

THE THREE REPRESENTS CAMPAIGN: REFORM THE PARTY OR INDOCTRINATE THE CAPITALISTS?

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The newly amended Constitution of the People's Republic of China enshrines the "Three Represents" as one of the ruling theories of China. Accordingly, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) must always represent the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China's advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. The Three Represents Campaign has long been considered to ensure that the Party expand its membership to include private entrepreneurs, redefine its societal role, modify its core tenets, and institutionalize its rule. The constitutional status of the slogans seems to corroborate that conclusion. The assertion, however, overlooks another side of the ideological movement: the CCP's desire to absorb capitalists into a preexisting Party line and to indoctrinate them with the Party orthodoxy. By doing this, the CCP is in fact strengthening its orthodox ideology so as to increase its authority and legitimacy.

Campaign to Defend Ruling Rationale

Initially brought forward in February 2000, the Three Represents theory was highlighted in Jiang Zemin's July 1, 2001, speech, which was delivered to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the CCP. In the speech, Jiang also urged that capitalists and other elites be allowed to join the Party (Jiang 2001a). Since then, explanations that the CCP would change its proletarian nature have abounded both in the media and academia (Paltiel 2001, Lawrence 2002, Saich 2002, Fewsmith 2002b). Those explanations continue to dominate academia as the

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new CCP leadership headed by Hu Jintao further promoted the Three Represents theory after it took power at the 16th National Party Congress in November 2002 (Dickson 2003, Mulvenon 2003). Commentators also argue that the decision to admit capitalists into the Party and institutionalize the Party's rule downplays the ideological role of the CCP. According to some experts, a natural outcome of the fading importance of ideology is that the CCP will become more authoritarian rather than totalitarian, commonly thought as the eve of democratization (Guo 2000: 1–32).

But a prudent reflection on the speeches of Hu and Jiang, a critical analysis of the development tracks of the Three Represents Campaign, and a systematic observation of the CCP's new policy orientation will lead political students to reach somewhat different viewpoints. It is clear that the Party's ideological role has not been reduced at all. Indeed, Zhang (1996:2) has shown that since the CCP launched its economic reform movement in late 1978, ideology has become an important vehicle for communicating regime values to the Party rank and file and to the whole population. The logic is continued as the CCP adapts its traditional ideology by assimilating new elements of China's modernizing society through the Three Represents Campaign.

New Leadership's Enhanced Ideological Efforts

The performance of the new leadership since 2002 illustrates its eagerness to maintain the dogmatic Party lines. On December 5, just days after being elected as the general secretary of the CCP, Hu Jintao went to inspect Xibaipo, a holy revolutionary land of the CCP. The trip was highly symbolic, representing the new general secretary's zeal to embrace the traditional Party line. The speech Hu made in Xibaipo, which was published one month later, emphasized that the Party leadership must keep a humble attitude and a hardworking spirit, which are called two musts (*wubi*). In the speech, Hu linked the Three Represents to the hardworking attitude and the so-called fish-water connection between the Party cadres and the masses (Hu 2003a). He did not mention the reform aspects of the Three Represents.

The disastrous severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which broke out in November 2002 in Guangdong Province and spread to Beijing and other Chinese cities in the first half of 2003, gave the new leadership another chance to highlight its image of caring for the people. On April 28, during the peak of the fight against SARS, the Politburo met to discuss the Three Represents. The theory was apparently linked to anti-SARS efforts, in which one of the Three

Represents—representing the basic interests of the majority of people—was highly stressed (*Qiushi* 2003). This move was also aimed at resuming the injured legitimacy of the Party after the government's poor response to SARS in the early period of the epidemic that deprived hundreds of their lives.

Starting in June 2003, the Chinese media have been promoting a new campaign to study the Three Represents. In Hu's speech on July 1, 2003, to mark the 82nd anniversary of the CCP, the essence of Three Represents was explained to mean that the CCP should dedicate itself to the interests of the public and govern for the benefit of the people (Hu 2003b).

