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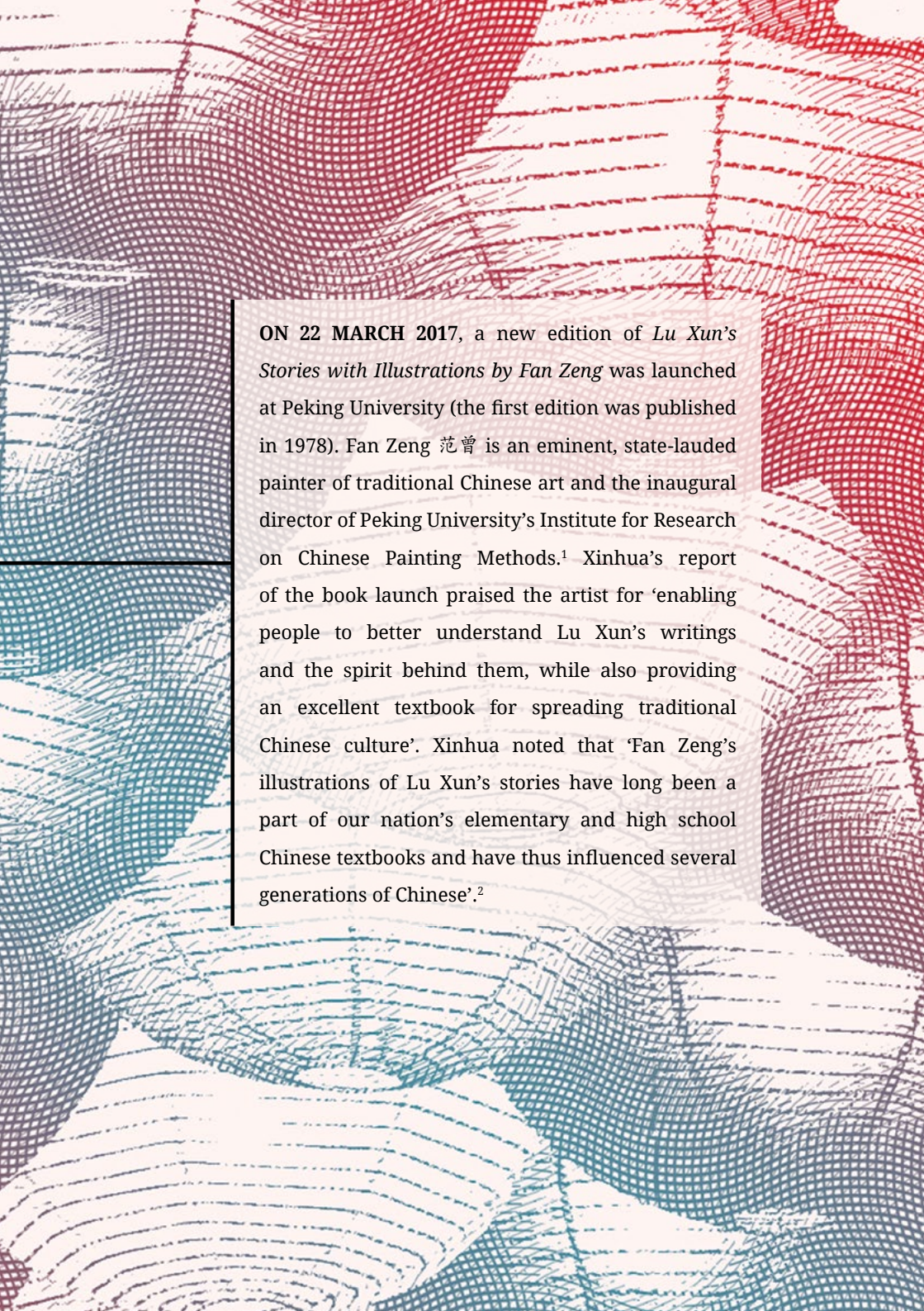
## PROSPER OR PERISH

Gloria Davies

**Red and gold lanterns: a prosperous future**

Source: Joe Sampouw, Flickr





ON 22 MARCH 2017, a new edition of *Lu Xun's Stories with Illustrations by Fan Zeng* was launched at Peking University (the first edition was published in 1978). Fan Zeng 范曾 is an eminent, state-lauded painter of traditional Chinese art and the inaugural director of Peking University's Institute for Research on Chinese Painting Methods.<sup>1</sup> Xinhua's report of the book launch praised the artist for 'enabling people to better understand Lu Xun's writings and the spirit behind them, while also providing an excellent textbook for spreading traditional Chinese culture'. Xinhua noted that 'Fan Zeng's illustrations of Lu Xun's stories have long been a part of our nation's elementary and high school Chinese textbooks and have thus influenced several generations of Chinese'.<sup>2</sup>

