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1. The invisible uprising: Covert coordination and hashtag hijacking in China's restrictive online landscape

Christian Göbel

This study examines the rise of dissent in limited information landscapes, with a focus on online demonstrations in China throughout 2022. These protests vehemently condemned the government for its overzealous pandemic prevention measures and the hypocrisy displayed when its representatives fell short of adhering to the very moral standards they imposed. Despite China's sophisticated censorship system, these protests thrived, and this paper aims to understand the mechanisms behind their success. Utilizing real-time data collected throughout 2022, it traces the development and progression of online dissent in China. The findings indicate that the protests were primarily driven by smaller, inconspicuous accounts, rather than easily traceable, high-profile ones. These seemingly insignificant accounts effectively coordinated their efforts without formal organization, through converging on keywords and hijacking hashtags from official accounts and propaganda phrases. Their individual small size made detection and intervention challenging, allowing for their collective impact to grow until it was too late for effective censorship. The invisible uprising underscores the power of grassroots digital dissent, even in the face of strict censorship, and highlights the adaptability and resilience of covert online activism.

2. Springboard Singapore: Chinese student migration in an era of geopolitical uncertainty

Zachary M. Howlett

Meritocracy is a cornerstone of political legitimacy in China. The education system gives ordinary people an opportunity to "change fate"—a direct though difficult route to status and power. But faith in meritocracy is crumbling. As growth slows and inequality grows, people face mounting anxiety about involution or *neijuan*—increasing competition for diminishing returns. This perceived crisis of meritocracy has been exacerbated by the illiberal policies of Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping, under whom many young people worry that China is a "sinking ship." Some members of the middle classes are voting with their feet by sending their children abroad to study. This paper investigates these dynamics by examining Singapore's role as a so-called springboard (*tiaoban*) for university students from mainland China. In a moment of rising geopolitical tension between the US and China, Chinese student migrants see the Southeast Asian city-state as a relatively safe neutral ground—a place from which they can "spring" to Western countries or from peripheral places in China to metropolitan cities like Shanghai or Beijing. In contrast to previous migrations, this one is being spearheaded by women,

who are outperforming men academically and replacing sons as primary filial contributors. Reporting on ongoing ethnographic research, this paper adds to scholarship on the everyday ethics of multinational student migration, transcends the domestic-international binary in migration research, and contributes to understanding women's roles in transforming families and state-society relations in an era of slowing growth, demographic transition, and geopolitical uncertainty.

3. AI ethics in China: Sociotechnical imageries in governance of AI - A case study of China's algorithmic recommendation regulation

Joanne Kuai

Algorithm-based automated systems have permeated many societies on a large scale. Whereas the efficiency in decision-making may have improved, there have been serious concerns about the negative consequences that algorithms bring, such as spreading misinformation, reinforcing inequity among marginalised communities, infringing on data privacy, and other ethical concerns. In an unprecedented move and pioneering in regulating algorithms, Chinese regulators have implemented far-reaching rules on tech companies that use algorithms to recommend news articles, videos and other services. The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) enshrined a new policy titled *Internet Information Service Algorithmic Recommendations Regulation* that came into effect on March 1st 2022. As China presents itself as an alternative to liberal democracy and is leading in developing and governing algorithmic technologies, it is of particular significance to study the Chinese algorithms regulations. Theoretically drawing from the concept of co-production and sociotechnical imaginaries, an interwoven collections of "promises, visions and expectations of future possibilities" (Jasanoff & Kim, 2009, p. 122), this study investigates how science and technology are driven and controlled by state power. In particular, I analyse how China treat algorithms as regulatory objects (Seyfert, 2022) and how it formulates, solves, and predicts the outcome of problems posed by algorithms (Wijermars & Makhortykh, 2022).Methodologically, this study adopts a case study design to examine the above-mentioned regulation and its potential implications by conducting a qualitative document analysis of the regulation supplemented by contextual material, such as guidelines in law implementation, news articles, and industry reports. The findings show algorithms regulation in China is strategy-based and emphasize what the code should or should not do. The study shows China is setting a new tone for global debate around platform governance and that China's case is worthy of further examination as China and the West (mainly Europe) are converging in cyberspace regulation and data protection.