Hu Jintao's highlight on studying the Three Represents has been considered by political researchers as a way to weaken the legacy and authority of Jiang Zemin (Miller 2003) or as an attempt to interject his own ideas into Jiang's theories (Fewsmith 2003).

But the conclusions are partial in that scholars have neglected Hu's emphasis on the dogmatic Party line. It is true that the new leadership launched some reform measures, such as the enactment of the Law on Administrative Licensing in August 2003 that nominally limits the government's power, the release of the Regulations of Internal Supervision of CCP in 2004, and the constitutional amendments.¹ But these reform policies, aimed at meeting new demands of the advancing market economy, are done in the pretext that the Party's monopoly hold on political power has not been weakened. The nominal limitation to the government revealed in these reform measures is aimed at limiting the abuses of power by individual officials or government organs, rather than restricting the CCP's dominance over political power. In fact, the limitation does not contradict the dogmas of a Leninist Party, which are major legitimatization resources for the CCP, because a Leninist Party must represent the people and receive the people's supervision. This view is consistent with the dogmatic side of the Three Represents theory.

But how are we to understand the protection of private property that has been written into the amended Constitution? Clearly, we should not think the new leadership has succumbed to the demands of rising capitalists. The constitutional revision has been explained mainly—both by researchers and the official media—as a way to protect the property of average people, as most urban residents now own their housing and other valuable belongings.² In addition, the

¹For details of the amendments, see *China Daily* (2004).

² See, for example, Zhao (2002), and Song (2004).

constitutional revision is at most symbolic, as the Chinese government always keeps a blind eye on appeals that certain policies or laws violate the Constitution, and the courts never use the Constitution as a basis for ruling (*The Economist* 2004). The new stipulation that the state shall make compensation for the land expropriated or requisitioned is also aimed to offer nominal protections to average people's properties. Thus, the added constitutional article on private property rights is naturally connected with the Three Represents theory, which is also written into the amended PRC Constitution.

The new leadership's emphasis on socialist ideology is a continuation of the policy of Jiang and other leaders who proposed the Three Represents Campaign.

In Jiang's July 1, 2001, speech that first clarified the Three Represents, certain theoretical shifts are apparent, such as the substitution of "the majority of the people" for "working class." Nevertheless, the tone and the expression of the speech were still identical to traditional socialist dogmas that the CCP claims to hold. That spirit was also apparent in Jiang's previous speeches on the Three Represents theory, in which Jiang, in language similar to that of his predecessors, repeatedly stressed that the Party was challenged by a new socioeconomic situation, and that it should better represent the interests of the people in the new era. In those speeches, the statements confirming the capitalists' importance, which characterized the July 1 speech, did not appear (Jiang 2001b).

The Necessity to Maintain Socialist Ideology

The efforts of Jiang and Hu to promote the traditional Party lines through the Three Represents Campaign are a result of the rising need to maintain the legitimacy of CCP's rule. Despite China's outstanding economic performance, including an average annual GDP growth rate that surpassed 9 percent in the 1990s,³ the CCP's economic reforms have actually weakened the legitimacy of the prevailing socialist ideology by introducing and expanding various forms of private ownership, encouraging income disparities, and, in some cases, causing serious corruption.

Since economic reform began in 1978, the Party's reformist leadership and its ideologues have defended the rationales for many new

³*China Statistics Yearbook 2001* (2002): 51.

policies, ranging from the rural household contract system to the leasing of state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

But since the mid-1990s, various social problems, especially rising layoffs from SOEs, have become increasingly poignant. Official statistics show that a total of 20.9 million workers lost their jobs in the state-owned and urban collective-owned sectors.⁴

The rising unemployment and rapidly widening income gap⁵ shadowed the CCP's economic legitimacy and previous justifications of the reform policies because the fruit of economic growth was not enjoyed by a large portion of population, while socialism by definition means equality and common wealth. As a Chinese political observer pointed out, "The basic rationale of socialism would be thrown into question if China had to pursue modernization at the expense of equality" (Chen 1995: 192).

