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The Hidden Ruler: Wang Huning and the Making of Contemporary China

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Abstract

The article provides the first comprehensive examination of the life and thought of Wang Huning, member of the Politburo, advisor to three Chinese leaders and important contributor to major political conceptual formulations in contemporary China. In doing so, it seeks to derive insights into the role of intellectuals in China, and what this says about Chinese politics. It argues that, although initially reluctant to enter politics, Wang has become in effect a ‘hidden leader’, exercising far-reaching influence on the nature of Chinese politics, thereby revealing the fundamental tensions in contemporary Chinese politics, shaped by major political debates concerning stability, economic growth, and legitimacy.

Understanding the character and aspirations of China’s top leaders and the subtle and complex shifting of alliances and authority that characterizes politics at this highest level has long been the focus of students of Chinese politics. But much less attention is paid to those who advise these leaders, perhaps because of the anonymity of these advisors and the view that they wield limited authority within the hierarchy of the state and the Party. Such neglect, however, is not justified in the case of Wang Huning. Wang, former Fudan University academic, was invited to advise President Jiang Zemin (1993–2003) in 1995 and since then has assumed an increasingly important role in advising subsequent leaders Hu Jintao (2003–2013) and Xi Jinping (2013–present). He is presently in the Politburo and is said to have been instrumental in formulating the ‘Three Represents’, ‘Scientific Outlook on Development’, and ‘Chinese Dream’, some of the major political policy initiatives in contemporary China. By any measure, therefore, Wang has been significant in shaping contemporary Chinese politics. Yet there have been few systematic studies of his role as intellectual and political advisor. This article presents the first comprehensive account of Wang, his life, his intellectual background and political career, much of which is only available from a range of fragmented sources and only in Chinese. This account will be useful for those who wish to understand who Wang is and what his intellectual views were before taking up formal office when he ceased publishing in his own name. But Wang and his thought warrants closer examination for two additional, related reasons. Because of his tenure and influence, Wang allows us to see the extent to which intellectuals can be said to be influential in contemporary Chinese politics. Equally important, Wang’s political role provides a valuable means for

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understanding the character of contemporary China, especially its core concerns regarding what it is and what it aspires to be.

This article argues that Wang as political advisor has come to exert unprecedented authority in determining major political questions. This influence has been such that it is possible to describe him as a ‘hidden ruler’, whose advice and counsel can have great influence on politics, just as influential as the foremost political leaders. Yet this influence is not due solely to his abilities, which are considerable. It is because of the unique circumstances that include the rapidly changing political and economic conditions, the legitimacy challenges facing the CCP (Chinese Communist Party), and the contest over the future direction of the PRC that Wang has come to exert this influence. To this extent, Wang as hidden ruler has been possible only because of the crucial challenges facing China regarding its stability and legitimacy and its uncertainty regarding the future direction it should take.

In the discussion that follows, the first section provides a brief biographical introduction to Wang and then attempts to understand his role as academic and advisor by reviewing the different theoretical approaches adopted in China and the West regarding the role of intellectuals in politics. This includes an overview of the role of advisors and public intellectuals in modern Chinese politics. Having developed this conceptual framework for understanding the role of thinkers in politics, the next section then examines the role of Wang as both a public intellectual and political advisor in contemporary China, outlining in detail his extensive publications that are predominantly in Chinese, as well as his contribution to Chinese politics as advisor to three Chinese leaders. The concluding remarks note how the unique contemporary circumstances provide unprecedented, though often fleeting, opportunities for advisors to wield extraordinary influence in shaping the political landscape, revealing the major challenges and uncertainties in contemporary Chinese politics.

Who is Wang Huning?

With his ancestry traced back to Shandong Province, which boasts the birthplace of Confucius, Huning Wang was born in 1955 to a revolutionary cadre family in Shanghai, where he spent most of his life before being drafted into the Beijing leadership at the age of forty.² His place of birth is permanently encoded in the choice of his given name ‘Hu-ning’, literally meaning ‘Shanghai tranquillity’. But his formative years were anything but tranquil. As a military officer, Huning’s father was implicated in Mao’s campaign against Marshal Peng Dehuai in 1959 and subsequently suffered persecution during the decade-long Cultural Revolution starting from 1966, when Huning was a teenager.³ A quiet and introverted boy,

² For Wang’s ancestry, see, for instance, Jun Jian, ‘Boshisheng daoshi Wang Huning jiaoshou’ [‘PhD supervisor Professor Wang Huning’], *Fudan Xuebao* (Shehui Kexue Ban) [Fudan Journal (Social Sciences Edition)], May 25, 1994. It should be noted that almost all the material about his early life is unavailable in English and difficult to find in any one place in Chinese publications. For a brief examination in English of Wang’s career, especially his scholarship before his move to Beijing in 1995, see Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp 95–100.

³ Around this time, in 1965, when Huning was barely ten years old, his mother became seriously ill and had to be hospitalized nearly 20 times. Huning took turns with his siblings in taking care of her: Hao Chen and Ge

Wang Huning developed a penchant for reading. As intellectuals were downtrodden and academic pursuits frowned upon during the Cultural Revolution, books were in short supply, apart from a limited list of officially sanctioned items including Mao's little red books and primers on Marxism. Wang managed to obtain extracurricular books, including banned items of foreign literary classics, from his teachers at Shanghai Yongqiang School, who were touched by his thirst for knowledge.⁴

After graduating from high school in 1972, he became an apprentice worker (*xuetugong*) for nearly three years.⁵ Being a sickly youngster, he partly escaped the fate of being sent 'up to the mountains and down to the countryside' (*shang shan xia xiang*), along with most other urban school-leavers of the time, as required by Mao's campaign in the 1960s and 1970s to subject school-educated urban youths to re-education by the peasants. Instead, Wang spent some time in the rural areas near Shanghai and attended a foreign language training program at Shanghai Normal University (later renamed East China Normal University), where he studied for several years, majoring in French.⁶ After completing this training program in 1977, he worked for a year in the Shanghai News and Publication Bureau before a major turning point occurred in his life.⁷

In 1978, with the launch of Deng's reforms after the end of the destructive Cultural Revolution, Wang was among the first to take advantage of the revival of China's university system by participating and distinguishing himself in the highly competitive university entrance examinations (*Gaokao*). Although his training program at East China Normal University was not sufficient to qualify him with a bachelor's degree, his Gaokao performance was so impressive that he was accepted directly into the very competitive master's program in international politics at Fudan University in Shanghai.⁸ His main supervisor there was Chen Qiren, a renowned authority on Marx's works, especially *Das Kapital*, which may account for the title of Wang's dissertation, 'From Bodin to Maritain: on sovereignty theories developed by the Western bourgeoisie'.⁹

After completing his master's degree with distinction, Wang was retained as teaching staff, taking courses others did not enjoy teaching and developing new ones in response to rapid growth in the curriculum in the burgeoning reform era. He published widely, both in academic journals and in newspapers and magazines read by the educated elite. His classes

Wang, 'Houlaizhe jushang: ji fudan daxue zui nianqing fu jiaoshou Wang Huning' ['Latecomers excel: on associate professor Wang Huning of Fudan University'], *Zhongguo Gaodeng Jiaoyu* [China Higher Education], September 28, 1986, p. 20.

⁴ Chen and Wang, 'Houlaizhe jushang', p. 20.