4. The use and abuse of karma: Ethical reasoning among Han Chinese practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism

John Osburg

In the context of a perceived spiritual and moral crisis, growing numbers of Han Chinese are turning to Tibetan Buddhism in their search for an antidote to the ills of Chinese society. Drawing from official state representations of Tibet as "backward," many Chinese have come to view Tibetan Buddhism as one of the few remaining domains of authentic and "pure" moral authority yet to be corrupted by market forces or political manipulation. Based on an ethnographic study of a group of affluent, urban Han Chinese who have become followers of Tibetan Buddhism and patrons of reincarnated lamas and charismatic Tibetan monks, this paper examines the ways these students and practitioners attempt to incorporate ethical principles from Tibetan Buddhism into their personal and professional lives. While Buddhist teachings offer them a way to make sense of their personal misfortunates and societal injustices, Buddhist principles seldom offer a clear-cut course of action in their daily lives, and practitioners frequently debate what constitutes an ethical Buddhist approach. This paper examines a few instances of ethical controversy among my interlocutors as well as some of the obstacles they encounter in attempting to reconcile Buddhist ethics with other imperatives from their lives. In particular, for some, Buddhist patronage continues to serve as an extension of worldly projects of social distinction and wealth accumulation despite their longing for a refuge from those very concerns.

5. Introspection and the articulation of individual desires in Chinese higher education

Naja Morell Hjortshøj

As part of Xi Jinping's China Dream campaign, the Chinese state encourages each individual to pursue his or her personal dream and thereby achieve happiness. In Chinese higher education, the state-propagated notion of happiness is exemplified in guest speakers who are invited to give lectures on how they are engaged in something they feel truly passionate about. Similarly, they urge the students to look inwards to find out what makes them happy in life. In this presentation, I discuss the meaning of introspection and the articulation of individual desires taught in Chinese universities. I argue that the guest speakers aimed to direct the students towards the 'correct' desires by, paradoxically, presenting themselves as successful individuals whom the students are encouraged to emulate on their path to finding their 'unique' selves. These guest speakers combine the notion of pursuing one's passions with ultra-individualistic ideals about exercising self-reliance and showing perseverance. For this purpose, they tell the students that it is necessary

to 'delay' the feeling of pleasure to a time in the future and continue working hard. To discuss how the importance of introspection is taken up by the learners, I provide an example of exercises taught in class. Drawing upon Børge Bakken (2000), I argue that this process of introspection is 'successfully' carried out when it ties in with the ritual framework of 'self-evaluation' (*ziping*), meaning that the students must reflect upon their behaviour to satisfy goals defined by the authority.

6. Ecology-driven life and self-transcendent environmental ethics: A pilot study on embodied soul life of rural returnees in contemporary China
Zhaohui Liu & Wengkang Qian

A new trend has emerged since the beginning of the 21st century, more and more city dwellers are returning to the countryside to explore an ecological-sustainable life. We chose the Sunshine Ecovillage Network (SEN 三生谷) as primary research subject, with other cases as comparative ones. We take an anthropological ethnographic in these field sites through long-time participatory observation. We aim to explore the sociocultural interpretation on such ecological view of life in contemporary Chinese context, and then probe into ontological characteristic from the perspective of living wisdom of Chinese traditional culture. In this draft, we find that the environmental activism in ecovillage is a secular practice combining spiritual enlightenment in pursuit of what they call the self-transcendent cultivation of body-heart-spirituality "身心灵". We argue that the rural returnee's lifestyle is substantially drove by ecological discourses, and it finally becomes an ethical conviction of immanent-oriented life by way of secularization ecological practice. In Eco-village like the SEN, people aim at adjusting or adapting himself to the body-heart-spirituality "身心灵" cultivation. While in the context of secularized China, it is a way to resist against the lack of spirituality life in the consumerist material world.

