

## **China's President Hu Jintao's Rhetoric of Socialization**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

China's current president, Hu Jintao, faces a dilemma. How does a Chinese leader retain Party loyalty and at the same time exert leadership for a new era in which the Party line may be perceived by many as being outmoded? He will face it by following the model of Deng Xiaoping – whatever he does will be done with Chinese characteristics. The purpose of this paper is to examine Hu's rhetoric to determine the nature of his discourse in light of Kenneth Burke's concept of the rhetoric of socialization. I have dealt earlier with this concept in the rhetoric of China's discourse in international relations with reference to the first Gulf Conflict in the United Nations (Heisey, 1999). Burke's notion is that rhetorical construction consists of "ways of identification that contribute variously to social cohesion (either for the advantage of the community as a whole, or for the advantage of special groups whose interests are a burden on the community)..." (Burke, 1952: 44).

Rhetoric results in division as well as cohesion. In Burke's terms, rhetoric ideally should bring about cohesiveness in human society rather than the divisiveness brought about by such rhetoric as Hitler's. My purpose in the present paper is to apply this concept to the rhetoric of Hu Jintao to determine if he continues using the same rhetorical strategy for the purpose of enhancing China's position in the world at large as well as in its domestic development path.

The paper provides a background on President Hu, an analysis of his domestic policy, his foreign policy – referencing recent work on the rhetoric of his predecessors – and a conclusion of what Hu's leadership no doubt will provide as he continues the Chinese rhetoric of socialization, especially in international affairs.

### **PRESIDENT HU JINTAO'S BACKGROUND**

President Hu Jintao was born in December 1942 in Jixi, Anhui Province, which is an inland province located between the two cities of Shanghai and Wuhan, in the central area of the country. At the age of 22 he joined the Communist Party of China and after graduating from Tsinghua University's Department of Engineering, began work as a political instructor in that department and later worked with the Ministry of Water Conservancy in its Liujia Gorge Engineering Bureau. During the Cultural Revolution he was a technician and secretary of a sub-bureau until he became secretary of the Gansu Provincial Construction Committee.

During the 1980s he served as vice chairman of the Gansu Provincial Construction Committee, and then secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, and finally secretary of the Guizhou Provincial Party Committee (“Hu Jintao,” 2002). From 1988 to 1992 he was “secretary of the Party Committee of Tibet Autonomous Region and thus presided over the imposition of martial law in March 1989 following a series of pro-independence demonstrations in the Tibetan capital” (Tibet Information Network, 2001).

During the 1990s he served as a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, became a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee and in 1999 became the vice president of the People’s Republic. In March of 2003 he was elected president of the People’s Republic (“Hu Jintao,” 2002).

At the personal level, not a lot is known about Hu. He is believed to have “a photographic memory and prefers to memorize his speeches, likes movies and opera, plays table tennis and enjoys dancing. He is married to his university schoolmate and has a son and daughter, but their names and ages are unknown to the public.” He has never served in the military, though he has been second in command of the Central Military Commission since 1999 (Lunev, 2002).

### **PRESIDENT HU’S SOCIALIZATION POLITICALLY**

As with every recent Chinese leader, Hu was groomed for his present job. It is reported that Deng Xiaoping himself selected Hu to be an eventual leader following Jiang Zemin (Lunev, 2002). In this sense Hu is considered a “grandson” of Deng, so he has this role to play in following the Party line and Deng’s policy of economic reform. At the same time, Hu is considered a “son” of Jiang Zemin, so the expectations are doubly secured for what kind of leader Hu is to be. As one China expert has said, “Jiang Zemin has really set the mold for the kind of leader China wants right now: a businessman, low key, not particularly political, not abrasive, very sober and very careful... They want a man in a gray flannel suit” (Terrell, 2003).

In short, Hu “has been groomed for top leadership for the past decade” (Yahoo News, 2003) and can be expected to follow largely in the steps of his predecessor both domestically and in foreign affairs. This grooming included “handling increasingly demanding tasks meant to test him and prepare him for leadership. Most recently, he held top party management posts handling promotions and other sensitive business” (CBS News, 2003). One of the tasks Jiang assigned him in 1999 was to handle the case of Liu Junning, a liberal researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who was accused of advocating “bourgeois liberalism.” Hu “quickly instructed party scholars to write articles to criticize ‘bourgeois liberalism,’ however, he made it clear that only five such essays should be written and they should be published by one national newspaper only. Apparently, Hu didn’t want to repeat a nationwide campaign to attack ‘bourgeois liberalism’ as was the case in the 1980s” (Yao Jin, 2001).