⁵ Zhou Xiao 'Guozheng wendan Wang Huning' ['Master writer of international politics Wang Huning'], *Huaren Shikan* [Chinese Times], August 1, 2003, p. 28.

⁶ Jun Zhou, 'Wang Huning: cong qingnian xuezhe dao gaoceng zhinang' [Wang Huning: from young scholar to top advisor], *Shiji Xing* [Centennial Journey], March 1, 2002, p. 32.

⁷ Hong Xiao, 'Hongqiang zhinang Wang Huning' ['Wang Huning: advisor behind the red walls'], *Dong Nan Xi Bei* [Four Directions], August 15, 2013, p. 18.

⁸ Hong Xiao, 'Cong xuezhe zouru juece ceng' ['From scholar to decision-maker'], *Jin Qiu* [Golden Autumn], July 1, 2014, p. 14.

⁹ Chen and Wang, 'Houlaizhe jushang', p. 21.

were popular and well attended. He enjoyed casual dress and simple food and appeared easy-going and approachable to staff and students.¹⁰

While studying at Fudan, Wang met Zhou Qi, a fellow student of international politics, who also proved to be a competent scholar, subsequently recruited by the university as a teacher after graduation and later to become his first wife. Their love life was depicted as one between two philosophical pedants, devoid of fun and romance, with both burying themselves in their own reading when alone in their cramped dormitory, occasionally locking horns with each other over topics they both felt strongly about. According to one anecdote, on the eve of their wedding, Zhou Qi handed Huning a simple shopping list one morning and asked him to go and buy some groceries plus a bunch of flowers as a rare luxury to brighten up the day. When both returned home at the end of the day, Wang had forgotten about his errand and produced, instead, a list of books he needed to acquire, scribbled on the back of the shopping list Zhou had handed him that morning.¹¹ But he did remember to express gratitude in some of his books for his wife's support of his research and writing.

Wang's dedication to his academic pursuits and his down-to-earth style, as well as his growing list of publications, did not go unnoticed by his superiors, who offered to recommend him for accelerated promotion. Wang initially tried to decline their offers, saying that he was still young with much to learn. In a similar vein, he had declined the offer of a bigger apartment by the university, saying that other people needed it more. At any rate, in 1985 when he had barely turned 30, Wang was promoted Associate Professor without having to first serve as lecturer, thus becoming the youngest ever professor at Fudan. This was a remarkable achievement in those years when China's academia was rigidly hierarchical, with seniority in age and experience regarded as almost a prerequisite for promotion.¹² Within three years, he was made full professor and went on to become Head of the Law School before being headhunted by the Beijing leadership.

Wang's rapid rise in academia was boosted by his successful involvement in a series of international debating championships, which were broadcast on China's national television and became the talk of the town. He first led the Fudan team to victory in the Asian inter-collegiate Chinese language debating contest in 1988, playing a crucial role as coach for the student contestants. Then in the International Intercollegiate Debating Championship of 1993, bringing together some of the best universities of the Asia-Pacific region, he served as advisor to the Fudan team. The team clinched the title with a stunning performance in the grand final held in Singapore, an event watched by millions of viewers back home, inspiring great national pride throughout the country.¹³

By now Wang had published more than a dozen books and numerous articles on a variety of topics ranging from mainstream political science to issues of current concern in the

¹⁰ Xiao 'Guozheng wendan Wang Huning', pp. 28–29; Feng Jiang, 'Wang Huning fandui Wang Huning' ['Wang Huning against Wang Huning'], online article by former student at Fudan, 2008, accessed June 5, 2016, http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4b11fbbd01009xw7.html.

¹¹ Xiao 'Guozheng wendan Wang Huning', p. 28.

¹² Chen and Wang, 'Houlaizhe jushang', pp. 23–24.

¹³ Xiao, 'Hongqiang zhinang Wang Huning', p. 19.

reform era.¹⁴ His growing reputation attracted serious attention from the upper echelon of the Shanghai municipal government, including Zeng Qinghong and Wu Bangguo, who were both close to President Jiang Zemin and went on to become top national leaders. One anecdote has it that Zeng, Jiang's confidant who later became China's Vice-President, personally sought Wang out after attending a formal function at Fudan and spent two hours chatting with him. Wang Daohan, a respected veteran leader with a keen interest in the theoretical development of social sciences in Shanghai, appreciated Wang's contributions to the revival of political science in China.¹⁵ Pan Weiming, Shanghai's publicity chief of the time and a philosophy graduate of Peking University, also enjoyed reading his works.¹⁶ These people strongly recommended Wang and had the ear of President Jiang Zemin, who had built his power base in Shanghai (before being handpicked by Deng to serve as the country's top leader in 1989), thus maintaining close ties with those still in the municipality, the so-called 'Shanghai Gang'. In 1995 after Jiang had consolidated his position in the central leadership and at the repeated urging of his associates including Zeng Qinghong and Wu Bangguo, Jiang called an initially reluctant Wang to Beijing, thus starting a new chapter in Wang's life and career.

Although Jiang had never met Wang until then, he had already heard much about Wang and read his works. It was reported that when they first met, Jiang joked by saying to Wang, 'if you still don't come to Beijing, these people (referring to members of the "Shanghai Gang", like Zeng and Wu) will fall out with me (如果你再不进京, 这一帮人可要跟我闹翻了'. Jiang went on to quote passages from Wang's books, much to Wang's pleasant surprise.¹⁷ It was also claimed in the Chinese press that Jiang was so inspired by Wang's book *Comparative Political Analysis* (1987) that he recited passages from the US Declaration of Independence when addressing staff and students at Cornell University. When President Bill Clinton visited China (in 1998), Jiang mentioned Wang Huning's name during dinner, speaking in glowing terms of the latter's academic ability, while Clinton countered by parading Samuel Huntington's achievements.¹⁸

Wang started in Beijing by serving as the head of the politics group in the Central Policy Research Office, which is a key organ of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist

¹⁴ These include his sole-authored books *National Sovereignty* (1987), *Comparative Political Analysis* (1987), *An Analysis of Contemporary Political Science in the West* (1988), *Analysing the Ecology of Administration* (1989), *Fighting Corruption: China's Experiment* (1990), *America against America* (1991), *Village Clan Cultures in Contemporary China: An Enquiry into the Modernization of the Chinese Society* (1991) and *Life of a Political Scientist* (1995); co-authored and edited books *Political Science Conspectus* (1986), *An Introduction to Administrative Studies* (1988), *Corruption and Anti-Corruption: Overseas Research on Corruption Issues in the Contemporary Era* (1990), *War of Words in Singapore* (1993) and the *Logic of Politics: Marxist Principles of Political Science* (1994). He also translated, with colleagues, Robert Dahl's *Modern Political Analysis* (1963) and Raymond Aron's *Les etapes de la pensee sociologique* (1967), with the translated books published in 1987 and 1988 respectively. His numerous articles appeared in both academic journals and the general press, with some collected into a volume published in 1989.

¹⁵ Xia Xiao, 'Dulingfengsao de xuezhe Wang Huning' ['Leading scholar Wang Huning'], *Juece yu Xinxi* [Decision and Information], July 15, 2001, p. 39.

¹⁶ Xiaoxia Chen, 'Wang Huning: xuezhe congzheng de dianfan' [Wang Huning: example of scholar entering politics], *Lingdao Kexue* [Leadership Science], February 16, 2003, p.23.