Posthumously extolled by Mao Zedong as ‘the sage of modern China’ 现代中国的圣人, Lu Xun (1881–1936), who during his lifetime was widely acknowledged as China’s leading writer, has occupied in death a position of unique authority in modern Chinese letters. Mao began praising Lu Xun in 1937 to lend prestige to the Chinese Communist cause. Thereafter, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has continued to quote the author and to claim him as its champion. However, Lu Xun never joined the Party and was renowned for criticising state power (the state of his time was the Kuomintang government under Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石, whom he loathed) and CCP doctrine and propaganda (which he warned his leftist acolytes against parroting). Accordingly, Lu Xun has also remained a favourite of independent-minded intellectuals and is frequently quoted by them. To this day, the writer’s contested legacy remains a key topic of discussion in mainland intellectual circles.

## Flourishing in Xi’s China

Fan began illustrating Lu Xun’s stories in 1977. Since then, he has produced large numbers of highly stylised depictions of characters and scenes from the stories. He has played an important role in aestheticising CCP propaganda as cultural history. Fan is renowned for depicting bucolic scenes from Chinese history and folklore, and for presenting legendary figures such as Qu Yuan 屈原 and Zhong Kui 钟馗 in heroic postures resembling the fierce-browed peasants and workers of Maoist poster art. His illustrations of Lu Xun’s stories are equally stylised. Of the forty-six images in the 2017 volume, one depicts a key scene from the famous 1924 story titled 祝福, ‘seeking blessings for prosperity’. The story is more commonly known in English as ‘The New Year’s Sacrifice’. Unlike Lu Xun’s original title, the English translation tells us the timing of the ritual but not its purpose.

In China, ‘prosperity’ as *fu* 福 is linked to destiny or fate, *ming* 命, either of an individual or family, and good fortune is understood to be

determined by the karmic consequences of one's actions in this life or previous lives. In Lu Xun's story, the pursuit of prosperity is presented as a selfish act driven by fear of bad luck. The main character, Xianglin's Wife, is an illiterate peasant woman who is shunned by everyone after being struck by personal tragedy. Known only by her dead first husband's name, Xianglin's Wife was forced into a second marriage. Her unnamed second husband then dies from typhoid and a wolf eats her young son. Although some are initially sympathetic to her plight, their patience wears thin when she repeats her story *ad nauseum*. She becomes inauspicious and a nuisance.

The Lu family for whom she works as a servant forbids her from assisting with the preparation of Lunar New Year food offerings for the God of Prosperity 福神. Denied a role in this auspicious ritual, her mental health further deteriorates. She is dismissed and dies a homeless beggar.

In Fan Zeng's depiction of the scene from which the story derives its title, Xianglin's Wife is a straight-backed young woman of calm and pleasant countenance who, as she stands before the Lu family altar, is hailed from behind by a fat old woman, her right hand raised as if to command her to desist and her left hand holding prayer beads. Behind the old woman stands an old man with a scraggly beard, ugly and thin, his body bent forward in anger. In writing this story, Lu Xun's focus was on how quickly the fortunate tire of the unfortunate.

Lu Xun's story ends with the male narrator expressing relief that the New Year festivities had dispelled the unease Xianglin's Wife had aroused in him. He felt that the townsfolk's ample sacrificial offerings would see



Fan Zeng's illustration of 'The New Year's Sacrifice'

Source: Sohu



them bestowed with ‘boundless good fortune’ in the year ahead.<sup>3</sup> In the 1940s, CCP operatives collaborated with left-wing artists in Shanghai to create the Yue opera 越剧 ‘Xianglin’s Wife’. This communist adaptation erased all nuance from Lu Xun’s story and turned it into an indictment of ‘feudal’ oppression instead. In 1955, an award-winning film version of Lu Xun’s story was made. In the film’s final scene, as Xianglin’s Wife collapses in the snow, a male narrator intones:

A diligent and kind woman, Xianglin’s Wife dropped dead after having endured numerous miseries and mistreatments. This happened over forty years ago. Yes, this was an event in the past. Fortunately, those times have finally passed and will never return.<sup>4</sup>

In the late 1950s and early 1960s in China, some thirty million people died of starvation as a consequence of Mao Zedong’s disastrous Great Leap Forward campaign. Millions more would also endure ‘miseries and mistreatments’ in the mounting violence of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution from 1966 onwards. Since Mao’s death in 1976, the Party leadership has imposed strict constraints on studies of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, considering these highly sensitive topics. As we noted in the 2016 *China Story Yearbook*, Xi Jinping’s administration has further tightened restrictions on historical investigation, imposing a blanket ban on public discussion of CCP rule, past and present. The actions it took in 2016 against *Yanhuang Chunqiu* magazine and the *Consensus* website have deprived mainland intellectual culture of any well-established forum for independent inquiry.

Under Xi, penalties for dissent have been far harsher than under his predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin. Xi has also proven far more successful than Hu in blocking online criticism and mockery of the Party’s discourse and slogans. Moreover, ‘ideological work’ has intensified since the launch of the Mass Line Education and Practice campaign in June 2013. In the 2015 and 2016 *Yearbooks*, we noted that instruction in Party thinking

had increased at Chinese universities and that study of Xi's speeches and essays had become compulsory for Party members. In 2017, these activities developed further, together with the growing sophistication and systematisation of Party propaganda generally.

Prominent individuals who demonstrate their eagerness to study Xi's thought, such as Fan Zeng, have flourished.

On 15 October 2014, Fan was one of 'seventy-two worthies' 七十二贤 from the mainland arts world invited to a forum on art and literature in Beijing at which Xi spoke for two hours (see *China Story Yearbook 2014: Shared Destiny*, Forum 'Springtime for the Arts', pp.179–185). Six days later, at Peking University, Fan convened a 'Meeting to discuss how to study "Xi Jinping's Speech at the Forum on Art and Literature"'. To mark the occasion, he composed a classical poem — a heptasyllabic quatrain with dense allusions to the splendours of imperial China. Eight other senior Peking University academics who attended the meeting followed his example. Online commentators promptly criticised Fan and his colleagues for being 'fawning sycophants' who 'know well how magnificent imperial favours can be'.<sup>5</sup> Just as quickly, an article appeared on numerous state-run websites, defending Fan's actions as noble and 'heartfelt', and advising his detractors to 'swot up on traditional Chinese culture' before they accuse 'a great maestro's graceful act'.<sup>6</sup> At any rate, to eulogise Xi is to be in the Party-state's good graces, as the state media's praise for Fan and the parade of dignitaries at the March 2017 launch of his *Lu Xun's Stories* made plain.



Poster from the film, *The New Year's Sacrifice*  
(released 1956)

Source: Mtime.com

## Dying under Xi

However, the Party-state has also sought to appear as benevolently humanitarian to its most famous critic, Liu Xiaobo 刘晓波 — the incarcerated 2010 Nobel Peace Laureate — when he became terminally ill in 2017. On 26 June 2017, the website of the Liaoning Prison Administration Bureau issued a notice stating that Liu, then serving the eighth year of his eleven-year jail sentence in Liaoning's Jinzhou prison, had been diagnosed with late-stage liver cancer and was receiving treatment at the province's China Medical University No.1 Affiliated Hospital in Shenyang.<sup>7</sup> On 28 June, an anonymously made three-minute video of Liu appeared on YouTube without any accompanying explanation.

The video contains three types of footage. The first presents a healthy-looking Liu engaged in various activities at Jinzhou prison. In a scene titled 'goods inspection', he receives a pile of books from two prison officers. Among other things, he is shown playing badminton with a prison guard and jogging in the prison compound. The second shows a still-healthy Liu receiving medical check-ups in prison and receiving a visit from his wife Liu Xia, speaking with her through a glass window on phones and apparently telling her that his check-ups were all fine. There is also footage showing Liu on prison leave to mourn his father in September



Still from a three-minute video of Liu in hospital  
Source: YouTube

## **GRATITUDE EDUCATION**, by Gloria Davies

Gratitude education 感恩教育 has been an integral part of educational and Party-sponsored public campaigns in mainland China since the 1990s. It forms part of the Chinese government's mandated patriotic education program for Chinese students. First introduced at schools in the 1980s, patriotic education was widened to include universities after 1989, following the government's violent suppression of the university student-led democracy movement at Tiananmen Square on 4 June that year.

