relationship to traditional culture and its widespread acceptance within society. Revolving around the theme of social order and control, the second section discusses the use of the CSVs to regulate behavior, and explains how morality is used in combination with the legal system to govern society. Finally, in the last section, I discuss the prominence of national interests in the CSVs discourse, and suggest that the CCP's commitment to cultivating moral citizens bears strong historical continuities.

### **How the Core Socialist Values are Defined**

For most of China's history, morality derived its content from one of two main sources – Confucian orthodoxy and Marxism. According to Confucian orthodoxy, Heaven was the source of moral virtues.<sup>77</sup> Mediating between the heavenly and earthly realm, emperors functioned as moral authorities on earth and were tasked with ruling the human world in accordance with heavenly-ordained moral rules.<sup>78</sup> Subsequently, as China came under communist rule, the CCP rejected Confucian ideals and values and imbued the content of morality with socialist ideology and proletarian consciousness instead.<sup>79</sup> Since economic liberalization began in the 1980s, however, the retreat of Communist ideology produced a 'morality-vacuum' and talk of China's moral crisis emerged.<sup>80</sup> I thus begin my analysis by focusing on how the CSVs are defined and the origin of these values.

According to the discourse, the CSVs "represent the nature of socialism, carry forward the fine traditional Chinese culture, draw on the best of world civilization and reflect the spirit of the times".<sup>81</sup> This standard formulation was first presented in the first policy document on the CSVs, and is used consistently throughout the discourse. Reaffirming observations that the CSVs seem like a "hotch-potch"<sup>82</sup> of ideas, this all-encompassing description indicates the variety of sources that the CSVs are drawn from. In contrast to the clearly defined sources of morality in the past, the CSVs do not seem to belong to a single overarching narrative or ideology and thus lack internal coherence.<sup>83</sup> The variety of sources presented does, however, concretize the shift away from socialist ideology, which is no longer presented as the sole foundation of morality.

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<sup>77</sup> Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 147.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>79</sup> Lu, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, p. 47.

<sup>80</sup> Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese*.

<sup>81</sup> This is the official English translation presented in Speech 3a. In Chinese, the formulation reads "体现了社会主义本质要求、继承了中华优秀传统文化、吸收了世界文明有益成果、体现了时代精神" (e.g. Speech 3, RMRB 2017-6, QS2).

<sup>82</sup> "Confucius Says, Xi Does", *The Economist*, (25 July 2015), available at: <https://www.economist.com/news/china/21659753-communist-party-turns-ancient-philosophy-support-confucius-says-xi-does> (accessed 26 May 2018).

<sup>83</sup> Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova, "Ideology in the Era of Xi Jinping".



While it may be difficult to make sense of the CSVs as a collective whole, the incoherence of the values may in fact be a way to accommodate the variety of values and opinions in Chinese society. As some Chinese intellectuals recommend, the CCP should present the CSVs as a consolidated values framework that allows Marxist ideology, which continues to assume a leading role, to coexist with other values.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, the flexibility of political slogans is a source of political utility<sup>85</sup> – flexible slogans can be politically manipulated or interpreted in numerous ways, and appeal to various audiences for different reasons.<sup>86</sup> Chen, for example, sees the CSVs' resonance with western democratic values as an indication of China's current lack of ambition to challenge the hegemonic ideologies of Western liberal democratic systems.<sup>87</sup>

As a formulaic description, all four components are rhetorically included whenever articles refer to the basis of the CSVs. However, they are not equally represented in the discourse – traditional culture, in particular, is paid the greatest amount of attention. Traditional culture is repeatedly described as a source of “rich nourishment”<sup>88</sup> (*fengfu yingyang*), and an important foundation upon which the CSVs are built. The CSVs in turn represent the “inheritance”<sup>89</sup> (*chuancheng*) and “upgrading”<sup>90</sup> (*shenghua*) of traditional culture. Consequently, calls for the promotion of CSVs and traditional culture are often made simultaneously, and popularizing traditional culture is frequently advocated as one of the ways to foster the CSVs. The other three components of the standard formulation in turn feature less prominently. The discourse is peppered with largely cursory assertions that socialist ideology continues to play a guiding role. There is, however, no further elaboration on the relationship between the CSVs and the “spirit of the times” or “world civilization” beyond their inclusion in the standard formulation.

The prominence of traditional culture in the CSVs discourse further relates to the CCP's broader narrative of historical depth and cultural continuity. The CCP's positive representations of traditional culture and China's unbroken 5000-year history have drawn significant scholarly attention in recent years, and scholars argue that the CCP has reinvented history and traditional culture to achieve various political objectives.<sup>91</sup> In particular, the CCP references traditional culture and its transmission over the course of several thousand years to allude to China's cultural depth and

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<sup>84</sup> Zeng, “The Debate on Regime Legitimacy in China”.

<sup>85</sup> Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics*, p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Josef G. Mahoney, “Interpreting the Chinese Dream: An Exercise of Political Hermeneutics”, *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 19, pp. 15-34.

<sup>87</sup> Chen, “China's Soft Power Policies”, p. 7.

<sup>88</sup> E.g. QS7, RMRB 2015-11, RMRB 2016-1.

<sup>89</sup> E.g. QS1, RMRB 2014-1, RMRB 2014-5.

<sup>90</sup> E.g. QS6, Speech 3, RMRB 2014-5.

<sup>91</sup> See for instance, Jyrki Kallio, *Tradition in Chinese Politics* (Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2011); Christopher A. Ford, “The Party and the Sage: Communist China's Use of Quasi-Confucian Rationalizations for One-Party Dictatorship and Imperial Ambition”, *Journal of Contemporary China* 24(96), (2015), pp. 1032-1047.

strength.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, the prominence of traditional culture in the CSVs discourse creates a sense of cultural support, and endows the CSVs with a sense of “continuity”<sup>93</sup> (*lianxu xing*) and “stability”<sup>94</sup> (*wending xing*). Furthermore, of the four components in the standard formulation, traditional culture is the only one that is undeniably indigenous. It is thus also used to distinguish the CSVs from Western values, and support their suitability for China.<sup>95</sup>

Relating more specifically to virtues and morals, China’s glorious past is also praised for its high moral standards and exemplary moral education.<sup>96</sup> Highlighting the ethical dimensions of traditional culture prominently, traditional values such as benevolence and harmony are repeatedly referenced, either to point to parallels between traditional values and the CSVs,<sup>97</sup> or to support the importance of inculcating values and morality.<sup>98</sup> It is arguably unsurprising that the CCP chooses to use imperial times instead of Maoist China as a frame of reference for present-day China to emulate in terms of moral standards. Rather than foreground the socialist narrative and the morally charged language that characterized the Cultural Revolution, the Party-state has chosen to point towards the more popular and less controversial narrative of traditional culture instead. Given the CCP’s rejection of ‘western values’, traditional culture indeed appears to be the most palatable source of morality that the CCP can appeal to.