¹⁷ Qing Tian, 'Hongqiang zhinang Wang Huning' ['Red-wall advisor Wang Huning'], *Renmin Wenzhai* [People's Digest], December 1, 2011, p. 5; Xiao, 'Dulingfengsao de xuezhe Wang Huning', p.39

¹⁸ Xiao, 'Dulingfengsao de xuezhe Wang Huning', p. 40.

Party (CCP), responsible for providing policy recommendations, developing party ideology, and drafting Party documents and leaders' speeches. Within three years, he was promoted Deputy Director of the Research Office. In 2002, at the 16th Party Congress that saw the transition from Jiang's reign to Hu Jintao's era, Wang became a member of the Central Committee, the body bringing together the top 200-odd members of the Party. He was also made Director of the Central Policy Research Office, equivalent in rank to that of a government minister but more centrally located in the political hierarchy. During Hu Jintao's leadership, Wang's lucky star continued to rise and, at the 17th Party Congress in 2007, he edged a step closer to the inner sanctum of power by becoming a member of the influential Central Secretariat of the Party while still retaining his directorship of the Research Office.¹⁹

In 2012, at the 18th Party Congress that marked the handover of power from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping, Wang succeeded in entering the Political Bureau (Politburo). He was thus transformed in status, from one of 204 members of the Party Central Committee, to one of 25 of the Politburo, the core of the Chinese leadership.²⁰ The change of top leaders did not adversely affect Wang's fortunes, as it did many others, but actually enhanced his standing. Wherever President Xi Jinping travelled, either domestically or overseas, Wang was part of the entourage, as he had been during the previous two administrations under Jiang and Hu, all of which had been widely publicized in China's national media.²¹ Xi has made Wang a crucial member of his inner circle, as the de facto National Security Advisor and as a key member of the Leading Group for Deepening Reforms, which is chaired by Xi himself.²²

The rise and continuing rise of Wang Huning through three different administrations has been hailed by the media as a remarkable and unprecedented achievement by a scholar turned official. It is instructive here to compare him with other influential figures, such as Ma Kai (1946–present) and Zheng Bijian (1932–present), to highlight the exceptional nature of his circumstances. Ma Kai, an economics graduate of People's University, started his career as an economic official in 1982, first in the Beijing Municipal Government and then in the central government after 1993. He rose through the ranks, serving almost exclusively in the economic and financial areas through three regimes or administrations. He came to be known as one of the 'big four' economic and financial officials of the Hu (President Hu Jintao) – Wen (Premier Wen Jiabao) era, before becoming a vice-premier under Premier Li Ke Qiang during the Xi era. Unlike Wang, however, Ma did not have an academic career, nor an established academic reputation before entering officialdom. Zheng Bijian comes closer to Wang, having studied and taught at People's University in the early 1950s. He went on to work in the central government and party institutions, including the State Council, the Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee and the Central Party School, culminating as a ministerial level official in charge of the party's propaganda/publicity work in the Deng and Jiang eras. He stepped back into second-tier roles after Jiang handed over to Hu Jintao. Zheng had also worked as an advisor to General Secretary Hu Yaobang in the 1980s and was known

¹⁹ Tian, 'Hongqiang zhinang Wang Huning', p. 5; Xiao, 'Cong xuezhe zouru juece ceng', p. 16.

²⁰ Xiao, 'Hongqiang zhinang Wang Huning', p. 19.

²¹ Xiao, 'Hongqiang zhinang Wang Huning', p. 19.

²² Qingtao Su, 'Lengmian Wang Huning: cong xuezhe dao hongqiang diyi zhinang' ['Bland-faced Wang Huning: from scholar to top advisor'], *Xin Chengxiang* [New Town and Country], March 1, 2014, p. 53.

to have played a significant role in editing and compiling some of Mao's later works and Deng's speeches. In some respects, Zheng's role is reminiscent of Wang Huning, but Zheng's career was marked and dented by the political vicissitudes of an earlier era, with setbacks and detours caused by the Cultural Revolution and the constraints characteristic of the Mao and Deng eras. Unlike Wang, Zheng's political career was not as smooth, and his influence was limited to the Party's ideological or theoretical work while Wang's trajectory has expanded steadily from theoretical to other spheres of the top leadership, including strategic planning and national security under Xi Jinping.

Though aware of the public attention and scrutiny, Wang has sought to keep away from it as much as possible. He has, in addition, avoided contacts with old acquaintances. For instance, when he accompanied President Xi on an official visit to the United States in September 2015, the *New York Times* reported that people who had known Wang since his stay in the US as a visiting scholar in August 1988–February 1989, now found him unapproachable as he ignored invitations for conversations. American officials also found it difficult to talk to him casually on the sidelines of international forums.²³

Thinkers and Leaders in China

How is one to understand Wang Huning's role first as academic and subsequently as advisor to the top leaders in China? And what does this reveal about the nature of contemporary Chinese politics? The role of thinkers in China has been an important and longstanding question.²⁴ The general approach has been to distinguish between the 'establishment' intellectuals who act as clients of rulers and 'non-establishment' intellectuals who show larger commitments.²⁵ These contemporary distinctions need to be understood in the larger context of the Chinese thought and tradition, and how it engaged with Western conceptions and approaches, especially from the 1890s onwards. Historically, the role of '*shi*' or scholars depended greatly upon the intellectual traditions that informed their actions.²⁶ The Confucian tradition, which predominated after the establishment of the Confucian bureaucracy by the

²³ Edward Wong, 'Xi Jinping's Inner Circle Offers Cold Shoulder to Western Officials', *New York Times*, September 25, 2015, accessed June 5, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/26/world/asia/xi-jinping-china-president-inner-circle-western-officials.html>.

²⁴ For an overview of the scholarship see Edward Gu and Merle Goldman, 'Introduction: The Transformation of the Relationship between Chinese Intellectuals and the State', in *Chinese Intellectuals Between State and Market*, ed. Merle Goldman and Edward Gu (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1–18; Hao Zhidong, *Intellectuals at a Crossroads: The Changing Politics of China's Knowledge Workers* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 1–50.

²⁵ Shiping Hua, 'One Servant, Two Masters: The Dilemma of Chinese Establishment Intellectuals', *Modern China* 20(1), (1994), pp. 92–121; Peter R. Moody, *Opposition and Dissent in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1977); Ka-ho Mok, 'The Changing Relationship between the State and the Intellectuals in Post-Mao China', in *Intellectuals and the State in Post-Mao China* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 171–203; Carol Lee Hamrin and Timothy Cheek, *China's Establishment Intellectuals* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1986), pp. 13–15.

²⁶ China did not have 'public intellectuals'. The role of *shi* was informed by various schools of thought, including Confucian, Legalists (Han Feizi), and Daoism (Lao Tsu), all of whom vied for authority in the Spring-Autumn and Warring States (*chun-qiu-zhan-guo*) period (770–221 BCE).

Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), had a complex relationship with political authority.²⁷ The Confucian sage would often remove themselves from political life, contributing to the community by their deportment and actions as models of excellence to be emulated. But where they were committed to public service, they could either serve as private citizens who provided independent advice, or as the ‘literati’, those educated in the classics, who would actively serve the emperor as bureaucrats, and for a select few, would be personal counsellors of emperors.²⁸

The concept of the ‘public intellectual’ (*gonggong zhishifenzi*) was first introduced into Chinese discourse when China turned to the West, in the final days of the Qing dynasty when western and imperial aggression prompted thinkers to view Confucianism as the cause of Chinese weakness and humiliation. The Hundred Days Reform (1898), fall of the Qing dynasty (1911), the Republican period, especially the May Fourth (1919) Movement and the New Culture (1916–1920) were attempts to turn to the West to recover political and military strength. The instability of the civil war between the communist and nationalist parties, with the ultimate victory of Mao and the CCP meant that the Confucian idea of the literati now confronted a new, western approach.

In the West, the extent to which thinkers and therefore ideas may have political influence has been an important and enduring question. Comparable to the Confucian sage, there was the model of the philosopher who avoided politics altogether, the provocative possibility of the ‘philosopher-king’, and the more practical role of thinkers as advisors who would counsel those who held the reins of power. It was in early modernity, however, with the rise of the Enlightenment *philosophes* that the new role of the ‘public intellectuals’ as the outsider or dissident critic of governments assumed prominence. These different conceptions of ‘intellectuals’ were complicated even more by the introduction of the historical approach to politics by Hegel and subsequently the historical materialism of Marx.²⁹ The new role of

²⁷ See in this context the contribution of Mencius (c. 390–305 BCE), Hsun-Tzu (c. 312–236 BCE) and the neo-Confucian metaphysical interpretations in the Tang and Sung dynasties. On contemporary ‘new confucianism’ see Jerome B. Greider, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History* (New York: The Free Press, 1981); Jesús Solé-Farràs, *New Confucianism in Twenty-First Century China: The Construction of a Discourse* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014). On the rise of the ‘scholar-officials’ see John W. Dardess, *Confucianism and Autocracy: Professional Elites in the Founding of the Ming Dynasty* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Benjamin A. Elman, ‘The Failures of Contemporary Chinese Intellectual History’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43(3), (2010), pp. 371–391.

²⁸ The great models were Hai Rui, who brought his coffin with him when remonstrating with an abusive Ming emperor, and Qu Yuan (200 BC) who drowned himself when the king ignored his advice. See generally Merle Goldman, ‘Confucian Influence on Intellectuals in the People’s Republic of China’, in *Confucianism and Human Rights*, ed. William Theodore de Bary and Tu Weiming (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 264; Greider, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China*; Joseph Fewsmith, ‘State and Intellectuals at the Turn of the Century’, in *China since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 15.

²⁹ As Boggs notes, ‘the Marxist tradition struggled with the contradiction between a theoretical identity rooted in the vision of proletarian self-emancipation and the political reality of a movement dominated by intellectuals’. See Carl Boggs, ‘Marxism and the Role of Intellectuals’, *New Political Science* 1(2–3), (1979), p. 7. See also Ron Eyerman, ‘Intellectuals and Progress: The Origins, Decline, and Revival of a Critical Group’, in *Rethinking Progress: Movements, Forces, and Ideas at the End of the 20th Century*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander and Piotr Sztompka (Routledge: Abingdon, 2002), pp. 91–105; Jean-Philippe Béja, ‘The Role of Intellectuals in the Reform Process’, *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 34(4), (2003), pp. 8–26.

‘intelligentsia’ showed the ambiguous agency of thinkers in the dialectic of history and uncertainty regarding their class interests that seemed to diverge from those of the masses or the vanguard parties.

In turning to the West, and therefore repudiating the literati tradition for philosophical and nationalistic reasons, Chinese leaders and thinkers adopted two different western conceptions of intellectuals. The first, especially in the enlightenment (New Culture) period was that of the ‘public intellectual’ or the dissident who was reminiscent of the critical literati, independent of political power yet remonstrating with it. The second, especially after 1949 was the ‘intelligentsia’ as the ‘ideological spokesman’ or ‘scholar-cadre’ of the new Party founded on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.

***Zhishifenzi* and ‘Intelligentsia’ in Modern China**

To understand Wang Huning’s role in contemporary politics, it is necessary not only to understand the different roles and types of intellectuals as detailed above, but also to take into account the specific treatment of intellectuals in China in the Mao and post-Mao era. The ‘intelligentsia’, or *zhishifenzi*, was in effect the new formulation of the outsider-insider dichotomy noted above. In adopting these categories, Chinese intellectuals embraced new ideological positions but in doing so lost the dignity or authority of the Confucian ‘literati’, making their new role precarious.³⁰ For Mao (1949–1975) there was a core ambiguity regarding the political importance of thinkers or ‘intelligentsia’. As ‘mental workers’, propagators and guardians of official ideology and values, they were seen as useful workers for the cause of the revolution. Yet when they began to criticize him, Mao saw them at best as insufficiently aware of the interests of the proletariat or at worst as the ‘stinking ninth’ (*chou laojiu*), in need of education and therefore subject to disgrace, ostracism, imprisonment and even death. The instrumental use and rectification of the intelligentsia resulted in a cycle of relaxation (*fang*) and repression (*shou*), evident in the 1957 Hundred Flowers campaign (‘let a hundred flowers bloom; a hundred schools of thought contend’) encouraging criticism of bureaucratic abuses, soon followed by the Anti-Rightist campaign (1957), the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960), and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) where all intellectuals were blamed for the errors of the leadership and thousands were purged, self-criticized or were sent to the countryside to learn from the proletariat.³¹ Maoism produced the love-hate of patriotic and nationalistic Chinese intellectuals — dangerous to be the critical outsider; yet equally precarious to serve from the inside, where it was not certain that their patriotism would be recognized.³²

³⁰ As Bonnin and Chevrier note, their precariousness was due to the fact that they were neither of the working class nor revolutionary vanguard. See Michel Bonnin and Yves Chevrier, ‘The Intellectual and the State: Social Dynamics of Intellectual Autonomy during the post-Mao Era’, *The China Quarterly* 127, (1991), p. 571.

³¹ See generally Bonnin and Chevrier, ‘The Intellectual and the State’, pp. 572ff; Goldman, ‘Confucian Influence on Intellectuals’.

³² See Judith Shapiro, ‘Bitter Love: Chinese Intellectuals and the State’, in *Debates on the Future of Communism*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu and Judith Shapiro (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), p. 202.

Deng Xiaoping's (1977–1989) post-Mao reforms seemed to promise, if not a recovery of Confucian *shi*, at least an acknowledgment of the importance of intellectuals. The new objective of the 'Four Modernizations' program suggested a rehabilitation of 'mental laborers', especially scientists and technocratic intellectuals, and an invitation for political thinkers to contribute to the new and more prosperous China.³³ The 1980s, therefore, became a New Enlightenment with the rise of new organizations outside the Party.³⁴ Yet when these initiatives seemed to seriously challenge the authority of the Party, Deng returned to the Maoist repertoire. The subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, attributed to the failed attempts to democratize, persuaded those scholars and intellectuals who favored a strong and prosperous China to favor stability, seeing their role as helping to develop the economy. Thus Deng's campaign to 'reassess' Maoism had far-reaching implications for the role of intellectuals in contemporary China. The unleashing of economic and political forces began to create unprecedented commercial and social opportunities. The increase in general and university education (which paved the way for Wang's subsequent rise), greater access to international markets and information, increasing individual wealth and opportunity and advances in technology, provided greater intellectual freedom.³⁵

Though Deng's reforms introduced greater liberalization, they also resulted, according to Wu, 'in the profound "three belief crises" (三信危機): a crisis of faith in socialism, a crisis of belief in Marxism and a crisis of trust in the Party'.³⁶ As a consequence, subsequent leaders, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping have all adopted a consistent view towards philosophy and social sciences, elevating their strategic significance in the process of Chinese socialist modernizations. Philosophy and social sciences are seen as 'theoretical weapons' to serve socialism, the stability of the regime and the political order.³⁷ Consequently, leadership in these fields is regarded as the embodiment of the cultural leadership of the CCP. Significant funding has therefore been directed to projects that address current political needs in Chinese socialist construction.

