The PRC’s 60th Anniversary: The Making of Legitimacy

20/08/2009  Florian Schneider & Jay Hwang
Overview

• The Concept of Legitimacy and Chinese Politics
• Discourse Analysis of Staged Events
• The PRC’s 60th Anniversary in Perspective
  → Maoist Traditions and the Symbols of Power
  → Tales of Modernity and Welfare
  → Appealing to Patriotic Sentiments
  → Expanding the Narrative: Revival of Traditions
• (Preliminary) Conclusions
Legitimacy and Chinese Politics

• The Concept of Legitimacy:

  → Max Weber:
  Legitimacy is the chance to attain acceptance for specific commands or a general political order from a given group of persons.

• Non-normative concept:
  The question is not, whether a political order is morally acceptable or adheres to preconceived standards of efficiency.

• Consequent question:
  How do political actors create acceptance for their actions and the system they represent?
Legitimacy and Chinese Politics

• Explaining “Authoritarian Resilience”:

  ➡️ Traditional Explanations:
  • Legitimacy through ideology (Marxism-Leninism-Maoism).
  • Legitimacy through nationalism and national glory.
  • Legitimacy through welfare (economic growth).

  ➡️ Recent Additional Arguments:
  • Legitimacy through improved governance.
  • Legitimacy through co-operation with ("co-option" of?) a wide range of social groups (such as business elites and religious groups).
Discourse Analysis of Staged Events

• The Concept of Discourse:

Analyzing Political Communication Processes:

• Discourse: Communication practices that over time establish what is commonly held to be true.

• Discourses are created and held in place by power relations.

• Discourses can be expressed in various areas of society (homes, schools, bars, newspapers, government agencies, universities, etc.).

• Discourses are expressed through all possible forms of communication (speech, writing, images, sounds, music, gestures, architecture, etc.).
Discourse Analysis of Staged Events

- Staged Events and Performance:

  ➤ **Ritualizing Discourse:**

  - Staged events reach a broad range of audiences in various ways (first-hand witnesses, secondary audiences, tertiary audiences).

  - Staged events assemble discourses, usually in a accessible and easily communicated way (through rituals and symbols).

  - Staged events make use of mass-communication, relaying their message through a broad range of different media types.
Discourse Analysis of Staged Events

- Focus of Analysis:
  - Qualitative Analysis of:
    - Main festivities (military and civilian parades).
    - Film and TV contributions.
    - Newspaper and magazine features.
    - “Activities” surrounding the anniversary.
The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

- Maoist Traditions and the Symbols of the Nation:
  - Rituals of Power and Service:
    - Demonstrating the ability to provide security.
    - Creating a sense of unity.
Legitimacy and the PRC’s 60th Anniversary

The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

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→ Rituals of Power and Service:

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The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

• Maoist Traditions and the Symbols of the Nation:

  ➔ Rituals of Power and Service:

  1984

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The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

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1999
Legitimacy and the PRC’s 60th Anniversary

The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

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The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

- Maoist Traditions and the Symbols of the Nation:

  Rituals of Power and Servitude:

  1984
  “Hello Comrades!”
  “Hello Chief!”

  • Demonstrating benevolence.
Legitimacy and the PRC’s 60th Anniversary

The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

• Maoist Traditions and the Symbols of the Nation:
  → Rituals of Power and Servitude:

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“You’ve been working hard!”
“We serve the people!”

• Demonstrating benevolence.
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- Demonstrating benevolence.
The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

• Maoist Traditions and the Symbols of the Nation: Re-Inventing the Foundation’s Spirit:

• Mao-Blockbuster (release date: 10 September 2009).
Legitimacy and the PRC’s 60th Anniversary

The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

• Tales of Culture, Modernity and Welfare:
  ➔ The Civilian Parade:
  • Organized by the same team that worked on the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony 2008.
  • Zhang Yimou likely to promote similar ideas?
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  • Harmony (和谐)
  • Environmentalism (绿色)
  • Science and Technology (科技)

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Legitimacy and the PRC’s 60th Anniversary

The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

• Appealing to Patriotic Sentiments:

  → Public Displays of Affection for the Nation:

  • Highlighting the advances in Chinese society.

  • Congratulating the nation to its “birthday”.

• Poems sent in via SMS and displayed in the metro.
The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

- Telling the Personal Stories:
  
  → Series of Family Tales in the “New Capital Daily”:
  
  • Lives of ordinary Beijing citizens as mirrors to China’s history.
  
  • Stories of welfare and improvement
  
  • Selective narratives that place the desired emphases on certain periods of the PRC’s history rather than on others.
Legitimacy and the PRC’s 60th Anniversary

The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

• Expanding the Narrative: Revival of Traditions:

  → Bringing the Sage back:

  • “Confucius” - Film directed by Hu Mei.
Legitimacy and the PRC’s 60th Anniversary

The 60th Anniversary in Perspective

• Expanding the Narrative: Revival of Traditions:

  → Bringing the Sage back:

  • “Confucius” – TV drama on CCTV.
(Preliminary) Conclusion

• 60th Anniversary of 30 Years Modern China?

  ➡️ Re-enforcing the Old Ideological Base of Legitimacy:
  • Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong,
  • Tales of a Progressive Modernity,
  • Tales of National Greatness.

  ➡️ Expanding the Base of Legitimacy:
  • Institutional changes and inclusion of new actors.
  • Re-arranging the ideological legacy and re-interpreting some of its concepts (for instance: welfare).
  • Reviving traditional concepts to pre-empt other social groups from doing so.

  ➡️ Resistance to Dominant Discourses is Possible:
  • Any legitimacy base can be attacked, even a broad one.
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