It is, however, also worth noting that there are hints of ambivalence towards traditional culture in the discourse. Specifically, the CSVs are not to be regarded as a complete copy of traditional culture, and traditional culture should not be blindly worshipped.<sup>99</sup> Traditional Chinese ethics ought to be regarded with a “critical approach”<sup>100</sup> and undergo “creative transformation”.<sup>101</sup> This ambivalence can be detected not only in the CSVs discourse but generally across official party rhetoric as well.<sup>102</sup> It indicates the party’s reluctance to identify entirely with traditional culture, and can be explained by the party’s historic antagonism towards traditional culture and continued insistence on its socialist identity.

The notion of ‘consensus’ is also an important rhetoric feature or strategy in the CSVs discourse, and is created in part by associating the CSVs with traditional culture. As the discourse suggests, traditional culture has strong influences in Chinese society and is an important component

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<sup>92</sup> Huijie Cher, “Appealing to Tradition: How Xi Jinping Represents Traditional Culture and Why”, *Shilin* 8(2), (2018), pp. 49-60.

<sup>93</sup> Speech 3.

<sup>94</sup> E.g. Speech 3, RMRB 2017-5.

<sup>95</sup> E.g. Speech 3, QS7

<sup>96</sup> QS2.

<sup>97</sup> RMRB 2014-4.

<sup>98</sup> RMRB 2016-3.

<sup>99</sup> E.g. QS6, QS2, RMRB 2015-11.

<sup>100</sup> Speech 8.

<sup>101</sup> Speech 7.

<sup>102</sup> Cher, “Appealing to Tradition”.

of societal consensus. It has “deep roots in the Chinese people’s mentality, influencing their way of thinking and behavior unconsciously”.<sup>103</sup> It is thus only with the nourishment of traditional culture, the spiritual and cultural foundation of Chinese people,<sup>104</sup> that the CSVs are endowed with “vitality”<sup>105</sup> (*shengming li*) and “influence”<sup>106</sup> (*yingxiang li*). The implication is that the basis of the CSVs’ appeal stems from traditional culture. Consequently, the state’s promotion of the CSVs is essentially an exercise to promote values that are already widely regarded as normatively correct, and is thus more likely to be supported by Chinese citizens.<sup>107</sup>

Beyond traditional culture, the CSVs are also described as the product of consultations with a variety of actors. As Xi Jinping says, in deciding what core values are suitable, “we should eventually agree upon this after sorting out opinions and understandings from all walks of life”.<sup>108</sup> The discourse thus presents the CSVs as the “consolidation of consensus within society and the party”,<sup>109</sup> and as the “greatest common denominator”<sup>110</sup> (*zui da gong yue shu*) of China’s diverse Chinese population. These representations in turn support Gow’s interpretation of the CSVs campaign as a consensus-building exercise.<sup>111</sup> As a rhetorical strategy, an artificially and discursively constructed consensus can induce people to adopt these ‘mainstream’ views. A ‘consensus’ or ‘mainstream view’ that did not in fact exist may thus be manufactured and turned into reality through this discursive process.<sup>112</sup>

Given that the source of the CSVs lies outside of the party, the CCP’s claim to moral authority lies in its ability to distill and articulate these values. This claim is in fact explicitly made – “the CSVs existed long before this, but it was the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress that clearly articulated them”.<sup>113</sup> This implicitly endows the party with authority, as the Chinese state has the final say on what constitutes true belief and correct moral behavior, and it is the party’s official pronouncement that elevates these twelve specific values above others to the status of core values.

The ambiguous definitions and flexible usage of the CSVs also add to the CCP’s moral authority in subtler ways. With regards to the ambiguity of the CSVs, even though there are twelve CSVs in total, they are rarely discussed or referred to on an individual basis. With the exception of

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<sup>103</sup> Translation from Speech 3a. In Chinese, the formulation reads: “植根在中国人内心，潜移默化影响着中国人的思想方式和行为方式” (e.g. QS2, RMRB 2014-4, RMRB 2016-3).

<sup>104</sup> E.g. PD1, Speech 3.

<sup>105</sup> E.g. RMRB 2014-15, QS7, RMRB 2014-35.

<sup>106</sup> E.g. QS7, RMRB 2014-35, RMRB 2016-3.

<sup>107</sup> Gow, “The Core Socialist Values of the Chinese Dream”.

<sup>108</sup> Speech 3a.

<sup>109</sup> PD1 and QS5. In Chinese, it reads “凝聚全党全社会价值共识”.

<sup>110</sup> E.g. RMRB 2014-44, QS8, RMRB 2014-5.

<sup>111</sup> Gow, “The Core Socialist Values of the Chinese Dream”.

<sup>112</sup> Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese*, p. 307.

<sup>113</sup> QS5. In Chinese, it reads “社会主义核心价值观早就存在，但明确提出社会主义核心价值观是党的十八大”.

two articles that discussed one specific value in great detail,<sup>114</sup> definitions of the individual values are conspicuously absent. Despite the consistent emphasis on putting the values into practice, there are also little guidelines or instructions that explain how exactly these values can be translated into practice. The lack of clarity stands in contrast to moral campaigns of the past. For example, New Life Movement directives were specific and comprehensive,<sup>115</sup> while virtue rewards during imperial times were awarded according to clear and specific criteria during imperial rule.<sup>116</sup>

Instead, the CSVs are most frequently referred to and used in their collective form, and this relates to the flexible use of the term 'Core Socialist Values'. In this form, the 'Core Socialist Values' becomes a *tifa* or slogan with a stipulative definition, which means that the term is given a specific definition. Logically, however, such slogans could take on a variety of stipulative definitions and be used to refer to something else altogether.<sup>117</sup> Reflecting this capacity for flexibility, some CSVs campaigns described in the articles define the CSVs slightly differently from the original twelve identified values, such as by promoting particular values or including new ones altogether.<sup>118</sup>

While Xia argues that the capacity for flexibility weakens the power of slogans and increases freedom of speech,<sup>119</sup> it can also be seen as a determinant of a slogan's political utility.<sup>120</sup> For example, the values of friendship, democracy and honesty could be presented as interchangeable with or as counterparts to specific traditional values, which in turn helped to make the connection between traditional culture and the CSVs more apparent.<sup>121</sup> More importantly, throughout the discourse, the term 'Core Socialist Values' is used primarily as a categorical referent or shorthand for a moral-ideological code rather than to refer to the twelve values specifically. Moreover, this is not a moral code with specific guidelines or rules. Instead, the rules of the moral code are more vaguely defined as anything that is ideologically compatible with the CCP, that contributes to the 'Chinese Dream' and that the CCP approves of. The abstract and vague definitions of the CSVs also make it harder for citizens to object to them or question their validity.

The CCP consequently has the power to police and arbitrate according to poorly defined rules. On one hand, vagueness can force people to speculate about what constitutes acceptable or unacceptable behavior and can result in greater degrees of self-censorship.<sup>122</sup> On the other hand, party officials are also tasked with moral policing. Specifically, they are to educate citizens on what

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<sup>114</sup> RMRB 2015-5 and RMRB 2017-1.

<sup>115</sup> Wennan Liu, "Redefining the Moral and Legal Roles of the State in Everyday Life: The New Life Movement in China in the Mid-1930s", *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 7, (2013), p. 38.