Wang the Public Intellectual?

³³ See Béja, 'The Role of Intellectuals in the Reform Process', p. 13; Carol Lee Hamrin, 'Conclusion: New Trends under Deng Xiaoping and his Successors', in *China's Intellectuals and the State: In Search of a New Relationship*, ed. Merle Goldman, Timothy Cheek and Carol Lee Hamrin (Harvard: Harvard University Asia Center, 1987), pp. 275–306.

³⁴ Suggesting that the *fang-shou* cycle is less stringent. Bonnin and Chevrier note the Bai Hua affair in 1981, the campaigns against spiritual corruption in 1983, bourgeois liberalism in 1987 and the Double Hundred Campaign in 1986. See Bonnin and Chevrier, 'The Intellectual and the State', p. 577; Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

³⁵ See Eddy, 'The Making of Chinese Intellectuals'; Gloria Davies, 'Anticipating Community, Producing Dissent: The Politics of Recent Chinese Intellectual Praxis', *China Review* 2(2), (2002), pp. 1–35; Maurizio Marinelli, 'On the Public Commitment of Intellectuals in Late Socialist China', *Theory and Society* 41(5), (2012), pp. 425–449; Timothy Cheek, 'Xu Jilin and the Thought Work of China's Public Intellectuals', *The China Quarterly* 186, (2006), pp. 401–420.

³⁶ Shufang Wu, 'Politicisation and De-Politicisation of Confucianism in Contemporary China: A Review of Intellectuals', *Issues & Studies* 51(3), (2015), p. 167.

³⁷ Wu, 'Politicisation and De-Politicisation of Confucianism', p. 168.

It is in this overall context of the various Chinese and Western conceptions of the intellectual, and the specific Chinese history that the article now turns to Wang's role in contemporary Chinese politics.³⁸ Wang's initial career at Fudan University, especially his extensive publications, suggest that he was in some sense a public intellectual, an outsider who was supposed to be critical of the Party. The best way to answer this question is by evaluating his publications to see the extent to which he can be described as a critical scholar.

A close reading of Wang's published works as a scholar and public intellectual in Fudan reveals a number of important philosophical and political themes.³⁹ After entering the prestigious Fudan University, Wang not only had a broader range of books to read but also better access to well-read professors. He initially intended to study French politics, then turned to economics and the history of Western political thought, and finally focused on political science, a newly revived discipline in China. As mentioned earlier, the topic of Wang's master's dissertation is the concept of sovereignty. While his dissertation is not publicly available, it is possible to derive some clues to its content from his first sole-authored book *State/National Sovereignty (Guojia Zhuquan)*.⁴⁰ The book starts by making clear the importance of sovereignty as a key concept in political science and goes on to trace the origin and evolution of the concept in western thought, contrasting it with the Chinese concept of *zhuquan*, which predated the western concept.⁴¹ The book then traces the genesis and formation of sovereignty through different epochs, explaining its dual aspect in domestic supremacy and external independence. Adopting a Marxist perspective, the book then elaborates on the class-based nature of sovereignty, as supreme power is wielded by the ruling class of a given society.⁴² The bulk of the book is devoted to explicating the internal and external aspects of sovereignty through a detailed review of the theoretical literature on the topic, citing authors from Socrates to Augustine and Machiavelli, and from Bodin to Hegel and Austin.⁴³ The book concludes by canvassing the significance of sovereignty to more contemporary issues, including national independence, the Third World, the international order and, closer to home, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, citing Marx, Engels, and Lenin on the importance of national equality and national self-determination for safeguarding international peace.⁴⁴ *State/National Sovereignty*, therefore, reveals the depth of Wang's command of political philosophy and his focus, informed by Marxism, on the immediate implications his insights have for contemporary political practice.

³⁸ Contemporary focus in China has been on the dissident 'public intellectual' and whether they are in decline, see Marinelli, 'On the Public Commitment of Intellectuals'; Jilin Xu, 'The Fate of an Enlightenment: Twenty Years in the Chinese Intellectual Sphere (1978–1998)', in *Chinese Intellectuals Between State and Market*, ed. Merle Goldman and Edward Gu (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 183–213. However, less attention has been paid to the role of the advisor, the 'establishment' or insider intellectual, as Wang has been, and the extent of their influence.

³⁹ These books are only available in Chinese, some of which are listed in footnote 13.

⁴⁰ Huning Wang, *Guojia Zhuquan [State/National Sovereignty]* (Beijing: People's Publishing, 1987).

⁴¹ The classical Chinese concept of *zhuquan* used to refer to the power of the monarch, but was later adopted by the master translator, Yan Fu, as the Chinese equivalent for sovereignty when translating the *Spirit of the Laws* by Montesquieu (Wang, *Guojia Zhuquan*, pp. 1–5).

⁴² Wang, *Guojia Zhuquan*, pp. 1–19.

⁴³ Wang, *Guojia Zhuquan*, pp. 20–122.

⁴⁴ Wang, *Guojia Zhuquan*, pp. 106–122.

Two months after *State/National Sovereignty*'s publication, Wang published what came to be hailed as his most important book, *Comparative Political Analysis*.⁴⁵ As made clear in the preface, he adopts a historical-social-cultural perspective as the basis of his analytical approach, employed with both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. Vertically, he attempts to explore the structures and patterns of contemporary politics through a historical review of the vicissitudes of humanity from ancient to modern times. Horizontally, he seeks to uncover some regularity of political relationships by ranging across the breadth of political activities in the current world.⁴⁶ In the opening chapter called 'Political Era', he characterizes the 20th century as more politicized than ever before and portrays a globalized world where humanity is so interlinked that everyday concerns like transport, nutrition and environment can become a political issue of global significance, a far cry from the Greek city-states of Aristotle's *Politics*.⁴⁷ He then traces the historical evolution of politics from ancient times to the present, regarding the historical, social and cultural conditions of each era as instrumental in the development of the political community (a concept he adopts in place of the commonly used term 'country') and the political system (or the state). Citing Marx and Lenin on the transition from the socialist to the communist society where both politics and the state in the current sense will be phased out, he points out that although the stateless vision seems like a distant possibility, it is not altogether pointless because it furnishes a long-term historical perspective in comparing and analyzing the current political era, enabling the continuation of 'a broad mind and a deep vision'.⁴⁸ He also makes clear that while Marxism is well known for emphasizing economic forces as the key determinant of society, Marxist historical materialism has never negated the role of politics in determining social development in certain circumstances, hence the need to get the politics right, in order to prevent catastrophes like the Cultural Revolution when class struggle was allowed to run rampant. Each of the remaining nine chapters of the book features a detailed analysis of an important aspect of politics, with the concluding chapter summarizing the history and future prospect of political science as a discipline.⁴⁹ The historical-social-cultural perspective permeates the discussions throughout the book, featuring historical data and comparison across different domains.