7. Urban space and the ethics of teahouse sociality in reform-era Guangzhou
Jakob Klein

The paper explores practices of teahouse sociality and staff-customer relations in a multi-storied Guangzhou teahouse-restaurant (*chalou*) I call the Glorious China. It draws on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 1999-2000. In revisiting this fieldwork, I also rethink discussions on urban space in post-Mao China. These centred on the extent of the socialist state's reach in popular culture and what this

could tell us about the vibrancy of traditional folk life or the "public sphere" in the wake of revolutionary socialism and recent, market-oriented reform. While these debates are relevant to my concerns, I shift the focus to explore the commercialization of urban spaces and how this was affecting the everyday practices and moral meanings of teahouse sociality. For many regulars, enjoying morning tea and dimsum at the Glorious China and socializing with other regulars and staff played an important part in their sense of normality and belonging and in their articulation of local identity in terms of place, class, and gender. Meanwhile, in the context of deepening reforms, like other state-owned teahouse-restaurants the Glorious China was facing the threat of immanent closure or privatization and undergoing a process of restructuring to make it more competitive by appealing to more high-spending customers. This was contributing to tensions between regulars and staff over the uses and moral ownership of teahouse space. The paper suggests that the 1990s was a pivotal moment that offers useful reflection on ongoing ethical questions surrounding the privatization of space and everyday sociality in urban China.

8. **Fairness and automated decisions: Fairness and hard to understand health code changes during China's Covid-19 lockdown**
Jesper Williang Zeuthen, Haiqing Yu, Han Tao, and Hailing Zhao

The health code app (健康码) designed to control mobility during the Covid19 pandemic was a nationally implemented app with limited local variation. The data and the automated algorithms this data was applied in were the basis for local and national decisions on individual mobility, some of which were made automatically, i.e. without human intervention. This paper studies how hard to understand automated health code changes were perceived and dealt with by various levels of authority and citizens. By studying the reactions to these hard-to-understand changes, ranging from everyday encounters to changes of health codes appearing to having been made to prevent a bank run, the paper seeks to understand how different perceptions of fairness were important for maintaining and challenging this system of automated decision making. At a broader level, the paper hopes to contribute to an assessment of how digitally enabled automated decision making may affect what is considered fair and unfair in Chinese policy implementation.

9.   CCTV 17 as an instrument of China's new rural governmentality
Francesco Zaratin

Using discourse analysis methods, this paper examines the human and ethical values transmitted by the rural people represented in "三农群英汇" and "我的美丽乡村", two popular programmes broadcasted in the China's state-sponsored channel explicitly dedicated to rural themes, CCTV 17 (中央电视台农业农村频道). Two main types of rural models are the most recurrent. On the one hand hard-working middle-aged entrepreneurs who also serve as village party cadres ; on the other hand rural youngsters able to produce a radical change in their home village by renovating it, re-enlivening old traditions, or most often returning to their native countryside after university to start businesses and/or introduce new technologies in the local production, like farming with drones or selling agricultural products via e-commerce (新农人). The depiction of both the categories mentioned above highlight a mixture of values coming from different aspects of China's past: confucian filial piety and self-sacrifice, socialist mobilisation (带动) through exemplarity, and post-socialist self-enterprise. Contextualising these findings with national rural development policies, the paper argues that this specific mixture of values serves the purpose of a new rural governmentality of "moral entrepreneurialism".

10. The logic of care and the Confucian role ethics
Lili Lai

In recent years, "care" has become a catch word in anthropological studies, both inside and outside China. But it is telling when considering the term "healthcare", "care" has always been put secondarily to "health," just like the role of nurses to doctors in medical practices. In a sense, despite the many current studies of care have put emphases on power relations, social inequalities and feministic concerns, "care" itself remains to be symbolically central yet practically peripheral. In the Chinese context, meanwhile, there is no equivalent Chinese word to "care" due to its multivalence. Starting from this double awkwardness, this paper attempts to discuss some intimacy between the Chinese concept of personhood with the multi-connotations of "care" that is hard to be fully translated. Further, it aims to explore some potential inspirations that the Confucian role ethics could provide to the heated topic of "logic of care".