<sup>116</sup> Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China".

<sup>117</sup> Nianxi Xia, "Political Slogans and Logic," *Diogenes* 56, no. 1 (2009): pp. 109-116.

<sup>118</sup> E.g. QS3, RMRB 2015-3.

<sup>119</sup> Xia, "Political Slogans and Logic", p. 112.

<sup>120</sup> Schoenhals, *Doing Things With Words in Chinese Politics*.

<sup>121</sup> RMRB 2014-4.

<sup>122</sup> Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese*, p. 288.

morally acceptable behavior is,<sup>123</sup> as well as reward or punish behaviors in accordance with the CSVs.<sup>124</sup> Considering the vagueness of the CSVs' moral code, party officials are thus given not only the power of moral judgment but also a significant amount of latitude in deciding whether something violates or complies with the CSVs. For example, pornography, fake news and violent content are explicitly denounced but the discourse does not refer to specific values that are violated, nor does it provide more specific reasons beyond their violation of the CSVs.<sup>125</sup> As this example suggests, rather than refer specifically to the twelve identified values, the term 'Core Socialist Values' is used instead to invoke the vague sense of a moral code that the CCP controls and dictates.

### **Governing Through Moral Norms and Justifications**

Within the CSVs discourse, morality is presented as an important means of achieving social control and order, and is thus a key governance tool. In Xi Jinping's words, the CSVs are an "important means of ensuring that the social system operates in a normal manner and that the social order is effectively maintained".<sup>126</sup> Thus, the CSVs are frequently discussed in the context of "social governance" (*shehui zhi*).<sup>127</sup> They serve as guidelines for social governance, and the process of social governance is apparently equivalent to the fostering and inculcation of the CSVs.<sup>128</sup> Above and beyond the development of moral citizens, the CSVs are also a means of achieving the broader goal of social order.<sup>129</sup>

The notion that morality is strongly related to social order, as well as the goal of maintaining social order, has its roots in traditional Chinese philosophies. According to the doctrine of Confucianism, utopia is an ordered and hierarchical but harmonious one. Utopia resulted from the goodness and moral conduct of all individuals, and this referred specifically to individuals' fulfillment of moral obligations dictated by the social relationships they were in.<sup>130</sup> Thus, individual virtue underpins social order and harmony. Moreover, to achieve this, Confucianism advocated the use of education and moral suasion to transform people's inner minds and cultivate their moral selves. In particular, the emperor was encouraged to 'rule by virtue' (*yide zhiguo*). Grounded in the Confucian belief that virtue has the power to transform oneself as well as others, the emperor's virtuous

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<sup>123</sup> E.g. QS2, QS6.

<sup>124</sup> E.g. PD1, PD2.

<sup>125</sup> E.g. PD1, QS6.

<sup>126</sup> Speech 8.

<sup>127</sup> For more on the state's 'social management' project, see Samantha Hoffman, "Programming China: The Communist Party's Autonomic Approach to Managing State Security", (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2017); Frank N. Pieke, "The Communist Party and Social Management in China", *China Information* 26(2), pp. 149-165.

<sup>128</sup> E.g. PD1, PD2.

<sup>129</sup> E.g. RMRB 2017-5, QS7.

<sup>130</sup> Hanna B. Krebs, *Responsibility, Legitimacy, Morality: Chinese Humanitarianism in Historical Perspective* (London: Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, 2014), p. 3.

conduct would inspire his people towards moral behavior, thus producing moral and social order throughout society.<sup>131</sup>

Reflecting similar ideas regarding morality and social order, the CSVs discourse adheres to the concept of ‘rule by virtue’ and calls for the publicizing of ethical role models<sup>132</sup> and “positive publicity”<sup>133</sup> so as “to inspire the people to esteem virtue, perform good deeds and emulate virtuous people”. Party officials, in particular, are called on to rule by virtue, and persuade citizens through their “exemplary behavior and noble personalities”.<sup>134</sup> Thus, morality is to be promoted in a “gentle and lively way”, “like spring drizzle falling without a sound”.<sup>135</sup>

The CSVs discourse also consistently articulates the logic of instilling the CSVs amongst citizens in order to produce desirable behaviors, which would in turn contribute to social order. The CSVs guide people in making value judgments, teach people what to approve and pursue,<sup>136</sup> and is a moral code that citizens should “internalize”<sup>137</sup> (*nei hua yu xin*). Additionally, the CSVs would also help citizens develop “correct”<sup>138</sup> (*zhengque*) perspectives of China’s history and foreign cultures. Given that correctness is defined by the party, this line of argument is reminiscent of the way morality was defined in ideological terms during Mao’s era, and points towards the continued conflation of ideology and morality. The goal of the CSVs campaign is consequently for the CSVs to serve as a “code of conduct”<sup>139</sup> (*xingwei zhunze*) for everyday life, and be so widely and regularly practiced that it no longer requires conscious effort.<sup>140</sup> Thus, by defining moral norms and instilling them within citizens, the Party-state hopes to produce self-governing citizens. In contrast to coercion, this would constitute a less resource-intensive and more sustainable mode of governance if it proves successful.

The issue of governance, especially as it relates to values, perspectives and thoughts, is of paramount importance to the CCP given the major changes and developments that China is undergoing. Domestically, market reforms and an increasingly open society have resulted in a variety of new and different ideas.<sup>141</sup> Internationally, countries around the world (including China) are engaged in intense ideological competition and exchange.<sup>142</sup> The discourse thus paints a poignant image of a China that is confronted with competing ideas and value systems, and this is in

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<sup>131</sup> Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, p. 156.

<sup>132</sup> E.g. Speech 6, RMRB 2016-1.

<sup>133</sup> Speech 5.

<sup>134</sup> Speech 8.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> E.g. QS2, QS6.

<sup>137</sup> E.g. Speech 3, RMRB 2014-28, RMRB 2014-31.

<sup>138</sup> Speech 7.

<sup>139</sup> E.g. Speech 3, QS8, RMRB 2014-9.

<sup>140</sup> E.g. RMRB 2017-10, RMRB 2014-25, RMRB 2016-3.

<sup>141</sup> E.g. QS5, QS1.

<sup>142</sup> E.g. QS5, RMRB 2014-41.

turn responsible for various social problems.<sup>143</sup> It is also noteworthy that this image resonates with Chinese intellectuals' identification of 'changing values' as one of the major threats to the Party-state's legitimacy.<sup>144</sup>

To cope with such variety, the CSVs are to play a "guiding"<sup>145</sup> (*yinling*) role, "integrat[e] the people's mindset"<sup>146</sup> and help produce coherence and conformity. There is also consequently a strong emphasis on directing campaign efforts at children and youths, who are at formative ages and seen as particularly vulnerable or susceptible to non-orthodox views.<sup>147</sup> The CSVs are thus meant to help "enhance their 'thought immunity', and help them grow healthily in accordance with the requirements of the party".<sup>148</sup> Officially defined as *the* dominant values system, the CSVs thus have the potential to be a "stabilizer"<sup>149</sup> (*wen ding qi*) amidst an environment of change.