### **PRESIDENT HU’S RHETORIC OF SOCIALIZATION IN DOMESTIC POLICY**

In domestic policy, Hu can be expected to provide continuity in China’s approach to economic reform and the swing toward capitalism, while at the same time continuing a policy of maintaining firm control of the slow process of democratization. In this way he will lead with the rhetoric of social cohesion. One China critic has concluded, “we cannot expect any substantive changes in Red China’s policy” (Lunev, 2002). However, there are hints that changes could come some time in the future. It is known that Hu “has favored the adoption of

a Western-style civil service system, including the public recruitment of relatively senior officials. He is also said to be interested in borrowing the ideas and organization principles of European-style social democratic parties. The Beijing academics said, however, the vice-president would keep the liberal ideas to himself until he felt confident about his grip on power – a process that could take a few years” (CNN, 2002).

One of the major policies that Jiang Zemin initiated during his presidency was an emphasis on developing the western provinces. Up until a few years ago the major beneficiaries of the economic boom were the eastern and southeastern zones and major cities. Jiang went out of his way to advance the provinces in the west. Zhao Qizheng said, “Currently, China is undertaking the mammoth task of developing its huge western and great northwestern regions, which naturally reminds Chinese of the similar American experience almost two centuries before” (Zhao Qizheng, 2000). Hu is committed to continuing this emphasis. He claims that the first two stages of Deng Xiaoping’s development strategy have been completed ahead of schedule and the third, to “realize modernization by the middle of the century,” is currently in progress. In the coming five years, Hu says China will build 10,000 kilometers of highway, increase power generation by 52,000 megawatts and crude oil reserve by 95 million tons and natural gas by 37 billion cubic meters (Hu Jintao, 2001).

One of the extensions of the development policy Hu is expected to advance is reducing poverty. One Western diplomat said, “On internal issues, Hu and the new team have taken over more quickly and efficiently than anyone expected, the basics of policy are the same but there’s a new special focus on poverty” (Rosenthal, 2003). Hu’s emphasis on reducing poverty is seen in the way he reports that “the socialist market economy” has been effective in recent years by reducing the number of rural poor from 250 million to 30 million (Hu Jintao, 2002). But he is nevertheless realistic in acknowledging that in light of “its large population, weak economic foundation and inadequate development, China remains a developing country. It will take long and persevered efforts to turn it really into a strong and prosperous nation” (Hu Jintao, 2001).

In order to meet the “rising discontent among the poor in both the cities and the countryside, who have not shared in China’s economic miracle,” Hu has “promised that his administration will focus on the needs of these ‘disadvantaged groups’” (Rosenthal, 2003). Hu, having “spent long years in China’s destitute interior, will do more than Jiang did to lift growth in those areas,” analysts have speculated (Yahoo News, 2003).

Another area of emphasis for Hu is the policy of preserving the environment within economic gain. While Hu was still vice president, he visited southwest China’s Yunnan province to urge China’s policy of speeding up “western development by accelerating key infrastructure construction.” He asked them to “build more small, fast-completed infrastructure projects that yield quick economic results and bring handsome benefits to farmers.” At the same time, Hu told local officials there “protecting the environment should also be a priority during economic development” (*China Daily*, 2002).

A final area of domestic policy for which President Hu will provide continuity is the firm control of the process of democratization. Hu’s own history on this issue is well established. While he served as party secretary in Tibet in 1989, demonstrations broke out and Hu immediately “declared martial law and called in the Chinese army on March 7, 1989. Hundreds of people were killed or tortured by Hu’s paramilitary police and dozens of political prisoners [who were] sentenced during his tenure remain locked up today” (Lunev, 2002). Later, Hu “became the first provincial leader to send his congratulations to CCP central leadership for massacring several thousand people in and around Tiananmen Square.” It is speculated that Hu’s “willingness to use military force to back up CCP rule is what caused

Chinese paramount leader Deng Xiaoping to pick him as Beijing's next ruler after Jiang" (Lunev, 2002).