Indeed, this perspective has been a recurring motif in Wang's writings ever since. Apart from books, he has written extensively in both academic journals and the general press. Some of these articles were published in a book, *Collection of Wang Huning's Essays*, with a preface stating the rationale and preferences in his research.⁵⁰ Quoting the great modern

⁴⁵ Huning Wang, *Bijiao Zhengzhi Fenxi* [*Comparative Political Analysis*] (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1987). See Kuide Chen, 'Zhengzhi wenhua yu bijiao zhengzhixue: du Wang Huning bijiao zhengzhi fenxi' ['Political culture and comparative politics: on Wang Huning's *Comparative Political Analysis*'], *Dushu* [Reading], January 4, 1987, pp. 29–37 for a Chinese review of the book.

⁴⁶ Wang, *Bijiao Zhengzhi Fenxi*, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁷ Wang, *Bijiao Zhengzhi Fenxi*, pp. 1–33.

⁴⁸ Wang, *Bijiao Zhengzhi Fenxi*, p. 28.

⁴⁹ Wang, *Bijiao Zhengzhi Fenxi*, pp. 34–296, 297–324.

⁵⁰ Huning Wang, *Wang Huning Ji* [*A Collection of Wang Huning's Essays*] (Harbin: Heilongjiang Education Press, 1989). See Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, p. 97, who notes: 'In general, Wang's essays combine an almost Parsonian understanding of the way in which everything is linked to everything else with a Huntingtonian understanding of the need to build institutions and maintain stability through a strong government over a long period of transition'.

Chinese thinker and novelist Lu Xun and using a popular Chinese saying rooted in the Buddhist emphasis on asceticism and chastity, *qing xin gua yu*, Wang states that his original preference was to focus single-mindedly on academic research in theories, especially political philosophy, without getting involved in mundane and worldly distractions and temptations, as he believed in a life of peace and tranquility as conducive to learning and the maintenance of ‘cerebral sanity’.⁵¹ But he could not help being touched by the raging tide of reforms around him and just as Thomas Paine had been inspired by the call of his times to take up the pen for the cause of a newly emerging American nation, he also felt the urge to answer the call of the reform era, with a sense of ‘responsibility, conscience and yearning’.⁵² Because of this, he says, he has written on issues of current concern as well as on theoretical questions. The collection is divided into two parts, theoretical and practical. The theoretical and historical articles cover post-revolution political development, political leadership in modernization, history of political thought, Marx on Hegel’s legal philosophy, young Mao and anarchism, Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, Rousseau’s influence, and American democracy, among other topics.⁵³ The part on current/practical issues canvasses the reform of China’s political structure, the construction of democratic politics, economic behavior and political reform, separation of the party from administrative functions, public service classification and personnel management, political transparency, democratization of political life, and the establishment of a new outlook on political development.⁵⁴ In many of his writings, his favorite historical-social-cultural perspective is evident, especially in emphasizing the importance of respecting the prevailing conditions in China. For instance, he argues against ‘grafting’ (*yi hua jie mu*) western-style democracy onto the Chinese political system, saying political democratization should not overshoot/leapfrog the country’s level of development, or *ba miao zhu zhang* (a Chinese proverb meaning to help a seedling grow taller by pulling it out of its soil). Regarding each political system as contingent upon a particular country’s historical-social-cultural conditions, he maintains that political reform should not be pursued at the expense of stability and that strong and unified central leadership is crucial to further reforms, which should be led by inner-Party democratization.

These arguments coincided with what the Party leadership needed at a time of rapid changes for maintaining control of the reform and opening agenda, hence his elevation to Beijing.⁵⁵ Wang’s views were characterised by commentators of the time as ‘new authoritarianism’, although Wang himself had resisted such a label. Wang’s views on strengthening the role of the central government were systemically expounded in a written interview published in the journal *Socialist Studies*, where he listed six main functions of the government: control, coordination, guidance, promotion, service and balance. He not only explored the reasons for the weakening of governmental functions in the new era of reforms and opening up, but also suggested ways to boost the role of the government, including the

⁵¹ Wang, *Wang Huning Ji*, p. 1.

⁵² Wang, *Wang Huning Ji*, p. 2.

⁵³ Wang, *Wang Huning Ji*, pp. 165–313.

⁵⁴ Wang, *Wang Huning Ji*, pp. 1–161.

⁵⁵ Xiao, ‘Dulingfengsao de xuezhe Wang Huning’, p. 39.

need to transform old and establish new mechanisms of control and coordination. In discussing better ways of improving the economy and utilising resources, he put forward the concept of ‘ecological development’ (in terms of promoting ecologically-balanced growth and preventing resource wastage and environmental pollution), and emphasised the need to tackle official corruption, both ideas being of increasing relevance in subsequent administrations, especially under Xi Jinping.⁵⁶

This general overview of Wang’s public writings before his move to Beijing in 1995, when he ceased his public commentary, reveals a number of important insights into his abilities and interests.⁵⁷ As discussed above, his writings show a command of the foremost works in political philosophy, both in the West and East. Yet his works reveal more than a philosophical or even antiquarian interest — as is evident from significant parts of each work, Wang is especially concerned with contemporary politics and how his philosophical insights may assist and inform contemporary practice, especially in China’s confrontation with modern political demands. Yet crucially, though Wang seeks to inform and instruct, he does not adopt the posture or tone of the public intellectual, the dissident critic of the government. So in this regard, it may even be said that his actions are consistent with the Confucian literati tradition of the sage who counsels, or equally, a dutiful minor functionary of the intelligentsia.

Wang in Beijing

This view seems to be confirmed by his transition to an employee of the CCP in Beijing, where he appears no different from the literati high-level intellectual (*gaoji zhishifenzi*) and high-level official who counsels the emperor, or in modern terms the dutiful Communist ‘mind worker’. Indeed, his personal background seems to confirm this. Having survived the Cultural Revolution, he seizes the opportunity to learn and rise swiftly through the university system, gaining accelerated promotions as professor and head of the Law School. His publications and success in mentoring the debating team brings him to the attention of the ‘Shanghai Gang’, who persuade him to go to Beijing, where he exchanges the life of the scholar for the life of the bureaucrat. His subsequent service testifies to his abilities as a politically adroit bureaucrat and a loyal servant of the Party.

But this account of Wang as merely another scholar who through luck, connections, and shrewd calculation becomes a bureaucrat does not sufficiently acknowledge the unprecedented nature of his rise and longevity and subsequent political influence. To do so, it is also necessary to note his remarkable talents, his ambiguous view of the life of bureaucrats, his extraordinary ascendancy, and perhaps most importantly, the nature of his contribution to Chinese public policy at the highest level. Wang’s talent is evident from his academic career, from the breadth and depth of his scholarship and the subsequent endorsement of his abilities

⁵⁶ Qiu, Kaiming, Interview with Wang Huning, *Shehui Zhuyi Yanjiu [Socialist Studies]*, issue 6, December 27, 1989, pp. 33–36.