Morality is also connected with more coercive forms of governance, and this is perhaps most evident from the prominence of the legal theme within the CSVs discourse. Independently of the CSVs campaign, China analysts have identified the construction of the socialist rule of law as a central pillar of Xi Jinping's political agenda. Trevaskes even claims that 'rule by law' or *yifa zhiguo* has been elevated to the premier governance-related *tifa* during Xi's tenure.<sup>150</sup> Its prominence within the CSVs discourse is thus unsurprising, especially given that one of the twelve values is 'rule of law' (*fazhi*). Moreover, one of the two policy documents released by the CCP General Office on the CSVs focused solely on the incorporation of the CSVs into the legal system, and the intersection of law, morality, and governance.

Before going into further specifics regarding law and morality in the CSVs discourse, it is useful to first note the reference to the age-old opposition between two schools of thought in Chinese political tradition – Confucian 'rule by virtue' and Legalist 'rule by law' (*yifa zhiguo*). In contrast to Confucian methods of moral suasion and education, Legalism advocates the use of punishment and coercive methods to regulate people's external behavior.<sup>151</sup> Confucianism and Legalism both regarded maintaining social order as the objective, but advocated different modes of achieving it. The opposition between these schools of thought is well established in Chinese political thought, and features prominently throughout China's history as well.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> QS5.

<sup>144</sup> Zeng, "The Debate on Regime Legitimacy in China", p. 621.

<sup>145</sup> E.g. PD2, QS1, RMRB 2015-6.

<sup>146</sup> Speech 8.

<sup>147</sup> E.g. Speech 3, Speech 4.

<sup>148</sup> QS4. In Chinese, it reads: "提高思想'免疫力'、按照党的要求健康成长".

<sup>149</sup> E.g. QS2, QS5.

<sup>150</sup> Trevaskes, "A Law Unto Itself".

<sup>151</sup> Liu, "Redefining the Moral and Legal Roles", p. 39.

<sup>152</sup> See Liu, "Redefining the Moral and Legal Roles" for an overview of the debate between the two schools of thought during the late-Qing and early-modern period in China. He focuses in particular on the disagreements that Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Jingwei had regarding the methods used in the New Life Movement.

Good governance, according to the current CCP leadership, requires the combination of both modes of governance and the simultaneous promotion of law and morality.<sup>153</sup> From the CSVs discourse, it is clear that the CCP seeks to establish a values-based governance and legal system. The moral code, as embodied by the CSVs, exists prior to and ought to underpin the legal system. The CSVs are thus to be incorporated into the legal system, and this is a necessary condition of good governance.<sup>154</sup> The legal system should reflect these values<sup>155</sup> as well as support the fostering of values amongst citizens. As part of the “basic strategy”<sup>156</sup> (*jiben fanglue*) for implementing the CSVs, the legal system directly influences people’s approval and practice of the CSVs and enhances the formation of a value system in society.

The legal system is embraced in particular because of its ability to compensate for the relative “vulnerability”<sup>157</sup> (*cuiruoxing*) of moral or normative norms. Specifically, the appeal of law for the CCP lies in its forcefulness and coercive power, and it is this coercive power that would facilitate the fostering of the CSVs and morality within society. Most notably, the legal system can help transform the CSVs from “soft requirements” (*ruanxing yaoqiu*) to “hard rules”<sup>158</sup> (*yingxing guifan*). The legal system possesses “authority”<sup>159</sup> (*quanwei*), has “rigid binding powers”<sup>160</sup> (*gangxing yueshuli*), and thus serves as a stricter way of governing and standardizing behaviors. Specifically, immoral or undesirable behaviors can be regulated, punished, and eradicated.<sup>161</sup> The legal system is clearly seen as a powerful way to enhance social control,<sup>162</sup> hence Brady’s observation that “when the state promotes awareness of the law... it is in order to create more obedient citizenry, it is not a means for Chinese citizens to gain more rights”.<sup>163</sup>

As the CCP’s combination of ‘rule by law’ and ‘rule by virtue’ suggests, morality and virtues are used to imbue its mode of governance with a particular moral character. Updating the traditional ‘rule by virtue’ doctrine, the CCP seeks to employ the coercive powers of the legal system to regulate behavior rather than rely solely on the power of moral suasion and education. This adaptation suggests that the CCP is more concerned with maintaining social *control*, above and beyond preserving a social *order* that is predicated on the moral conduct of citizens, and is consistent with views of the CCP’s ‘social management’ (*shehui guanli*) as a project to help the

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<sup>153</sup> E.g. PD2, QS8, RMRB 2017-7.

<sup>154</sup> E.g. PD2, QS8, RMRB 2017-4.

<sup>155</sup> QS8 and PD2.

<sup>156</sup> QS8.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> E.g. PD2, QS8, RMRB 2017-4.

<sup>160</sup> E.g. QS2, QS8, RMRB 2017-6.

<sup>161</sup> E.g. PD2, QS8.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Rogier Creemers, “China’s Rule of Law Plan is For Real”, *East Asia Forum*, (10 May 2015), available at <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/05/10/chinas-rule-of-law-plan-is-for-real/> (accessed 20 April 2018).

<sup>163</sup> Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship*, p. 109.



Party-state retain its authority in society.<sup>164</sup> The absence of clearly defined rules regarding moral conduct and the consequent latitude party officials enjoy in sanctioning behavior also point towards the goal of maintaining social control rather than producing order.

This argument further suggests that morality is mobilized for rhetorical rather than substantive purposes. Moralistic language is used to justify various methods of control, and the Party-state's construction of a normative agenda helps legitimize supervisory or disciplinary aspects of state-society relations. In her analysis of 'yifa zhiguo', Trevaskes suggests that the insistence on the integration of 'rule by virtue' and 'rule by law', an important shift in the 'yifa zhiguo' discourse, implies that the legal system alone is insufficient. Furthermore, its perfection requires the insertion of party leadership in all legal-institutional bodies, as their moral virtue will ensure the effective implementation of the law.<sup>165</sup> Thus, morality is used to justify and reassert the Party's authority and leadership.

Aside from the legal system, the CSVs have also been used to justify moral policing and other more coercive forms of governance. As mentioned earlier, party officials are instructed to reward and encourage good behavior, as well as punish and restrict unacceptable behavior.<sup>166</sup> Moral norms are thus supported by brute power, and the reverse arguably holds true as well. For example, looking beyond official discourse, the Chinese state has banned a series of things such as hip-hop,<sup>167</sup> surrogate drinking services,<sup>168</sup> and even April Fool's celebrations,<sup>169</sup> in the name of upholding the CSVs. With regards to the government's control of the Internet, audiovisual content must be audited to ensure their adherence to the CSVs,<sup>170</sup> and online literature will be subject to a scoring system that weights their promotion of the CSVs heavily.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Cf. Hoffman, "Programming China".

<sup>165</sup> Trevaskes, "A Law Unto Itself".

<sup>166</sup> E.g. PD1, PD2

<sup>167</sup> "China's Fledgling Hip-Hop Culture Faces Official Crackdown", *BBC News*, (24 January 2018), available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-42800032> (accessed 26 May 2018).