The reformist Deng Xiaoping theory, which was written into the CCP's Constitution at the Party's 15th National Congress in 1997, is insufficient to meet the new demands of socioeconomic development (Hong and Sun 1999: 35) and defend against the leftists' repeated accusation. This is because the leftists' arguments were more coherent and systematic than the reform theories that remain basically contradictory to traditional socialist dogmas (Misra 2001: 143). Therefore, Deng's theory cannot offer a rational base for the reformist leadership.

According to Max Weber, there are three major types of legitimate domination: rational ground, traditional ground, and charismatic ground, of which rational ground plays the most important role in modern world (Wu 1999: 14).

For a socialist party, socialism's goals of common wealth, equal society, and the inevitable transition to communism are a natural rational ground for its ruling. But where is the rational base for China's reformist socialist leaders? For the CCP leadership, there is a demand for a rational base that incorporates reform into its traditional ideology—ideology that stresses common wealth ahead of economic performance.

That demand is revealed by empirical studies conducted in the late 1990s. A survey carried out in six Chinese cities showed that overall satisfaction with reform declined in 1999 while the percentage of

⁴*China Statistics Yearbook 2002* (2003): 117.

⁵Economists with Nankai University estimate that China's Gini coefficient reached 0.40 in 1997, indicating China's income disparity had reached a dangerous level (Wang, Hu, and Ding 2002).

those who claimed that reform was too slow decreased from 17 percent in 1991 to 12 percent in 1999 (Tang 2001: 891–909).

On the other hand, the same survey showed that political support for China's socialist system and ideology was very high. For example, about 44 percent of those surveyed—the highest percentage—did not want any change in the communist-led multiparty system while 31 percent did not care so long as life could be improved (Tang 2001: 899).

The rising dissatisfaction with reform and strong support of socialism drives the post-Deng leadership to debate the socialist nature of China's economic growth. The large-scale political campaigns that the CCP leadership under Jiang Zemin resumed, including *sanjiang* and the Three Represents Campaign, were aimed at emphasizing the socialist characteristics of the reforms. *Sanjiang*, or “Three Stresses Campaign,” which required the Party leaders to stress politics, stress learning, and stress righteousness, was a political movement urging senior Party members to discipline themselves.

Compared with Deng's pragmatism, which prioritized economic growth over ideological orthodoxy, *sanjiang* and the Three Represents theory focus more on a combination of economic achievement and socialist dogmas.

From *Sanjiang* to the Three Represents

In late 1998, the CCP leadership decided to concentrate on certain periods for the launch of the Three Stresses Campaign among the Party leaders.⁶

It is noticeable that Jiang Zemin first urged Party leaders to stress politics, the most important aspect of *sanjiang*, in 1995 (Jiang 1996: 314–18). It was not until late 1998 that the CCP leadership decided to turn *sanjiang* into a massive political campaign across the country.

Although the CCP always relies on ideological campaigns as a tool, the scale of such campaigns has been reduced since the mid-1980s (with the exception of the post-Tiananmen period between 1989 and 1991). Moreover, the direct influence of these campaigns has been

⁶“Zhongyang zhaokai dianshi dianhua huiyi dui xianji yishang lingdao dangxing dangfeng jiaoyu zuochu bushu” (“The ‘center’ held a teleconference to begin boosting Party morale among leaders higher than the county level”). *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*), December 6, 1998.

limited. But *sanjiang* and the later Three Represents Campaign have halted this trend.

Media coverage of the campaign was much more intense than reports on previous Party movements. Through *sanjiang*, several superior Party and government leaders, including Cheng Kejie (vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress) and Hu Changqing (vice-governor of Jiangxi Province) were sentenced to death for corruption.

While serving some organizational goals,⁷ *sanjiang*, together with its measures to strictly punish corrupt officials and highly praise outstanding and selfless Party members, sent a strong message that the Party was energetic and able to cleanse itself whenever possible. Corruption was not a result of systemic failure, say, lack of balance between powers, but rather a natural outcome of personal moral baseness.