⁵⁷ By the time of his move to Beijing in 1995, Wang had published nearly 20 books and 200 articles, covering a wide range of topics.

at the highest level. As this article has sought to show, that knowledge and scholarship is important for Wang is evident from his early attempts to educate himself, especially during the Cultural Revolution and his extensive teaching and publications. It was his academic ability, rather than other sources of influence that attracted the ‘Shanghai Gang’ to Wang, as demonstrated in his brief biography.⁵⁸ The account of his life suggests that Wang had to be persuaded to exchange his scholarly life for the life of a bureaucrat, suggesting his continuing love of scholarship and lack of political ambition. His ultimate reasons for moving to Beijing, one may surmise, were due to a mixture of ambition to have greater influence to implement useful policy initiatives from the inside, as well as a sense of public duty or patriotism, evident from his remarks regarding ‘responsibility, conscience and yearning’.⁵⁹

Yet far from a standard life of the scholar-bureaucrat, Wang’s bureaucratic career in the Party has been remarkable for three important and interrelated aspects. The first is his steady and swift ascendancy in the hierarchy, from an initial advisory role in the Central Policy Research Office to ever more powerful official postings, until he is close to the apex of the Chinese political system, both as a member of the Politburo and as personal advisor to Xi. The second is the remarkable fact that this rise has coincided with and been unaffected by the changes in leadership through Jiang, Hu and now Xi. But arguably the more fundamental aspect of Wang’s success as a bureaucrat may lie in his contribution to the shaping of the contours and direction of Chinese politics.

It is his command of the scholarship, and his desire to improve Chinese politics, that undoubtedly attracted the ‘Shanghai Gang’ to Wang. It is also the reason, this article contends, that he has continued to be retained and elevated in the bureaucracy once he moved to Beijing. Wang in effect possessed a unique ability that was missing in the upper echelons but was deemed essential for China in the era of post-Mao reforms. Confronting new political and economic questions and challenges that could not be simply answered by traditional Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought, a Chinese leadership confronted the need for a non-bureaucratic intelligentsia that would refashion new ways to accommodate the evolving concepts of sovereignty, democracy, and rule of law in China. What was especially important was determining the new foundation of legitimacy that would reconcile innovative economic initiatives with the evolving role of the Party. In many respects, therefore, Wang was — and is — the man for the times. But his success is also attributable to the fact that he fulfilled the duties and obligations imposed upon him. Wang has been credited by the Chinese media with masterminding the major ideological banners of the three leaders he has served (or has been serving), such as Jiang’s ‘Three Represents’ (*sange daibiao*), Hu’s ‘Scientific Outlook on Development’ (*kexue fazhan guan*) and Xi’s ‘Chinese Dream’ (*zhongguo meng*). That Wang is the initiator or formulator of these concepts has been derived from journal articles

⁵⁸ Note, however, the suggestion that his rise is due not only to his Shanghai connections, but through his first wife Zhou Qi, whose father Zhou Jirong is a senior researcher in the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, which is linked to China’s secret intelligence service (Zhou, ‘Wang Huning: cong qingnian xuezhe dao gaoceng zhinang’, p. 32; Renyan Su, ‘Wang Huning kao shenme qingyun zhishang’ [What’s behind Wang Huning’s meteoric rise?], *Kaifang Zazhi* [Open Magazine], 2013–06, 2013, accessed June 5, 2016, http://blog.boxun.com/hero/201306/cba5959/6_1.shtml.

⁵⁹ Wang, *Wang Huning Ji*, p. 2.

published in China that the Chinese authorities have not censored and therefore by implication have endorsed.⁶⁰ It is also a view endorsed by Western scholars.⁶¹ This, of course, does not mean that Wang has actually devised these concepts. They may have existed for some time already or been developed by others and credited to Wang, for immediate political purposes or for long-term strategic attribution in case they do not succeed. But this article's examination of Wang's academic career and writings suggests that he certainly had the ability to conceive such formulations. Moreover, it is plausible to argue that it was success with each such initiative that gave him the credentials for subsequent promotions, which in turn gave him the authority to devise the new initiative. There is, therefore, the high likelihood that Wang did indeed formulate and develop each of these major public policy initiatives, and that their perceived success accounts for his continuing success and extraordinary authority in the contemporary political hierarchy.

If indeed Wang did have a significant role in formulating these concepts, it is useful to reflect on the nature and significance of these concepts. The so-called 'Three Represents' theory was put forward in 2000 as Jiang's contribution to the philosophical foundations of Chinese socialism. Claiming the CCP represents advanced productive forces, advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the majority of people in China, the concept was aimed, among other things, at further growing the economy and building a broad-based political consensus by co-opting private entrepreneurs and other beneficiaries of Deng's market reforms, those that would have been branded as capitalist-roaders in the Mao era.⁶²

⁶⁰ Wang's role as mastermind has been widely acknowledged in the Chinese media, including those directly affiliated to official publications, such as *People's Digest*, an offshoot of *People's Daily*. See, for instance, Tian, 'Hongqiang zhinang Wang Huning', p. 4 and Su, 'Lengmian Wang Huning: cong xuezhe dao hongqiang diyi zhinang', p. 51.

⁶¹ See, for example, the comment by Party researcher Teng Wensheng that the 'Three Represents' was developed by Jiang in concert with his chief advisor Zeng Qinghong and Wang, cited in Robert Lawrence Kuhn, *How China's Leaders Think* (Singapore: John Wiley and Sons, 2011), pp. 106. For other specific references to Wang and his contribution see Zhiyue Bo, 'Hu Jintao and the CCP's Ideology: A Historical Perspective', *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 9(2), (2004), p. 36, fn 87; Barthélémy Courmont, 'What Implications for Chinese Soft Power: Charm Offensive or New Hegemony?', *Pacific Focus* 28(3), (2013), pp. 345–347; Kingsley Edney, 'Soft Power and the Chinese Propaganda System', *Journal of Contemporary China* 21(78), (2012), pp. 901, 908; Joseph Fewsmith, 'China in 2007: The Politics of Leadership Transition', *Asian Survey* 48(1), (2008), pp. 91, 93; Terry Flew, 'Evaluating China's Aspirations for Cultural Soft Power in a Post-Globalisation Era', *Media International Australia* 159(1), (2016), pp. 33–34; Anja Lahtinen, 'China's Soft Power: Challenges of Confucianism and Confucius Institutes', *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* 14(2), (2015), p. 206; Peter M. Kristensen and Ras T. Nielsen, 'Constructing a Chinese International Relations Theory: A Sociological Approach to Intellectual Innovation', *International Political Sociology* 7(1), (2013), pp. 38–39; Linda Jakobson and Ryan Manuel, 'How are Foreign Policy Decisions Made in China?', *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 3(1), (2016), p. 103; Cheng Li, 'China's Fifth Generation: Is Diversity a Source of Strength or Weakness?', *Asia Policy* 6(1), (2008), pp. 53–93; Cheng Li, 'The Chinese Communist Party: Recruiting and Controlling the New Elites', *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 38(3), (2009), pp. 13–33; Kalpana Misra, 'Neo-Left and Neo-Right in Post-Tiananmen China', *Asian Survey* 43(5), (2003), p. 738; David Shambaugh, 'The Dynamics of Elite Politics during the Jiang Era', *The China Journal* 45, (2001), p. 105; Jeanne L. Wilson, 'Soft Power: A Comparison of Discourse and Practice in Russia and China', *Europe-Asia Studies* 67(8), (2015), pp. 1173–1177.