<sup>168</sup> Jing Meng, "Chinese Firm eDaijia Ends Service to Outsource Alcohol Consumption to Surrogate Drinkers", *South China Morning Post*, (10 January 2018), available at: <http://www.scmp.com/tech/start-ups/article/2127681/chinese-firm-edaijia-ends-service-outsource-alcohol-consumption> (accessed 26 May 2018).

<sup>169</sup> Lucy Clarke-Billings, "China Bans April Fools' Day and Warns Nation not to Spread Rumors", *Newsweek*, (30 June 2018), available at: <http://www.newsweek.com/china-bans-april-fools-day-and-warns-nation-not-spread-rumors-443000> (accessed 26 May 2018).

<sup>170</sup> Shannon Liao, "China Plans to Audit and Ban Online Content if it's not Socialist Enough", *The Verge*, (5 July 2017), available at: <https://www.theverge.com/2017/7/5/15923158/china-socialist-censorship-audit-ban> (accessed 26 May 2018).

<sup>171</sup> Owen Churchill, "China Says Online Literature Must Uphold Socialist Values", *Sixth Tone*, (28 June 2017), available at: <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1000418/china-says-online-literature-must-uphold-socialist-values> (accessed 26 May 2018).

## Connecting Private Morality to National Goals

Beyond morality's relevance to governance and social stability, the moral narrative presented in the CSVs discourse also strongly relates morality and core values to the nation's fate. To begin with, the way the CSVs are grouped immediately suggests a hierarchy in which national values rank first.<sup>172</sup> The use of the term 'citizen' (*gongmin*) to describe individual-level values further defines individuals as members of a collective political entity. Thus, through the CSVs discourse, the Party-state demonstrates its concern first and foremost for the nation rather than for individuals. The priority is to inculcate national values amongst youths whereas civic and private morality is of secondary importance,<sup>173</sup> and patriotism is described as the "deepest, most fundamental and most lasting"<sup>174</sup> of the CSVs.

Framed as a "strategic decision"<sup>175</sup> (*juece*) or "strategy"<sup>176</sup> (*zhanlue*), the CSVs contribute to the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and achievement of the 'Chinese Dream' in several ways. First of all, the CSVs imbue these goals with "lofty moral ideals",<sup>177</sup> and the hope is that the clear articulation and definition of a moral ethos will further instill Chinese citizens with confidence in China's development path.<sup>178</sup> The repeated assertion that the "core values... are closely related to its history and culture"<sup>179</sup> also adds to this, as the aforementioned narrative of cultural continuity seeks similarly to inspire confidence by alluding to the cultural strength of the 5000-year-old Chinese civilization.

Secondly, the CSVs are used to unite the nation in pursuit of a common goal. The aim of the CSVs campaign is to inculcate a common set of values amongst Chinese citizens in order to develop social coherence and national unity. Emphasizing China's large and diverse population, the CSVs campaign is a "fundamental project for integrating the people's mindset".<sup>180</sup> As discussed in previous sections, the CSVs help to consolidate competing value systems, foster societal consensus, and provide thought leadership within society. The result, ideally, is the transformation of China's disparate citizens into a powerful, collective force for the achievement of the nation's goals.<sup>181</sup> This calls to mind Sun Yat-sen's famous characterization of China as 'a sheet of loose sand' (*yi pan san sha*), which he evoked to promote nationalism and inspire unity amongst Chinese citizens. This metaphor is also explicitly referenced in the CSVs discourse to make a similar point –

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<sup>172</sup> Gow, "The Core Socialist Values of the Chinese Dream".

<sup>173</sup> QS4.

<sup>174</sup> RMRB 2016-3.

<sup>175</sup> QS1.

<sup>176</sup> E.g. QS4, QS5.

<sup>177</sup> Speech 8.

<sup>178</sup> E.g. Speech 3, RMRB 2016-4, QS2.

<sup>179</sup> Speech 3a.

<sup>180</sup> Speech 8.

<sup>181</sup> E.g. PD1, QS2, RMRB 2016-4.

“without the CSVs, a nation and its people will lack the cohesion, power and force needed for development, and become a sheet of loose sand”.<sup>182</sup>

Underlying this argument is the notion that a shared moral ethos and collectively held values determine the strength and longevity of the nation. First articulated by Xi Jinping, and then repeated throughout the discourse, “the most lasting and profound power for a nation and country is the core values acknowledged by all”.<sup>183</sup> Core values serve as the “spiritual bonds”<sup>184</sup> (*jingshen niudai*) that society relies on, and provide the spiritual support needed to maintain social harmony, cohesion and stability over the long term.<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, “without shared core values, a nation and country will be at a loss to know what is right and what is wrong, and its people will have no code of conduct to follow, the result being that the nation and country can never progress”.<sup>186</sup> Consequently, Xi Jinping argues that having a moral ethos is what accounts for the Chinese civilization’s continued survival and progress over several thousand years.<sup>187</sup> Conversely, the social instabilities that other countries currently face can be explained by shifts or weaknesses in their core value systems.<sup>188</sup> Thus, the CSVs are not simply a matter of morality or virtues, but concern the development and future of the nation.

The Chinese saying ‘a country cannot prosper without virtues, nor can anyone succeed without virtues’<sup>189</sup> (*guo wu de bu xing, ren wu de bu li*) succinctly captures the national importance of morality, and it is frequently touted throughout the CSVs discourse to emphasize the significance of the CSVs.<sup>190</sup> As the saying suggests, this idea has strong historical continuities within Chinese political thought. According to Confucianism, morality and national prosperity were directly related as social and political order was seen as a reflection of, or as coterminous with, moral order.<sup>191</sup> The morality of the emperor and citizens were thus seen as the foundation of the nation’s peace and progress. Such ideas continued to persist, albeit in slightly adapted forms, even after the end of the imperial period. Chiang Kai-shek, for example, pointed to the inferiority of Chinese citizens’ morality and knowledge as an explanation China’s weakness and humiliation by foreign powers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> QS7. The original Chinese reads: “没有了核心价值观，一个国家、民族就没有凝聚力、向心力和发展动力，就会成为一盘散沙和空中浮萍”。

<sup>183</sup> Translation from Speech 3a. In Chinese, it reads: “最持久、最深层的力量是全社会共同认识的核心价值观” (E.g. QS7, RMRB 2014-17, RMRB 2014-28).

<sup>184</sup> E.g. RMRB 2016-1, RMRB 2016-4, RMRB 2017-6.

<sup>185</sup> E.g. PD1, QS1, QS2.

<sup>186</sup> Speech 3a.

<sup>187</sup> Speech 4a.

<sup>188</sup> QS2.

<sup>189</sup> Translation from Speech 3a.

<sup>190</sup> E.g. RMRB 2016-1, RMRB 2014-5.

<sup>191</sup> Pye, *Asian Power and Politics*, p. 41.

<sup>192</sup> Dirlik, “The Ideological Foundations”, p. 954.