It is clear that Hu can be counted on to keep a firm hand on the priority of stability in the process of democratization.

## **PRESIDENT HU'S RHETORIC OF SOCIALIZATION IN FOREIGN POLICY**

In foreign policy matters Hu has been trained to follow the Party line. During the time of his vice presidency, he was tested in several incidents for his leadership. In 1999 when the U.S. bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, "Hu was the government's public face, making his first major speech on Chinese television during anti-U.S. and British rioting that followed, despite Washington's insistence that it was a mistake" (CBS News, 2003). In this speech he said, "the United States will never give up its attempt to subjugate China," but "urged the angry students and Beijing residents who were throwing rocks at the American Embassy to get back to their studies and jobs" (Yao Jin, 2001). Hu handled a second incident in 2001 when there was "a tense standoff with the United States after a U.S. military surveillance plane made a forced landing on Hainan island after a mid-air collision with a Chinese fighter jet" (CBS News, 2003).

There will be more continuity than change in foreign policy; the history of the Chinese leadership demonstrates this fact time and again. In a recent study of foreign policy arguments (Heisey, 2002), I have shown that throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese leaders have developed a coherent and cohesive policy with respect to foreign affairs and the position of China in the international arena. Though the thread of continuity has been strong, there has been some change in the development that moves in the direction of greater cohesiveness in foreign relations. Sun Yat-sen in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century argued for "rising up" against the foreign invaders to establish China's "nationalism." Mao Zedong argued for "class struggle" to bring about an internal as well as external "independence." Deng Xiaoping argued for "groping the stones" to find the best way to build "economic pragmatism." Jiang Zemin argued for a "path of development" that would be based upon "strategic partnership" with the West.

These arguments for China's role in the world of nations have been culturally based and President Hu follows in the same line of thinking. As the Chinese leaders have followed religiously the pattern of international relations of the five principles of peaceful co-existence, President Hu in a speech on May 1, 2002, cited the same principles. He said, "China adheres to the independent foreign policy of peace and actively develops friendly relations and cooperation with all countries on the basis of such basic principles as mutual respect for sovereignty, and territorial integrity, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit" (Hu Jintao, 2002).

The most important principle in determining the rhetoric of socialization is that Hu seems to be satisfied to defer to former President Jiang Zemin on the priority issues of foreign policy and military affairs. Rosenthal (2003) claims that Jiang "will not cede for now to the new administration, particularly those involving foreign policy and the military." Jiang retains control of the military as head of the Central Military Commission and has made it clear that there "should be no attempt to re-assess government decisions concerning certain sensitive issues: the 1989 military crackdown on pro-democracy student demonstrators in Tiananmen Square and the suppression of the Falun Gong meditation practice, banned in 1999." Diplomats say that Hu "has shown little interest in having a voice in foreign policy" (Rosenthal, 2003).

The fact that Hu will continue the commitment to the five principles of international relations that China has been known for, and is deferring to Jiang Zemin in foreign affairs and military decision-making, confirms that Hu is committed to the principle of socialization in international affairs. In an important speech Hu gave on May 1, 2002, he reiterated the principles of “constructive and cooperative relationship between China and the US” that Presidents Jiang and Bush agreed upon together. Hu went further to elaborate his own interpretation of these principles, stressing the importance of dialogue: “I have had candid and constructive dialogues with President Bush, Vice President Cheney and other U.S. leaders on bilateral relations and issues of mutual interest...” (Hu Jintao, 2002).

He argued, “the two sides should step up their high-level strategic dialogues” in order to enhance “mutual understanding and trust and developing constructive and cooperative bilateral relations.” He commended both sides for the “effective dialogue” already conducted and called for more such dialogue in more areas. Even though the history and traditions are different, “...we can,” he continued, “through dialogue on an equal footing, increase our understanding, expand areas of agreement and gradually reduce our differences” (Hu Jintao, 2002). “Dialogue” is one of President Hu’s favorite words. He used it at least five times in this speech.

Hu said in another speech (2001), in the context of addressing a British audience, “China is committed to opening still wider to the outside world in an all-directional and multi-tiered way, with an even more active approach.” Hu is seeking to set even wider parameters for extending the dialogue in the world community.