A relatively innocuous form of gratitude education requires school students to formally express gratitude to their parents and teachers. The gratitude education imposed on Tibetan people is far more sinister. Following the government's crackdown on street protests in Tibet in 2008, Tibetans have been required periodically to publicly express their gratitude to the Party for providing for their daily needs. They must also criticise the Dalai Lama.

Gratitude education requires people to attest that they 'feel the Party's kindness and obey and follow the Party' 感恩听党话跟党走. The video footage showing Liu Xiaobo thanking prison wardens was intended to demonstrate that he too was touched by the 'Party's kindness'. Incensed by international sympathy for Liu, the state-controlled *Global Times* sought to educate its Anglophone readership on the 'Party's kindness'. In an editorial of 28 June 2017, the paper stated that 'Liu is an ordinary prisoner. He ought to be grateful for extra help from the prison authorities, but he and his supporters have no right to demand preferential treatment.'

2011 (he had been allowed to visit his parents' home in Dalian, Liaoning, for thirty minutes) and footage showing Liu telling the unknown person filming the video that he was extremely grateful to the prison officers for looking after him so well. The third type of footage takes up the video's remaining seventy-five seconds. It shows Liu in hospital, looking noticeably thinner, undergoing checks and procedures, and in consultation with different doctors. The last scene is of a doctor having a bedside chat with Liu, with Liu confirming that he first learned that cancerous cells had been detected in his liver in 1995 when he contracted Hepatitis B.<sup>8</sup>

YouTube has been blocked in China since 2009. The video, which used Liu's words to indicate that his cancer pre-dated his present term of imprisonment, was directed at viewers outside China. Its presentation of Chinese prison and medical personnel attending solicitously to China's best-known dissident sought to pre-emptively deflect criticism of Liu's continued detention. As international media coverage of Liu's deteriorating condition increased in the weeks that followed, China's media outlets remained silent. A state notice issued on 28 June forbade any reporting, commenting, or reposting about Liu Xiaobo's 'medical parole and related matters'. Coded words and images referring to Liu were blocked on social media.<sup>9</sup>



In any case, by the 2000s Liu had become little known in China. The state had banned his writings since his first prison sentence in 1989. After 2010, following his international fame as a Nobel Peace laureate, censors became even more vigilant in removing online references to his name as well as his Nobel award. Al Jazeera correspondent Florence Looi wrote that when her team asked people about Liu on a busy street in Shenyang near where he was hospitalised, no-one knew who he was.<sup>10</sup> Other foreign journalists who conducted street interviews reported similar results.

A second one-minute video was uploaded on YouTube on 9 July 2017. It showed Liu gravely ill, lying on a hospital bed. Gathered around him were several Chinese doctors and nurses, his wife, and two foreign oncologists — Joseph Herman from Texas and Markus Büchler from Heidelberg, whom hospital authorities had invited to China to review Liu's condition. The video shows Dr Büchler speaking favourably of the care that Liu was receiving. On 10 July, the German embassy in Beijing issued a statement expressing its 'deep concern' that recordings had been made of the oncologists' medical visit in breach of doctor-patient confidentiality and then 'leaked selectively to certain Chinese state media outlets'.<sup>11</sup> Liu had wanted to be treated abroad to ensure that in the event of his death, his wife, who would accompany him overseas, would be safe. Liu Xia had lived under virtual house arrest from the time her husband was detained in 2008. The Chinese government denied Liu's final request, despite diplomatic efforts by Germany, the US, and other countries. Against the recommendation of the two invited oncologists that Liu be granted a swift medical evacuation, Chinese doctors argued that he was too ill to travel.

As Liu approached death, the government released more footage of his hospitalisation and photographs of him with his wife. It held press briefings for foreign journalists; the final one, organised by the Shenyang city government on 15 July, followed Liu's funeral service earlier that day. At the final press conference, officials showed the journalists a two-minute video of the service, followed by the scattering of Liu's ashes at sea. Liu's elder brother Liu Xiaoguang spoke at the press conference, thanking

the Party on the family's behalf for providing medical care and organising the funeral 'according to the family's wishes'. Journalists who interviewed Xiaobo's close friends learned that Xiaoguang had strongly opposed his brother's activism and had little to do with him after 1989.

