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The use of propaganda to shape what the Chinese population believes about its government has been a long-lasting and contentious approach to managing the state-society relationship throughout the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the use of propaganda remains relevant to the contemporary Chinese socio-political context. Scholars examining propaganda in the PRC today are investigating the ways in which propaganda itself is being modernized and adapted to contemporary social, political, and market needs. *China's Thought Management* represents a significant empirical and conceptual contribution to this academic discourse, addressing the most recent changes and transformations of the Chinese propaganda system. The ten chapters included in this edited collection examine different themes and methods that exemplify the systemic shifts in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) approach to propaganda, focusing in particular on the decades following the events of June 4, 1989. In the book, Brady builds on her previous landmark scholarly work on propaganda and brings together a number of outstanding voices in the field to analyze various events and contentious issues that, to date, have only been partially explored by the academic literature.

The case studies examined in this work address some of the critical and most puzzling questions concerning the relationship between politics, society, and the market in the PRC. Crucially, they attempt to explain the reasons behind the CCP's success in persuading the Chinese people—both within and outside the PRC—of the continued need for a one-Party system for the maintenance of social stability. One of the key assumptions underlying the arguments developed in the book is that “thought work” (*sixiang gongzuo*)—the intentional use of carefully shaped messages to control or manage the ways in which people perceive their reality—continues to be one of the main instruments used by the Chinese political elite to create “manufactured consent” among the masses, who, the government believes, should look at the political *status quo* with optimism and confidence.

Part I of the book discusses new themes in propaganda work. The first two chapters eloquently illustrate the scope and significance of “marketing dictatorship,” which refers to the power of the market in shaping the themes and the methodologies of propaganda in contemporary China. Chapter One investigates the specific case of the propaganda efforts concerning the Beijing Olympics. It explains how intertwining political and commercial interests shaped the propaganda campaigns around the Olympics with the aim of creating an appropriate “China Brand” that would please the tastes of both Chinese and foreigners. The link between marketization and propaganda is developed in more detail in the subsequent chapter, in which Brady and He examine the Chinese scandal of the tainted milk¹ to prove the direct relationship existing between economic propaganda and the political imperative of stability maintenance. Information about the San Lu tainted formula were severely restricted by the Chinese authorities, in order to safeguard the social order and stability, and, crucially, not to damage the economic interests of the companies involved in the production and distribution of the milk formula. In this respect, according to the authors, the San Lu milk tragedy tells the tale of government interference in the market economy and exemplifies the collusive relationship existing between the Party-state and the market that develops when economic interests are stake.

¹ The 2008 Chinese milk scandal was a food safety incident in the People's Republic of China involving milk and infant formula and other food materials and components, adulterated with melamine. According to official statistics approximately 300,000 infants suffered from kidney damage after consuming the tainted milk produced by San Lu between 2007 and 2008, while six infants died.

Chapters Three and Four focus on Confucianism and the instrumental role it has played in modernizing Chinese propaganda. They examine how the revival of Confucianism that has occurred since the 1980s has been supported and manipulated by the CCP with the aim of forging a Chinese distinctive path to modernity. In chapter Four, Niquet explains the phenomenon of “Confu-talk” through the role played by Confucian Institutes throughout the world. “Confu-talk”, as defined by Niquet, indicates the use and exploitation of Confucian key-words and notions to shape domestic and foreign policy objectives. The strategic use of ancient principles with a strong cultural dimension, together with the establishment of Confucian Institute, serves the purpose of consolidating China’s pre-eminence internationally both at the hard and soft power levels. Chapter Five analyses linguistic engineering in Hu Jintao’s China, considering, in particular, language manipulation within the party itself. The Chapter proves how Hu used carefully designed linguistic formula to consolidate his ascendancy within the Party, to promote his reform agenda, to strengthen Party discipline, and to help revive idealism and a sense of mission amongst government cadres. In both cases, looking back at Chinese past models represent a way to create cultural homogeneity, consent, and ultimately stability.

Part II of the book investigates new methods of control of the Chinese population and of special groups. Chapter Six assesses the process of marketization of the Chinese media since the 1990s and the political implications of such a process, reiterating that propaganda work through the media represents an attempt to harmonize marketization and political control. Indeed, it is argued that the commercialization of the cultural sector creates a sense of “cultural security” that is instrumental to the CCP’s ability to govern. The next three chapters focus on specific aspects of the CCP’s “thought work,” respectively: (1) the propaganda work and associated bureaucratic structure created within the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), (2) the discourse constructed around the issue of prostitution, and (3) the application of “thought work” in the context of overseas Chinese communities.

While the quality of the ten chapters varies, overall, the book largely contributes to our understanding of the complex dynamics existing between society, politics, and the market in contemporary China. The process of modernization of the system of propaganda is inserted into the wider discourse on social stability—one of the most pressing socio-political issues driving the governance agenda in China today. As expressed by a number of scholars in the field and hinted at in this book, the imperative of stability maintenance stems from the anxieties and uncertainties of the party-state, which fears that destabilizing social activities may threaten not only the success of China’s economic agenda but also, more crucially, political stability and, ultimately, the very survival of the CCP and the PRC as it is presently constituted. Growing social dissent has seriously called into question the capacity of the CCP to manage China’s society efficiently and effectively, while, at the same time, preserving control over it in a legitimate fashion. According to Brady, “thought management” at various levels is aimed at creating consent, softly silencing forms of resistance and responding to the social and political craving for stability.

Another topical issue addressed by the book is social management. Brady explains that the concept of management (*guanli*) has replaced that of control (*kongzhi*); such a change is strategic to the creation of a more acceptable image of the CCP, both domestically and internationally. Crucial to this process and, notably problematic, is the introduction of methods of social and political control utilized by modern democratic societies. Political leaders in China look at foreign models to identify alternative routes to political success and to provide Chinese citizens with the impression that they are free to participate in the political system and build their own social discourse. While the topic of social management is mentioned various times in the different chapters, the book would have likely benefitted from

a more structured analysis of such concept in the context of the recent discussions on “social management innovation” (*shehui guanli chuangxin*) in China.

Social stability and the accompanying rhetoric of “social management innovation” dominates the national political discourse not only in government policy but also in media reports, netizens’ debates, and scholarly discussion across the nation. Brady’s book demonstrates how these concepts shape propaganda strategies in contemporary China and are crucial to the discourse on thought management, economic and political reforms, and the administration of justice. This edited collection is extremely timely and important. The book’s potential readership comprises China Studies scholars interested in contemporary Chinese society and politics as well political scientists interested in issues of communication and social governance.

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