While *sanjiang* was in an upsurge, the Three Represents theory—initially without a formal name—was first announced by Jiang during his inspection tour in Guangdong Province in February 2000 (Jiang 2001c: 1–6).

Zhang Quanjing, the CCP's general coordinator for the *sanjiang* campaign, said in May 2000 that the goals of *sanjiang* were consistent with the requirements of the Three Represents, and the Party leaders should implement requirements of the Three Represents throughout the Three Stresses Campaign.⁸

But where is the consistency? It lies in that the two campaigns shared a common goal of informing the public that the Party was energetic and self-adaptive.

Compared with *sanjiang*, which emphasized the disciplinary side of the Party orthodoxy, the Three Represents theory stressed the CCP's reform or development side. In other words, the Party can adjust itself to changing times because it represents the development trend of China's advanced productive forces and the orientation of China's advanced culture. Therefore, it seems that the move to allow private entrepreneurs—who are playing an increasingly important role in the

⁷Paltiel (2001) argues that the major target of *sanjiang* was to strengthen the center's control over local leaders. But if that was the dominant goal of *sanjiang*, then 1995, the year when Zhu Rongji just finished his tax reform to strengthen the center's authority, should have been a better time to launch the campaign.

⁸“Zhongyang ‘sanjiang’ jiaoyu lianxi huiyi fuzeren Zhang Quanjing qiangdiao: ba xuexi guanche ‘sange daibiao’ sixiang guanchuan ‘sanjiang’ jiaoyu quanguocheng” (“Zhang Quanjing, the central coordinator of the three stresses education, emphasizes: Implement the learning of the three represents thought throughout the three stresses educational activities”). *Xinhua*, May 30, 2000.

Chinese economy—to join the Party can be explained as the CCP’s reform measure to advance economic development.

However, Party membership is never unconditional. Anyone who wishes to join the Party must vow that he or she will accept the CCP’s basic principles, such as struggling for communism throughout one’s whole life. That is perhaps why Jiang Zemin never neglects the word “eligible” and always stresses that Party members should continue to adhere to socialist principles when called on to accept private entrepreneurs into the Party.

In his July 1 speech, while authorizing capitalists to join the Party, Jiang Zemin reiterated that Party cadres should be the first to bear hardships, help others, and the last to enjoy themselves, instead of only thinking about how to get rich. Although the call is nothing more than a repetition of the CCP dogmas, its significance is notable in light of the fact that capitalists are now able to join the Party.

This focus has been noticed. In his recent study on the Three Represents, Dickson (2003) cited an article of a Central Party School professor as saying that the ideological campaign means that not all people in each status deserve to join the Party; only the truly outstanding ones who also meet the other criteria of Party membership are qualified. But Dickson failed to explore this aspect.

In fact, the other criteria that capitalists must meet have been clearly stressed by senior Party officials. The most noticeable one is given by Liang Jinqun, Party secretary of the All China Federation of Industry and Commerce, a government-controlled organization consisting of private entrepreneurs. In stating how to represent the interests of the people, Liang (2001) said:

For [businesspersons in] the non-public economies, to realize the interests of the people is to fully consider social benefits, serve the country, and contribute to the society when they make their own profits and pursue their economic benefits. . . . Particularly speaking, [private entrepreneurs] should first of all better operate their enterprises to produce more quality products for the society, create more social wealth and generate more jobs; second, [private entrepreneurs] should self-consciously obey the law and social ethics, . . . correctly deal with the relationship between laborers and capitalists, care for employees, safeguard their legal rights, and purchase social and medical insurance for them so as to be responsible for the society; third, [private entrepreneurs] should think of the origin of their wealth, . . . care and help the multitude in difficulty, support the “western development strategy” [*xibu dakaiifa*] and the economic, education, health and cultural advancements in poor regions, and help others get rich, so as to play a positive role in

eliminating poverty and fueling economic development and social progress of poor regions.