In late July, Hong Kong-based journalist Verna Yu wrote: 'The government's attempt to monopolize the storyline related to Liu's illness and death is part of a radical change in the way the Chinese government uses the media. Instead of hushing up issues it found embarrassing like in the past, it is now aggressively manipulating the public discourse.'<sup>12</sup> Opinion pieces carried in the English-language editions of the *People's Daily* and *Global Times* bear out Yu's observation. They described Liu respectively as having 'long engaged in illegal activities aimed at overthrowing the current government' and as 'a victim led astray by the West'. The Chinese-language version of *Global Times* called him a 'criminal'.<sup>13</sup> None mentioned his Nobel Peace Prize.

In Lu Xun's story, the male narrator is an educated member of the Lu household who on hearing that Xianglin's Wife had died says: '[I]n the present world, when a meaningless existence ends, so that someone whom others are tired of seeing is no longer seen, it is just as well, both for the individual concerned and for others.'<sup>14</sup> The picture the Chinese state media paints of Liu expresses a similar sentiment. However, despite the government's efforts to diminish Liu and to present itself in a positive light, it has not succeeded in swaying public opinion outside China. In many countries, people mourned the Nobel Peace laureate and criticised the Party leadership's refusal to grant his dying wish to leave China. Social media also alerted people globally to the arrest and detention of individuals who, undeterred by threats of punishment, held private memorials for Liu in



Liu Xia and Liu Xiaobo  
Photo: Andy Shuai, Flickr

Dalian, Guangzhou, and other Chinese cities. Meanwhile, public concern for Liu Xia's wellbeing has ensured that she is not forgotten. Rights activists continue to provide updates about her situation and organisations such as Amnesty International and PEN have petitioned for the lifting of restrictions on her movements.<sup>15</sup>

## Four Confidences for Authoritarian Prosperity

On 26 July 2017, ministerial and provincial-level Party leaders gathered in Beijing for a two-day closed meeting on 'Studying the spirit of General Secretary Xi Jinping's key speeches in preparation for the Nineteenth Congress'. The international media's focus on Liu Xiaobo from late June through to mid-July would undoubtedly have irritated these senior officials. In Lu Xun's story, the death of Xianglin's Wife on the eve of the Lunar New Year caused the Lu family patriarch to exclaim in exasperation: 'What a moment to choose! Now of all times! Is that not proof enough she was a bad lot?'<sup>16</sup> An English-language *Global Times* editorial published on 15 July stated:

Liu's memorial tablet cannot find a place in China's cultural temple. Deification of Liu by the West will be eventually overshadowed by China's denial of him. No matter what was the motive behind Liu's behaviour, he was actually a disruptive player to China's development theme during the country's reform and opening-up and a destructive element in China's rise.<sup>17</sup>

In referring to 'China's cultural temple' and asserting China's distinctiveness from 'the West', the article equates CCP rule with 'China'. The point of these statements is to defend CCP rule as inherently right for China. Under Xi, prescriptive uses of language have become an important part of this defence.

In 2016, Xi's focus was on achieving 'comprehensive and strict Party governance' 全面从严治党, which meant that Party members were re-



quired to be well versed in his pronouncements on this topic. In 2017, he turned his attention to confidence building. At the high-level agenda-setting Beijing meeting in July 2017, Xi Jinping emphasised the importance of strengthening the Party's and country's self-confidence. As Xinhua's summary of Xi's speech puts it (the full speech has not been released): 'We must firmly build our confidence in the path of Socialism with Chinese characteristics as well as our confidence in its theory, system and culture. This will ensure that the Party's and country's undertakings will always follow the correct path and advance toward victory'.<sup>18</sup>

Abbreviated to the Four Confidences 四个自信 and sometimes described as the 'Confidence doctrine' 自信论, this Party formulation 提法 set the tone for the Nineteenth Party Congress three months later when it was presented as a key feature of Xi Jinping Thought for the New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.

The basis of China's official discourse is a quest narrative that presents successive Party leaderships as having steadfastly guided 'Party and country' as they journeyed forward, ensuring 'victory' 胜利 (a favourite

#### **LU XUN ON SELF-CONFIDENCE**, by Gloria Davies

'Confidence' 自信, understood as national self-confidence, has long been part of Chinese public discourse. In September 1934, Lu Xun wrote an article titled 'Have the Chinese lost their self-confidence?' 中国人失掉自信力了吗? in response to a public debate on this question. At the time, Japan had invaded China and the country was under unelected Nationalist Party rule, with Communist-hating Chiang Kai-shek as China's President. The debate revolved around whether the Chinese had lost their self-confidence in the face of Japan's growing military aggression.