The idea that the perfection of a society is dependent on the perfection of its people, especially in moral and spiritual terms, is a strong undercurrent that runs throughout China's political history. Thus, Chinese modes of statecraft and governance from Confucius to Mao have tended to prioritize the character of its people and regarded their moral development as its primary task,<sup>193</sup> over and above building robust institutions. Governments tended to locate the source of problems in the character of its citizens, and consequently pursued solutions that focused on rectifying and building the moral character of its people. For example, Sun Yat-sen was skeptical about Chinese citizens' readiness for democracy, and recommended initial periods of military and tutelary rule to prepare citizens for constitutional rule.<sup>194</sup> More recently, the socialist spiritual civilization campaign was implemented in response to the social ills that accompanied economic liberalization, and the goal was to endow citizens with 'correct' or 'suitable' moral attitudes so that they would consume and participate in the market economy responsibly.<sup>195</sup>

Reflecting historical continuities, morality is similarly seen as a matter of national importance in the CSVs discourse, and the Party-state continues to regard the moral development of its people as its fundamental task.<sup>196</sup> In Xi Jinping's words, the CSVs "explain what sort of country and society we are striving for, and *what kind of citizens we are cultivating*" (emphasis added).<sup>197</sup> Paternalistic attitudes in turn feature strongly in the discourse, as "serving the people" is defined as "educating and guiding them", "upgrading their personal quality" and "enhanc[ing] their moral strength".<sup>198</sup> There are also calls for the CSVs to be incorporated into all activities and aspects of society<sup>199</sup> so that they become a ubiquitous feature of everyday life. It is thus clear that the Party-state seeks to play an active role in cultivating citizens and civilizing minds. However, the CSVs campaign differs from the aforementioned campaigns in that it is launched and implemented during a period of relative strength. The moral transformation of citizens is thus not intended as a solution to pressing national problems. Rather, it is to produce qualified citizens that complement China's impressive development thus far, and that can contribute to China's future progress. This is in turn indicative of the CCP's grander aims – "to make one party rule sustainable and to push China towards the goal

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<sup>193</sup> Historical continuities regarding the state's civilizing of citizens have been especially well analyzed in the context of the *suzhi* discourse. See for instance, Tamarrs, "Cultivating Citizens: Suzhi (Quality) Discourse in the PRC", *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 17(3), (2009), pp. 523-535, as well as Haifeng Huang, "Personal Character or Social Expectation: A Formal Analysis of 'Suzhi' in China", *Journal of Contemporary China* 25(102), (2016), pp. 908-922.

<sup>194</sup> Huang, "Personal Character or Social Expectation", p. 909.

<sup>195</sup> Thomas Boutonnet, "From Local Control to Globalized Citizenship: The Civilizing Concept of Wenming in Official Chinese Rhetoric", in Corrado Neri and Florent Villard, eds, *Global Fences: Literatures, Limits, Borders* (Lyon: IETT, 2011), p. 93.

<sup>196</sup> E.g. PD1, RMRB 2014-4, RMRB 2016-1.

<sup>197</sup> Speech 3a.

<sup>198</sup> Speech 5.

<sup>199</sup> E.g. Speech 7, RMRB 2015-3, RMRB 2015-7.

of being a great and strong nation by the achievement of the first centennial goal by 2021<sup>200</sup> – and signals a new phase in the country's development.

The CSVs campaign not only calls on Chinese citizens to conduct themselves in a virtuous manner but, more importantly, to become ideal citizens as constructed and defined by the CCP. The interweaving of morality throughout an otherwise nationalistic narrative implies that it is the citizen's moral duty to contribute to the nation. To illustrate this more clearly, in one of Xi Jinping's speeches, he asserts that "what is most important is to cultivate morality". Elaborating further on what it means to cultivate morality, he explains that one needs to have "high ambitions", which is defined by "devot[ing] oneself to one's country and serv[ing] one's people" – indeed, "this is the great virtue".<sup>201</sup> What it means to serve one's country varies with each Chinese state – in the contemporary case, citizens are called on to have pride and "[shoulder] the mission of national rejuvenation"<sup>202</sup> – but no matter how it is defined, China's ideal citizen is above all a moral one. The Chinese notion of citizenship thus reflects the influence of traditional Chinese philosophies and historical continuities, and features significant moral and normative components.<sup>203</sup>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In summary, this research paper provides a thorough review of the treatment of morality in official textual materials relating to the CSVs campaign, and attempts to piece together the moral narrative that the Party-state presents through the CSVs. Presented as a moral code, the CSVs are vaguely and imprecisely defined, and are not derived from a single ideological orthodoxy. Instead, the CCP draws on the ideas of traditional culture and consensus to increase the appeal of the CSVs. In the domestic context, the CSVs serve two main purposes. First, the moral norms as laid out by the CSVs would help regulate the thoughts and behaviors of citizens, and are thus an important means of maintaining social order. Second, the inculcation of the CSVs is regarded as a matter of national importance, as it is a means of uniting Chinese citizens in pursuit of a common cause. This also further relates to the historic belief that the moral development and perfection of citizens is a necessary condition for national prosperity.

This research was conducted through an investigation of official discursive materials, and thus captures a moral narrative that stems primarily from the perspective of the CCP's central leadership. In so doing, my research is advertently limited by the treatment of the Chinese government as a unitary state, and risks creating the impression of a homogenous state that this moral narrative uniformly applies to.

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<sup>200</sup> Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova, "Ideology in the Era of Xi Jinping".

<sup>201</sup> Speech 3a.

<sup>202</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> congress speech

<sup>203</sup> Keane, "Redefining Chinese Citizenship", pp. 7-8.

However, located throughout the massive bureaucratic and political apparatus of the Chinese state are sites of political contestation that involve a variety of state actors.<sup>204</sup> The relationships between the central state, local governments and various organizational bodies are an important feature of analysis in Chinese statecraft. Furthermore, as Thornton suggests, the construction of moral agendas and normative boundaries is one of the key ways in which the central state extends and reinforces its political power.<sup>205</sup> In the same vein, further research on the various activities that claim to promote the CSVs or on local variants of the CSVs campaign, especially in areas that are politically contentious or peripheral to state power, could potentially illustrate how moral norms that are defined by the central state are reinforced, disputed or negotiated. Interestingly, examples of campaign activities within the CSVs discourse suggest that there is considerable variation; some campaigns focus on select values, while others include values outside of the CSVs. Further research into specific case studies or comparisons between state- and federal-level campaigns could thus shed light on the means by which the central state controls local governments and communities, and the role that moral agendas play in this process.

My reliance on official discursive texts also presents additional limitations. The linguistic monotony of the discourse facilitated the identification of themes and narrative strands. However, it also highlights the fact that these materials were prepared for the specific purpose of “provid[ing] official rationales, positions, guidelines and principles”<sup>206</sup>, and consumed by a specific type of audience that is not representative of the general populace. Thus, while the materials reliably convey the moral narrative as intended by the central leadership, this moral narrative does not necessarily correspond to the one that is delivered and received by the target of the CSVs campaign – China’s general populace.