⁶² For scholarship, see Joseph Fewsmith, 'Studying the Three Represents', *China Leadership Monitor* 8(1), (2003), pp. 1–11; Manoranjan Mohanty, 'Three Represents: Ideology of the Fourth Generation', *China Report* 39(2), (2003), pp. 237–245; Xianlin Song, 'Signs of the Times: the Discourse of "Three Represents" and Globalisation', *East Asia* 22(3), (2005), pp. 25–40.

Hu's 'Scientific Outlook on Development', in contrast, focused on achieving balanced development and promoting social harmony. In view of the increasing imbalances and inequality between different regions and different social strata, Hu's concept emphasized the centrality of the common people and the need for 'comprehensive' development in an effort to rectify the excesses of accelerated economic growth emanating from the Deng and Jiang eras, paying greater attention to issues threatening the harmony and stability of the Chinese society.⁶³ Xi's 'China Dream' thesis was put forward soon after he became party leader in 2012, during a tour of the National Museum of China, where he commented on the country's proud historical heritage and talked about 'a great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'. This call came on the back of a surging Chinese economy that had risen to the second largest in the world at a time when the Chinese nation was aspiring to a more affluent life at home and greater respect abroad. As a rallying cry, the China Dream distinguishes itself by capturing the mood of the nation with references to Chinese history and culture rather than resorting to ideological notions of previous administrations.⁶⁴

More than simple exercises in public policy formulation or specific economic, financial or technocratic programs or initiatives, these conceptions are overarching visions of what China is and aspires to be. They are not strictly speaking 'ideologies', to the extent that they do not seek the exactness or technical jargon of the preceding forms of scientific socialism. Indeed, in their generality and vagueness, they aspire more to be overarching 'narratives' that seek to combine what is obviously in profound tension in contemporary China, the demands of stability and the centrifugal forces of change that have potential to fragment the regime. Each iteration of the 'banner' is reminiscent of Maoist doctrinal statements, but in their scope and ambition, they show a more sophisticated attempt to go beyond doctrinal dogmatism to a future that can accommodate the profoundly different and conflicting claims for legitimacy. As such, they represent attempts to define the regime: complex and ambitious articulations of what China is and what it aspires to be.

Wang as Hidden Leader

⁶³ On 'harmonious society' see John Delury, 'Harmonious in China', *Policy Review* 148, (2008), pp. 35–44; Heike Holbig, 'Remaking the CCP's Ideology: Determinants, Progress, and Limits under Hu Jintao', *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 38(3), (2009), pp. 35–61; Yongnian Zheng, "'Harmonious Society" and "Harmonious World": China's Policy Discourse under Hu Jintao', briefing series, issue 26, October 2007, China Policy Institute, University of Nottingham.

⁶⁴ See William A. Callahan, 'Identity and Security in China: The Negative Soft Power of the China Dream', *Politics* 35(3–4), (2015), pp. 216–229; Michael X.Y. Feng, 'The "Chinese Dream" Deconstructed: Values and Institutions', *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 20(2), (2015), pp. 163–183; Peter Ferdinand, 'Westward Ho — the China Dream and "One Belt, One Road": Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping', *International Affairs* 92(4), (2016), pp. 941–957; Zheng Wang, 'The Chinese Dream: Concept and Context', *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 19(1), (2014), pp. 1–13.

The political role of thinkers or intellectuals has been an important and enduring question in the East and West. The main distinction between thinkers who remain outside political authority, either not engaging or providing critical counsel, and those who take office, as bureaucrats or advisors, can be found and has been conceived in specific ways in the Confucian conception of the *shi*, the western understanding of the advisor and the *philosophe* or public intellectual, and in the Marxist view of the *intelligentsia*. Wang Huning was originally an academic at Fudan University and therefore was the wise counsellor in the Confucian tradition, or the intelligentsia who provided advice to the CCP. Once he took office with the CPP, however, he ceased to write publicly and became the ‘thinking worker’ in the Party, who deferred to the needs and demands of the Party and its leaders. Yet this close examination of his role in contemporary Chinese politics suggests that his influence has been much more significant than a mere advisor. Wang’s length of tenure, spanning three leaders, his rapid rise in authority, so that he is now a member of the Politburo, and his contribution to seminal political formulations such as the ‘Three Represents’, ‘Scientific Outlook on Development’, and ‘Chinese Dream’ suggest that, though he does not wield any direct political power, and his position is ever-precarious, his role in shaping the political direction of contemporary China has made him the equal of political leaders. In this role, Wang, therefore, seems to have become an insider whose role and actions in some sense can be understood both in terms of the Confucian literati and Marxist intelligentsia. But in important respects, Wang seems to have gone beyond these roles. More accurately, he is in the tradition of the western scholarship the advisor who governs indirectly. He has, in other words, become a hidden leader.⁶⁵ It should be clear that the article is not claiming that Wang has assumed political authority, which clearly is held within the larger architecture of the General Secretary, the Standing Committee of the Politburo, and the offices within the hierarchy of the Party and the state. Rather, the suggestion is that his counsel has been so significant that though not wielding direct political authority, he has as an advisor come to shape significantly the future political direction of modern China. Of course, Wang is not altogether hidden in the sense that he is out of sight or obscure — in spite of his attempts at anonymity, Xi (like Hu and Jiang before him) has insisted that Wang accompany him to major events and international visits, publicly declaring this hidden influence. This confirms the obvious fact that as advisor and hidden ruler, Wang does not have the authority and therefore security of leaders such as Xi. Yet it is this delicate balance between lack of political authority, and strength gained from his insights and counsel — from his intellectual authority — that reveals both the strength and precariousness of ideas and thinkers within the ruthless world of politics.

The possibility of a thinker as advisor and therefore hidden ruler not only reveals important aspects of Wang himself but also provides valuable insights into the unique

⁶⁵ There is a long tradition of the thinker/philosopher who advises political leaders and in doing so becomes potentially a hidden leader: see Plato’s *Laws*; Xenophon’s *Hiero*; Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, Rousseau’s *Discourse on Political Economy*. The potential tension between advisors and leaders is nicely summarized in Machiavelli’s *Prince* (Ch 19), when he states; ‘For this is a general rule that never fails: that a prince who is not wise by himself cannot be counselled well, unless indeed by chance he should submit himself to one person alone to govern him in everything, who is very prudent man. In this case he could well be, but it would not last long because the governor would in a short time take away his state’ (Ch 19, p 95).

circumstances of contemporary China that can accommodate such an office.⁶⁶ It is only in unusual circumstances, especially in times of foundings, crises, and transitions that advisors can come to exercise such authority. That all three recent leaders have needed Wang's counsel suggests there are profound questions confronting contemporary China that are not simply technical or bureaucratic. Wang's contributions to 'banners' is simply the external manifestation of the profound tectonic struggles concerning the future direction China should take without jeopardizing its fundamental security and stability. In other words, the contests for legitimacy due to the 'three belief crisis' that have provided unprecedented political authority for thinkers are also inconvertible evidence of the formidable constitutive questions and challenges facing the country. The very influence and authority of Wang Huning therefore coincides with the instability and precariousness of contemporary China, and a deep uncertainty of what is 'China's Dream'.

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⁶⁶ For previous scholarship examining public intellectuals, with insights into the political and historical circumstances, see Hao Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).