In this essay, Lu Xun wrote that the only people who struck him as self-confident were those who 'worked doggedly in silence...risking their lives, who strove to save others and who braved death in pursuit of truth'. He observed: 'It is only because they are trampled on, kept out of the news and made to vanish in darkness that most people don't know about them.' He concluded: 'The writings of prominent academics and those who hold high office are insufficient to ascertain whether we possess or lack self-confidence. We must discover it for ourselves on the ground right beneath us.'

word of the Party's) over the challenges and dangers encountered on the way. The story assumes that 'Party and country' are ever advancing toward greater prosperity. The CCP's changing slogans seek to convey this picture of continuous progress.

In this regard, the Four Confidences, as a slogan, is intended to represent the culmination of a process of improvement for 'Party and country', beginning with Xi's first year in office. The earlier stages of this process include, *inter alia*, Xi's emphasis in 2013 and early 2014 on 'the struggle for public opinion', with the Party's media workers and propagandists being told they must 'dare to grasp, control and unsheathe the sword' when presenting the Party's view; his shift to Party discipline in 2015, using slogans such as the Three Stricts and the Three Genuines to define Party discipline;<sup>19</sup> followed by his integration of Party discipline into the Four Comprehensives as the Party's leading motto in 2016. (See the *China Story Yearbook 2016: Control*, Chapter 4 'The Language of Discipline', pp.111–129).

The Party's key slogans mostly outline objectives (such as the China Dream or the Four Comprehensives) or prescribe an attitude (such as the Four Confidences). The ideological significance of the Four Confidences is

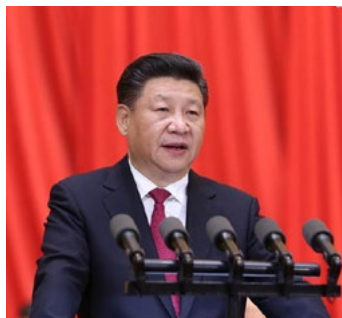
#### **ZHANG LIFAN ON THE FOUR CONFIDENCES**, by Gloria Davies

On 21 October 2017, the Beijing-based social commentator and historian Zhang Lifan 章立凡 posted the following tweet, referring to a line from Xi Jinping's speech of 6 February 2013, delivered at a meeting to celebrate the Lunar New Year in Beijing.

The Four Confidences? First came the decree: 'We must be able to take sharp criticism.' But no sooner had I made a few critical remarks this time, the authorities promptly sent someone to my door to issue a warning. If they were genuinely confident in their system, its path, theory and culture, would they have done this? A regime that permits only eulogies and is intolerant of criticism will find it difficult to avoid repeating the mistakes of its predecessor.

四个自信？当初有旨：“要容得下尖锐批评”。这回老夫随口点评了几句，有司马派员上门警告。若真有制度自信、道路自信、理论自信、文化自信，何至于此？只许歌颂不容批评的政权，难免重蹈前朝覆辙。

evident from the sustained attention it has received from Party theorists and the state media, starting with its introduction as the Three Confidences by Hu Jintao in November 2012: ‘the whole Party should have every confidence in our path, in our theories and in our system’ 全党要坚定这样的道路自信、理论自信、制度自信.<sup>20</sup> A Xinhua report of 14 November 2012 described the Three Confidences as crystallising ‘the underlying strength of an ever-maturing and ever more confident Marxist ruling party at its most powerful.’<sup>21</sup>



Xi speaking at the ninety-fifth anniversary of the CCP's founding, July 2016  
Source: news.cn

From 2013 to 2015, Xi called on Party members to cultivate the Three Confidences. In January 2013, Peking University received funding from China's most prestigious academic grant scheme, the National Social Science Fund, to set up a ‘major project’ 重大项目 on ‘research into reinforcing confidence in the path, theory, and system of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’ 坚定中国特色社会主义道路自信，理论自信，制度自信研究.<sup>22</sup> Then, on 1 July 2016, in a speech commemorating the ninety-fifth anniversary of the CCP's founding, Xi modified the formulation by stating that confidence in the culture of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics was also essential. The Party's and country's prosperity was the ‘overall result of an incessant push by the Chinese people and CCP members toward the construction, creation, selection, and transcendence of [their] culture’.<sup>23</sup> Thereafter, in the twelve months leading up to Xi's ‘important speech’ of 26 July 2017, Party theorists publicised the Four Confidences in numerous articles highlighting the necessity of progressing from Three Confidences to Four Confidences. The Four Confidences was well on its way to becoming a signature motto of Xi's.