The next logical step would thus be to conduct research on how the CSVs are actually delivered to and received by China’s population. As the discourse repeatedly advocates, the CSVs would be more effectively promoted throughout society using popular medium and in plain language.<sup>207</sup> An analysis of promotion and campaign materials, such as posters, video advertisements, and even moral education textbooks, would likely reflect an expanded political vocabulary and enrich the moral narrative presented through official texts alone. This would also serve as a useful comparison for the narrative presented in the official CSVs discourse, as it would be interesting to see how the importance of the CSVs and morality are marketed differently to party officials and to China’s increasingly sophisticated population. This could in turn feed into existing

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<sup>204</sup> Hays Gries and Rosen, “Introduction: Popular Protest”.

<sup>205</sup> Thornton, *Disciplining the State*.

<sup>206</sup> Cao, “Introduction: Legitimization, Resistance”, p. 11.

<sup>207</sup> E.g. RMRB 2014-6, QS4.

literature on the effectiveness and adaptive capacity of the CCP's contemporary propaganda system.

I began this research by positioning the CSVs campaign within China's political tradition of moral and civic campaigns, and hypothesized that the relationship between morality and politics revealed in the CSVs campaign would bear strong historic. For the most part, the moral dimensions of governance that culturalists emphasize are not prominent themes in the CSVs discourse. The notion that political leaders should be moral exemplars is reflected, as party officials are called on to lead by moral example and to guide citizens in making moral decisions. However, the party does not explicitly claim to possess moral truth, or any modern-day equivalent of the 'Mandate of Heaven'. The party suggests instead that the CSVs are derived from consensus and traditional culture. Moreover, the moral code of the CSVs does not reflect concepts of benevolent governance or the government responsibility to respond to the welfare of the citizens. While the campaign itself can be interpreted as a demonstration of the state's concern for the people's spiritual livelihood, this concern stems ultimately from a concern for the collective rather than for the moral welfare of the individual.

My analysis did, however, reveal new ways of understanding the relationship between morality and politics, and these in turn relate to different and arguably more salient historical continuities. First, my research reflects the state's use of morality as an instrument or tool for governance. According to the Confucian perspective, morality serves as a check on the power of the state – a ruler that did not behave virtuously would lose the Mandate of Heaven and the legitimate right to rule.<sup>208</sup> In contrast, an analysis of the CSVs discourse reveals how morality is flexibly defined and used instead to augment the power of the state. Thus, the CCP has the power to arbitrate according to poorly defined rules, set moral norms that dictate the boundaries of acceptable behavior, and use national goals as the criterion to distinguish between moral and immoral things. Responsibility is consequently borne by the people, rather than the state, to prove their moral obedience and worthiness.<sup>209</sup> Notably, this practice is not a novel one. Dirlik points to the New Life Movement as a similar example,<sup>210</sup> while Thornton illustrates how various Chinese states exercise power through moral agendas.<sup>211</sup>

Another historical continuity reflected in the CSVs discourse is the strong relationship between morality and collective goals. While propaganda efforts emphasize the cultivation of citizens' private morality, the moral narrative produced by the CSVs discourse highlights a strong collective orientation and foregrounds the importance of the CSVs for social order and national

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<sup>208</sup> Tong, "Morality, Benevolence, and Responsibility", p. 146.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Dirlik, "The Ideological Foundations".

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup> Thornton, *Disciplining the State*.

prosperity. Consequently, the validity of the values and the morality of citizens are evaluated in terms of their contribution to collective goals, and private morality connects seamlessly to the wellbeing of collective entities.

These two points can in turn be combined to explain the distinctively Chinese perception of the citizen as a “blueprint for ethical refashioning”.<sup>212</sup> The political utility of morality stems from a long-standing Confucian framework that enables political leaders to elevate the interests of the nation over that of the individual. The Confucian tradition of collective morality has arguably endured throughout Chinese history, even as the content and nature of morality underwent various changes.<sup>213</sup> When concepts of citizenship were introduced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, late-Qing reformers responded by increasing the scope of individuals’ Confucian-based moral obligations to include duties to the nation.<sup>214</sup> These moral duties to the nation were in turn defined by the Chinese state. Thus, in contrast to western conceptions of citizenship, Chinese citizenship includes an important normative dimension and the term ‘citizen’ (*gongmin*) is used to invoke one’s moral obligation to the state. The moral narrative presented in the CSVs discourse reflects these continuities, but whether this mode of governance will continue to be successful for the regime remains to be seen.

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<sup>212</sup> Keane, "Redefining Chinese Citizenship", p. 1.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> Fairbrother 2014, p. 23



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## APPENDIX A: Primary Materials

#	Reference Code	Title	Date	Source Type	
1	PD1	关于培育和践行社会主义核心价值观的意见	23/12/2013	CCP General Office Policy Document	
2	PD2	关于进一步把社会主义核心价值观融入法治建设的指导意见	25/12/2016		
3	Speech 1	HJT 18 <sup>th</sup> national congress report		Speech	
4	Speech 2	决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利 -- 在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告	18/10/2017		
5	Speech 3	青年要自觉践行社会主义核心价值观 -- 在北京大学师生座谈会上的讲话	05/05/2014		
6	Speech 3a	English translation of Speech 3			
7	Speech 4	从小积极培育和践行社会主义核心价值观 -- 在北京市海淀区民族小学主持召开座谈会上的讲话	03/06/2014		
8	Speech 4a	English translation of Speech 4			
9	Speech 5	Enhance Publicity and Theoretical Work	19/08/2013		
10	Speech 6	Strong Ethical Support for the Realization of the Chinese Dream	26/9/2013		
11	Speech 7	Enhance China's Cultural Soft Power	30/12/2013		
12	Speech 8	Cultivate and Disseminate the Core Socialist Values	24/02/2014		
13	QS1	发挥组织要求 体现群众特点 积极培养和践行社会主义核心价值观	01/07/2014		<i>Seeking Truth (Qiushi)</i> article
14	QS2	核心价值观是最持久、最深沉的力量 -- 学习习近平总书记关于社会主义核心价值观的重要论述	01/10/2014		
15	QS3	让社会主义核心价值观落地生根	15/12/2014		
16	QS4	用社会主义核心价值观培育当代新青年 -- 学习习近平总书记关于在青少年中培育和践行社会主义核心价值观的重要论述	28/02/2015		
17	QS5	培育和践行社会主义核心价值观是凝魂聚气强基固本的基础工程	15/04/2015		
18	QS6	筑牢社会主义核心价值观的文化根基 -- 学习习近平总书记关于核心价值观及优秀传统文化的重要论述	15/04/2015		
19	QS7	坚守我们的核心价值观 -- 学习习近平总书记关于核心价值观的重要论述	15/04/2016		
20	QS8	努力把社会主义核心价值观融入法治建设	31/03/2017		
21	RMRB 2014-1	让社会主义核心价值观落地生根	26/10/2014	<i>People's Daily (Ren Min Ri Bao)</i> article	
22	RMRB 2014-2	播种社会主义核心价值观——习近平总书记在北京市海淀区民族小学的讲话引起热烈反响	01/06/2014		
23	RMRB 2014-3	从国际视域认识社会主义核心价值观	04/07/2014		
24	RMRB 2014-4	国风飘过五千年——社会主义核心价值观	11/08/2014		