11. Systemic therapy in China:
"Catch-up institution" or formula for living?
Teresa Kuan

The recent outpour of anthropological research on self-development and the psycho-boom provides an important window into ongoing social processes in contemporary Chinese society. While much of this research has focused primarily on activities and workshops intended for the lay public, attracting educational and professional migrants and women keen to resolve their moral dilemmas, I will focus in this presentation on systemic family therapy, a therapeutic modality with a longer history originating from "within the system" (*tizhi nei*) – i.e., hospital psychiatry. Although the practice I observed in my field research on systemic therapy is not representative of broader trends, I present in this workshop a sample of clinical encounters to pluralize our picture of the answers being given by the psy- disciplines to the ethical question of "How one ought to live." I will make a case for understanding systemic therapy as a "catch-up institution," borrowing from Jeanne Favret-Saada's account of dewitching in 1960s-1970s rural France, to show how therapy addresses concerns that are simultaneously unique to China's social order on the one hand and universal to the human experience on the other. How a moral agent ought to negotiate their kin relations is a perennial question that is particularly pertinent in the Chinese context, characterized by changing family patterns and power relations in flux.

12. The moral imperative of children's academic excellence: Tensions and contradictions in Chinese middle-class parenting styles
Lisa Eklund & Kristina Göransson

It is well documented that Chinese parents invest enormous amounts of time, resources and emotions in their children's education, as if a life worthwhile is a life where education and self-cultivation is at the fore. Taking part in and excelling in educational activities is a moral imperative that marks childhood, whereby achieving in school is not only an act of filial piety, but also a patriotic deed, where the good-student-subject contributes to the advancement of the nation. Educational desire, seen across China and other East Asian societies, feeds off and contributes to an intrinsic web of subjects and public and private institutions that govern themselves as much as they are governed by the state. One key set of actors, subsumed in this web, is parents who both set goals and aspirations for their children's academic achievement, and manage, support and coach their children in achieving these goals, often with the help of tutors and extra-curricular schools. This paper explores some of the tensions and

contradictions in Chinese middle-class parenting styles aiming at academic excellence on part of their young children. Drawing on fieldwork in Beijing, Shanghai and Singapore, various norms and practices are delineated, pointing at tensions and contradictions of the moral imperative of children's academic excellence. As we show, these tensions cannot be understood without taking into account aspirations for social mobility and intergenerational relations on the one hand, and concerns over (mental) health and wellbeing and the moral imperative of being a good parent on the other hand.

13. Chinese mendacity: A provocation

Haiyan Lee

In this short paper, I take up an uncomfortable subject: dishonesty. Specifically, I seek to respond (very belatedly) to a student's question about the cheating behavior she witnessed at a Shanghai educational consulting firm. I draw from personal experience, fictional representations, and the works of Susan Blum, James Scott, and Hans Steinmüller to probe the contours of a culturally inflected matrix of truth and power. I argue that Chinese society has a broad tolerance for dishonesty for at least two reasons: 1) It has always been a hierarchically structured society with substantial power imbalance; 2) it has always prioritized social relations and harmony over truth and justice. For these reasons, lying and cheating are not only tolerated, but may well be necessary, justified, and tacitly encouraged.

14. The art of unnoticing: Risk perception and contrived ignorance in China

Loretta I.T. Lou

In China many petrochemical plants are adjacent to residential areas. Despite this, the people who live in these areas appear indifferent to the threat of toxic pollution and chemical explosions, even though they are aware of the danger. Building on historical and social studies of ignorance, I show how residents in a southern Chinese city live with the threat of petrochemicals by practicing what I call the "art of unnoticing," a contrived form of ignorance that enables them to live with the reality of pollution and reclaim their agency in face of the unavoidable. In light of this, I reflect on the limit and complexity of the global environmental justice when willful ignorance is at work. The next step forward is to understand what it is that people are unnoticing, as well as what unnoticing can do to people's lifeworlds.