In his 1 July 2016 speech, Xi said that ‘cultural confidence’ was ‘the most fundamental, far-reaching, and profound’ of the Four Confidences because it entailed ‘firmly remembering the [Party’s] original intention in one’s continuing advance’ 坚持不忘初心, 继续前进.<sup>24</sup> Yet Xi has consistently avoided using the CCP’s founders’ expression of their Party’s mission: to ‘wage class war’ against ‘capitalists’ to establish the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. Xi’s wording presents the CCP’s ‘original intention’ vaguely, as a *cultural* attitude of always striving to rule well. The elevation of culture *via* the Four Confidences facilitates this rhetorical sleight of hand: it presents the Party-state’s retreat from socialist *politics* as the most advanced form of socialist *culture* — namely, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.

Academics who write on Party theory and who teach the Party’s mandated university courses on political thought have done well under Xi. In 2017, the Central Propaganda Department-controlled *Guangming Daily* published many articles praising the enhanced quality of ‘ideological and political work’ in China’s tertiary sector.<sup>25</sup> However, as Xi’s ‘important speeches’ multiply, what Xi’s academic eulogisers mean by ‘theory’ has also required turgid elaboration using the Party’s ‘correct’ formulations. In a *People’s Daily* commentary on the Four Confidences, Jin Nuo 靳诺, Party Secretary of Renmin University in Beijing, enthused that Xi’s formulation demonstrates the ‘powerful sturdiness of a Marxist political party capable of producing high-quality theory in keeping with the times’.<sup>26</sup>

Thoughtful Chinese netizens have pointed out that the Party’s leaders have never explained why they invariably speak of ‘the Party and the country’ and ‘the Party and the people’ — specifically, why ‘country’ and ‘people’ must always come second?<sup>27</sup> The *Charter 08* petition, of which Liu Xiaobo was a leading author, directly challenged the legitimacy of unelected CCP rule. He thus incurred the wrath of the Party leadership, whose fortunes are most closely tied to the system’s preservation. For this reason, we should heed Xi’s Four Confidences as more than Party pedantry dressed up as ‘high-quality theory’. The Four Confidences is code for

the success of Xi's administration in strengthening the Party-state system around his personal authority. Undoubtedly, we are meant to see the Four Confidences reflected in the self-assured manner of the Party's personnel as they subjected Liu Xiaobo to various indignities in his final weeks, not least by turning his physical deterioration into a Party-orchestrated YouTube spectacle, accessible everywhere except in China. That they did this to Liu (and that they continue to restrict Liu Xia's movements) suggests that the Four Confidences is driven as much by anxiety about the future of the Party-state system as by celebration of its achievements.

In 1939, E. M. Forster famously wrote that he would only give democracy 'two cheers': 'one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough: there is no occasion to give three.'<sup>28</sup> Single-party rule in perpetuity, defended as the democratic centralism of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, is a lot more complicated. As China continues to prosper, the Party led by Xi has grown less tolerant of criticism. This is not surprising, since the Party-state system requires conformity and is constitutively hostile to variety, especially when variety takes the form of criticism of the Party-state system itself.

Indeed, in striking contrast to E. M. Forster's 'two cheers for democracy', Party-state rule under Xi has required continuous applause. According to Xinhua, Xi Jinping's 200-minute report at the Nineteenth Party Congress on 18 October elicited more than seventy rounds of applause from the delegates. Tencent, the Chinese technology and media giant, produced an applause app to coincide with Xi's report to the Party Congress. Using an eighteen-second snippet of applause for Xi during his report, the Clap for



Clap for Xi Jinping app  
Source: YouTube

Xi Jinping app invited users to tap their phone or device screen to join in the applause. The screen image features the interior of the Great Hall of the People, the venue of the Party Congress, with a pair of hands in the lower foreground. Each tap produces a virtual clap. According to a *The Globe and Mail* report of 19 October 2017, within a day of its release, the app had generated 1,024,294,610 claps for Xi — the equivalent of ‘more than 10,000 per second since the close of his speech’.<sup>29</sup>



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