The criteria significantly enhance the “socialist” nature of the capitalists. It is not strange at all that capitalists are correspondingly branded as the “builders of socialism” in the amended PRC Constitution.

Also, by allowing capitalists to join the Party, the CCP can better control the booming private sector, for it is clear that a basic eligibility requirement for capitalists is that they unconditionally obey the Party’s rule. In fact, when the Three Represents theory was initially put forward, Jiang Zemin linked it to the need of strengthening the Party’s leadership in the nonpublic sector (Jiang 2001d: 7–26). Since then, that perspective has been further developed by the Party ideologues (Dai 2000, Lin 2002). The CCP Organizational Department officials even proposed to send Party members to private enterprises to lead the Party’s membership campaign.⁹

Other Measures to Safeguard the Party Line

However, the looming connotation of the campaign—preserving the reform’s socialist nature—is not sufficient to ensure the CCP’s goal of increasing its legitimacy based on traditional socialist dogmas and the urgency to further economic development. For the CCP leadership, it is clear that other measures are necessary.

Ideologically, the CCP leadership may be aware of the difficulty to convince the masses that the Party would tame capitalists to “represent their interests.” After all, by allowing capitalists to join the Party, the CCP appears to be giving up its socialist beliefs.

Perhaps out of this consideration, the Party’s propaganda department issued a series of requirements guiding and regulating the media’s reports of the Three Represents theory. In July 2001, all central level media were notified that, in reporting on the July 1 speech and the Three Represents theory, all articles must be guided by talking points (*koujing*) that glorified the Party’s historical achievements and exalted its ability to develop with the times. It was strictly prohibited to interpret the July 1 speech otherwise, especially if that meant

⁹Zhang Quanjing, former coordinator of *sanjiang* and now chairman of National Society of Party Building Research, made the proposal at a seminar to discuss Party building in the private sector. The event was held by *Qiushi*, the Party journal, in Guangdong Province in October 2003.

interpreting it to mean that the Party was admitting private bosses, or that the Party was giving up its working-class base.

The CCP leadership seemed very sensitive to any accusation that the Three Represents theory, which provided for basis for allowing private entrepreneurs to join the Party, was inconsistent with socialist dogma. The closedown of two leftist magazines *Zhenli de Zhuiqiu* (*Quest for Truth*) and *Zhongliu* (*Mainstream*) in 2001 could be so understood.

Accompanying the measures to encourage private entrepreneurs to embrace the symbolic socialist principle of common wealth are the CCP's increased efforts to improve China's weak social security system to appease the marginalized working classes. Expenditures in the central budget for social security programs in 2001 totaled \$11.9 billion, 5.18 times the figure for 1998, according to the then Finance Minister Xiang Huaicheng (Xiang 2002: 6). The government budget report delivered by the new Finance Minister Jin Renqing in March 2004 indicated that in 2003, in addition to the continued growth of the central and local governments' expenditure on social security programs, a special fund of \$567.6 million was established in the central budget for transfer payments to local governments to support reemployment programs (Jin 2004).

Meanwhile, the CCP also imposed severe punishments on some rich private entrepreneurs after Premier Zhu Rongji reportedly commented in June 2002 that many private entrepreneurs evaded tax.¹⁰

The first victim was the famous actress and millionaire Liu Xiaqing who was arrested in July 2002 for tax evasion. Yang Rong, former chairman of New York-listed China Brilliance Auto Co Ltd, and Yang Bin, former chairman of Shenyang-based Euroasia and the second richest billionaire in China listed by *Forbes* in 2001, were also ranked as state asset embezzlers and tax evaders. Yang Rong fled to the United States after Liaoning provincial authorities were warned to arrest him in late 2002, and Yang Bin was sentenced to 18 years of imprisonment, plus a fine of \$277,100 in July 2003.

In October 2003, Sun Dawu, an outspoken billionaire in Hebei Province, was convicted of illegally accepting almost \$20 million in deposits. He was sentenced to three years in jail with a suspension of four years and a fine of roughly \$12,000.