		从哪儿来	
25	RMRB 2014-5	以社会主义核心价值观引领立德树人工作——深入学习贯彻习近平同志在北京大学师生座谈会上的重要讲话精神	17/06/2014
26	RMRB 2014-6	培育大学生社会主义核心价值观认同的四个原则	11/07/2014
27	RMRB 2014-7	坚持以社会主义核心价值观引领文艺创作	16/09/2014
28	RMRB 2014-8	弘扬社会主义核心价值观是新闻媒体的神圣职责	29/05/2014
29	RMRB 2014-9	践行社会主义核心价值观 推动企业改革发展	17/07/2014
30	RMRB 2014-10	从经济学角度认识社会主义核心价值观	30/10/2014
31	RMRB 2014-11	国科协发布科技工作者践行社会主义核心价值观倡议书	13/09/2014
32	RMRB 2014-12	如何培育核心价值观?	07/08/2014
33	RMRB 2014-13	把核心价值观 融入大学精神——北京大学党委书记朱善璐谈社会主义核心价值观	31/07/2014
34	RMRB 2014-14	践行核心价值观脚步铿锵	24/12/2014
35	RMRB 2014-15	以道德建设促进核心价值观践行	24/12/2014
36	RMRB 2014-16	善用抓手培育和弘扬核心价值观	01/12/2014
37	RMRB 2014-17	当下为什么要强调核心价值观?	24/07/2014
38	RMRB 2014-18	善用社区媒体传播核心价值观	14/08/2014
39	RMRB 2014-19	核心价值观的“三重音部”	18/08/2014
40	RMRB 2014-20	把核心价值观贯穿高校教育全过程	14/08/2014
41	RMRB 2014-21	践行核心价值观 激发青春正能量	31/07/2014
42	RMRB 2014-22	用先进典型引领核心价值观建设	31/08/2014
43	RMRB 2014-23	让核心价值观旗帜飘扬在文化阵地上	17/08/2014
44	RMRB 2014-24	善用抓手培育和弘扬核心价值观	01/12/2014
45	RMRB 2014-25	以积土成山精神推进核心价值观建设	08/12/2014
46	RMRB 2014-26	“超级大课堂”解说核心价值观	12/06/2014
47	RMRB 2014-27	贯彻核心价值观 贵在知行合一	27/06/2014
48	RMRB 2014-28	奏响践行核心价值观的动人旋律	31/08/2014
49	RMRB 2014-29	大力实施核心价值观建设“三五五四”工程	02/11/2014
50	RMRB 2014-30	以核心价值观引领人才培养	12/06/2014
51	RMRB 2014-31	坚持立德树人 加强社会主义核心价值观教育——深入学习贯彻习近平同志在北京大学师生座谈会上的重要讲话精神 ——深入学习贯彻习近平同志在北京大学师生座谈会上的重要讲话精神	23/05/2014
52	RMRB 2014-32	用核心价值观铸文化软实力之魂	09/11/2014
53	RMRB 2014-33	核心价值观百场讲坛第十场在北京科大举行	27/11/2014
54	RMRB 2014-34	践行核心价值观应抓好“知、情、意、行”	04/11/2014
55	RMRB 2014-35	增强核心价值观亲和力凝聚力	19/11/2014
56	RMRB 2014-36	将核心价值观教育有机融入学校工作	19/06/2014

57	RMRB 2014-37	新闻工作者践行社会主义核心价值观倡议书	31/08/2014
58	RMRB 2014-38	核心价值观经验交流会发言摘编	16/09/2014
59	RMRB 2014-39	以“六文明”把核心价值观落到实处	21/09/2014
60	RMRB 2014-40	让核心价值观之花绽放江淮大地	28/09/2014
61	RMRB 2014-41	培育和弘扬核心价值观是高校重要使命	19/06/2014
62	RMRB 2014-42	用核心价值观熔铸企业文化之魂 —— 中国南车集团公司的探索与实践	27/06/2014
63	RMRB 2014-43	全国妇联向全国家庭发出践行社会主义核心价值观倡议书	27/09/2014
64	RMRB 2014-44	发挥新闻媒体宣传核心价值观主渠道作用	30/10/2014
65	RMRB 2014-45	让社会主义核心价值观的种子在少年儿童心中生根发芽	15/05/2014
66	RMRB 2014-46	全方位推进社会主义核心价值观建设	20/09/2014
67	RMRB 2014-47	把培育和弘扬核心价值观落细落小落实	19/06/2014
68	RMRB 2015-1	有效传导社会主义核心价值观	07/05/2015
69	RMRB 2015-2	好人是一道最美风景——全国践行社会主义核心价值观弘扬好人文化巡礼	23/06/2015
70	RMRB 2015-3	核心价值观，点亮 2014	06/01/2015
71	RMRB 2015-4	以良好家风弘扬核心价值观	10/08/2015
72	RMRB 2015-5	以科学辨析把握社会主义自由观	18/05/2015
73	RMRB 2015-6	推进核心价值观建设目标化系统化品牌化	08/10/2015
74	RMRB 2015-7	核心价值观，照亮了我们的社会生活	27/02/2015
75	RMRB 2015-8	核心价值观，确定我们如何存在	07/12/2015
76	RMRB 2015-9	核心价值观建设需要良法善策	05/03/2015
77	RMRB 2015-10	核心价值观 就在你身边	28/12/2015
78	RMRB 2015-11	从“其命维新”看核心价值观自信	27/12/2015
79	RMRB 2015-12	用核心价值观培养责任公民 —— 对湖北荆门一中打造“正”文化的调研	02/04/2015
80	RMRB 2016-1	核心价值观，为中国精神凝魂固本	06/01/2016
81	RMRB 2016-2	让核心价值观建设进入网络时代	13/05/2016
82	RMRB 2016-3	用社会主义核心价值观凝心聚力——关于建设社会主义文化强国	05/05/2016
83	RMRB 2016-4	核心价值观为实现中国梦提供思想保证	10/05/2016
84	RMRB 2016-5	深刻领会核心价值观的统一性	25/03/2016
85	RMRB 2017-1	共享发展丰富社会主义平等观	22/06/2017
86	RMRB 2017-2	牢固树立社会主义生态文明观	22/11/2017
87	RMRB 2017-3	高校社团如何践行核心价值观	02/11/2017
88	RMRB 2017-4	培育社会主义核心价值观需要两手抓	03/03/2017
89	RMRB 2017-5	增强社会主义核心价值观的凝聚力引领力	11/08/2017
90	RMRB 2017-6	黄坤明：培育和践行社会主义核心价值观	17/11/2017
91	RMRB 2017-7	社会主义核心价值观贯穿民法总则草案	10/03/2017
92	RMRB 2017-8	知识分子要做践行社会主义核心价值观的模范	14/03/2017
93	RMRB 2017-9	进一步加强社会主义核心价值观网上传播	18/12/2017
94	RMRB 2017-10	让核心价值观融入社会生活	16/06/2017