In summary, Hu’s rhetoric of socialization in foreign policy is based upon the three elements of his continuing in the line of cultural arguments that his predecessors followed for China’s role of independence, his deferring to Jiang Zemin in foreign policy and military leadership, and his emphasizing the importance of dialogue in working out a strategic and constructive relationship with the U.S.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has described the background of President Hu Jintao of China. As an engineer who came up through the Party bureaucracy, he was anointed by Deng Xiaoping to be the successor of Jiang Zemin. He earned his credentials by taking a hard line in Tibet and supporting the crackdown at Tiananmen. Hu has achieved socialization in a personal way politically by being groomed for his present position for ten years. He is considered the “grandson” of Deng Xiaoping and the “son” of Jiang Zemin and owes his present position to those two leaders. Identifying personally with these two previous leaders affords him the advantage of having a strong ethos for the socialization process.

Burke’s concept of the rhetoric of socialization, which achieves identification through social cohesion for the advantage of the community as a whole, was shown to be functioning in Hu’s rhetoric in domestic policy in following Jiang’s emphasis on developing the western provinces, but extends it to include the disadvantaged poor in the rural areas everywhere and emphasizes a goal of respecting the environment in the process. This would be an example of Burke’s concept of building social cohesion also “for the advantage of special groups whose interests are a burden on the community.”

In foreign affairs, Hu’s rhetoric was shown to continue the socialization process with the West by following the established policy of strategic partnership through more effective and extensive dialogue with the US and other regions of the world. Hu’s linguistic emphasis on China’s dialogue with the US as equal partners is a rhetorical strategy that constructs a social cohesion, advantaging the whole international community. The concept of dialogue

permits the holding of differences and thus conforms to Deng Xiaoping's notion of strategic pragmatism with Chinese characteristics.

Thus, the new generation of Chinese leadership in the person of Hu Jintao may be seen to be grounded firmly in the Party line, while extending the established commitment to a socialist market economy to include additional geographical regions and economically disadvantaged classes of people, and continuing to express and solidify the rhetoric of socialization for which China has been known. China is building its cohesiveness with the international community as it builds its own economic and democratic regime with Chinese characteristics.

One critic plays on the words of a Chinese proverb to describe Hu Jintao's approach; he is "the bird that keeps its head down" (Yao Jin, 2001). There are signs, however, as has been noted, that Hu will attempt to put his own stamp on his leadership without sticking his head up too far. Yao Jin supports this view when he argues, "as a leader of a new generation, Hu will show himself as a force for faster political and economic change in the second five years of his rule when Jiang and other party elders are too old to exert their influence" (Yao Jin, 2001).

Finally, one personal element that supports his rhetoric of socialization that may give President Hu additional credibility at home and abroad is his apparent leadership style that he seems to be developing. One critic has called it "a new down-to-earth leadership style, refusing to take part in the ribbon cuttings that were standard fare for many years. While Mr. Jiang was wont to be photographed at economic summit meetings and on visits to high technology development zones, Mr. Hu has been seen talking to herders in snowy Mongolia or trudging through a farmer's muddy field" (Rosenthal, 2003). One report in *The People's Daily* confirmed the deep impression Hu made on locals, when it quoted a restaurant manager as saying, "It is a powerful demonstration of him retaining a flesh and blood bond with the people" (Rosenthal, 2003).

Hu appears to be taking a more populist stance than Jiang that suggests the historic approach of Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles of the People" ("nationalism, people's power, people's livelihood") (Lam, 2003). When addressing a Party Central Committee early in 2003, Hu told the ideological study session, "Power must be used for the sake of the people." Lam continues, "By arguing that the CCP must represent 'the most advanced productivity and culture,' Jiang's motto has laid the theoretic basis for the enablement of the 'new classes' of private businessmen and professionals, and while Hu still cites the Three Represents theory in public speeches, the Jiang shibboleth has to all intents and purposes been displaced by Hu's populist sayings."

This attempt at personal identification with the people is an important dimension of President Hu's rhetorical approach of building social cohesion between leader and people. Hu's personal leadership style and his public policies of domestic economic development and relations with the international community are all directed toward social cohesiveness, offering a striking illustration of Burke's rhetorical concept.

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