15. Benefits of episodic mistrust and selective system trust: Allaying the anxious heart in alternative food networks

Anders Sybrandt Hansen

This paper contributes to comparative anthropological theory by eliciting the conceptual dynamics of episodic mistrust and selective system trust that emerge from ethnographic cases. Following the cue from recent studies that cast mistrust as a productive category in its own right, we apply this idea to a complex modern society suffering from recurrent food safety scandals to study how people in China allay anxieties with the food they and their dependents eat. In our case, mistrust has no anchoring in an ideology of opacity of mind, and yet is shown to be highly socially productive as people deploy, anticipate and attempt to alleviate mistrusting social attitudes. While constant mistrust may give rise to ambitions of total surveillance and control, the ethnography illustrates the benefits of episodic mistrust for actors when attempting to establish confidence in both personal relations and systems. The cases reveal the existence of selective trust in particular systems, which differs both from trust in direct personal relations and from social trust as measured in surveys. The article concludes that system trust must be qualified and conceptually disentangled from general social trust, as trust in exclusive systems may allay anxieties exactly because they insulate the actor from involvement in more comprehensive systems that are seen as overly risky.

16. Against virtue ethics in China anthropology

Hans Steinmüller

Different versions of Confucian ethics, as well as some proposals for an anthropology of ethics, share the core characteristics of virtue ethics: they anchor whatever is considered 'ethical' in a social context yet claim that the ethical transcends the same context. Philosophers have found virtue ethics incapable of dealing with this paradox (both being tied to its context and supposedly superseding it), especially in contemporary societies defined by moral pluralism. In this presentation I argue that similar criticisms can be applied to Confucian ethics and to the anthropology of ethics. Often they simply re-state the meanings of vice and virtue in terms of their social context, yet claim that subjects of virtue somehow raise above the ordinary. Ignoring the possibility of the amoral and the dilemmas of rule-following, the identification of an ethical moment in this way tends to be moralizing, and thus mis-describes the moral reasoning that takes place in everyday life. The arguments are illustrated with examples from anti-drug campaigns at the China-Myanmar border, the uses of irony in Hubei province, and practices of self-improvement in Kunming.

17. Early pears, plant hormones, and chronological ethics
Mikkel Bunkenborg

In the pear district of Zhao county in Hebei, farmers use plant hormones in the cultivation of pears. When the pears have set on the branches, the fruitlets are thinned and a paste containing synthetically produced gibberellin is applied to each individual stem to make the pears ripen quickly and evenly. The use of plant hormones has been common for decades and it's perfectly legal, but the farmers generally regard it as an embarrassing secret and many have misgivings about the so-called "pears rubbed with medicine" 抹药的梨 to the extent that they avoid eating their own produce. Even the farmers who insist that the practice is entirely scientific tend to think that it is best kept secret from the wider public and this apprehension about consumer reactions is well founded as media scares about "hormone fruit" 激素水果 flare up from time to time and disrupt the market for fruit. The use of plant hormones is legal and described by scientists as harmless to humans, but it nonetheless generates a great deal of anxiety among producers and consumers. This paper explores why the use of plant hormones in pear cultivation is felt to be wrong and argues that the anxiety is rooted not just in the confounding of plant and animal hormones but also in questions of timing as the accelerated ripening of hormone pears plays an important role in defining the practice as unnatural and ethically reprehensible.

18. Virtuous body: Physiognomy, materiality and everyday moral judgements among Chinese migrants in Zambia
Di Wu

Like many other cases of interactions between migrants and their host societies, moral judgements are made, exchanged and passed on constantly among Chinese migrants in Zambia - not only about each other but also of local Zambians. Nevertheless, besides following the explicit rules of 'right' and 'wrong', most daily ethical evaluations are reasoned along the parameters of 'physique'; in other words, to many Chinese migrants, a person is good and trustworthy to do business with, for example, is because s/he has a round face and large ears. A judgement of character frequently includes a study of 'physiognomy', which constitutes a crucial part of ethical learning. In this paper, I intend to describe this distinct yet common type of moral judgement, arguing that 'the body' – as the semiotic system of morality - plays a significant role in the process of everyday moral reasoning, interactions and learning among the Chinese migrants in

Zambia. By further comparing and analysing the epistemological differences on 'virtue' between Chinese and Aristotelian traditions, I aim to elicit the potential contributions that Chinese practises of 'moral judgements by physiognomy' can make in balancing the over-intellectualisation trend which the anthropology of ethics is undergoing.