Never before have there been the concentrated arrests and

¹⁰The report on Zhu's reproach first appeared in the Hong Kong media, and Guangzhou-based *Nanfang Dushibao* (*Southern Urban News*) was the first domestic media to quote Zhu's words. See *Nanfang Dushibao* (2002).

sentences of private tycoons in China since the reform was launched in late 1970s, indicating a symbolic intention to warn private entrepreneurs not to deviate from socialist symbols of common wealth, and to inform the public that the Party would not tolerate the widening income gap.

Long-Term Impacts of the Campaign

Will the Three Represents Campaign, as an ideological effort with traditional Party dogmas, influence the CCP's practical economic policymaking? My answer is there can hardly be an overall impact, despite the certain (mostly symbolic) measures I have mentioned. The internal and external pressures the Party faces will push the CCP leadership to continue its economic reforms. Domestically, the low efficiency of the state-owned sector is well understood by the leadership, while the private economy is enjoying a growing share of the GDP and contributing more tax revenues to the state.¹¹ The state-owned and collective-owned sectors are unable to offer enough jobs to China's huge population, while the energetic private sector is absorbing more and more workers.¹²

Internationally, China's accession to the World Trade Organization will further spread national treatment and a fairer policy environment for the private sector, leading to its further development (Mao 2002).

Yet measures that nurture the private sector in China do not indicate that the CCP leadership wishes to adopt a systematic change, such as large-scale privatization. It is more likely that the CCP leaders are engaged in a short-run problem-solving scheme, at least in the field of ideology (Chen 1995: 5). The CCP would never give up its ruling ideologies, even when it aims to further capitalist reforms. As one scholar argues, in the field of ideology, there must be a point at which, by abandoning a particularly cherished principle or embracing a previously derided theory, an ideology loses its identity or, perhaps, is absorbed into a rival ideology (Heywood 1998: 14).

¹¹There are no accurate statistics on the private sector's contribution to GDP. It is reported that in 2001, the private sector (not including self-employed businesses) realized a total production value of \$240.1 billion—20 percent of GDP (*Renmin Ribao* 2002: 1). However, economists estimate that the nonstate sector's share of GDP is much higher when self-employed business, foreign-invested firms, and private firms registered as collectives are included.

¹²Statistics show that between 1998 and 2001, jobs created by businesses registered as private enterprises increased from 9.73 million to 15.27 million in urban areas and from 7.37 million to 11.87 million in rural areas (*China Statistics Yearbook* 2002: 117). If we consider the many private enterprises that are registered as collectives, the actual number will be much higher.

The CCP leadership must have a clear awareness of the danger. Thus, although the Party ideology can no longer be used to guide economic policy (Wang and Zheng 2000: 10), policies must not obviously contradict the Party orthodoxy. When policies threaten the ideological foundation of the Party's rule, the CCP leadership will find ways to safeguard the ruling ideology, either by abandoning a particular policy, or by absorbing the policy into its traditional ideological framework. The Three Represents Campaign embodies the second approach, which will become increasingly common as the cost of abandoning certain policies has become too high.

Conclusion

Although the CCP could symbolically incorporate private entrepreneurs into its ideological orthodoxy through the Three Represents Campaign, the Party's ability to drive private entrepreneurs to embrace that orthodoxy has become very limited. One reason is that the Party's membership has not been attractive enough in contemporary China. In addition, the CCP's reluctance to extend a strengthened traditional orthodoxy from the ideological field to factual policymaking out of fear that economic development might be curbed will also reduce the ideological effect of the Three Represents Campaign. Finally, the CCP has been unable to fully implement its policy from the center to local levels, let alone the blurry ideological call to consolidate orthodox socialist principles among capitalists.

Given those reasons, the ideological effect of the campaign can hardly last long. The Party will have to continue its pragmatic policies in economic and social fields and will possibly launch massive ideological campaigns like the Three Represents once it detects other threats to its legitimacy.

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