

Spectacular Performances and Surveillance in Contemporary China

現代中国におけるスペクタキュラーパフォーマンスと監視

Haoguang Li

Doctoral Program, Graduate School of Media and Governance, Keio University

李 昊光

慶應義塾大学大学院政策・メディア研究科後期博士課程

Correspondence to: haogli@keio.jp

Abstract: This article examines the relationship between the coerciveness of surveillance and the efficacy of spectacular performances. It argues that sarcastic views or even subversive actions towards spectacular performances may emerge when the coerciveness of surveillance is heightened. By comparing the Reform and Opening-Up era with the Xi era, this article demonstrates that the political campaigns launched by Xi Jinping, against his original willingness, had negative ideological impacts on the Chinese people, ultimately leading to massive protests and an unprecedented level of political instability since 1989.

本研究は、監視の強制性とスペクタキュラーパフォーマンスの効果の関係を検証する。監視の強制性が高まると、スペクタキュラーパフォーマンスに対する民衆からの皮肉な見方や破壊的な行動さえも生じる可能性があるとして主張する。改革開放時代と習近平時代との比較を通じて、習近平の意図に反して行われた政治運動は、中国人に否定的なイデオロギーの影響を与えた。その結果として、1989年以來最大規模な抗議デモおよび政治的不安定を招いたと、本研究は主張する。

Keywords: surveillance, spectacular performances, political stability, the “white paper revolution”, coerciveness
監視、スペクタキュラーパフォーマンス、政治的安定性、白紙革命、強制性

1. Introduction

1.1 Spectacular Performances, Power, and Reception

Spectacular performances, as noted by Don Handelman, are “organized like mirror-images to reflect especially composed visions of social order,” wherein they merely reflect the cultural worlds of the powerful and place spectators at a distance to legitimize and reinforce the dominant power (Handelman, 1997). Indeed, spectacular performances are often employed repeatedly by governments to bolster prevailing power structures, thereby ensuring the maintenance of social and political stability. State power relies on spectacular performances, a process of enchantment, and simultaneously, this enchantment produces power (Reinhard, 2019). Spectacular performances, such as military parades, leader’s speeches, and state-held conferences,

are carefully designed, meticulously orchestrated, and strategically employed for political ends that reinforce state authority through diverse means. Alongside these performances, a series of rigorously edited official messages, typically considered as political rhetoric, is often presented. These messages serve the educational goal of ensuring that the reception of these performances is perceived in the “right” way.

A prototypical way of shoring up dominant power is via nationalism, and spectacular performances are perfect tools to instigate it. Ernest Gellner argues that nationalism originates in and is consolidated by modernization, industrialization, decline in Latinization, and broader education, allowing the majority of people to recognize the existence of their nation and communicate more easily in society (Gellner, 1983, p.19-29). In his discussion of national consciousness, Benedict Anderson

suggests that nations are “imagined communities,” where the recognition of nationalities and the formation of national solidarity occur through people’s imagination. This process is significantly accelerated by Print Capitalism, which enables greater connectivity among people by removing linguistic barriers and maximizing circulation (Anderson, 2006, p.39-42). Hence, spectacular performances serve as powerful political tools for stimulating nationalism, since compared to written words, they can convey much simpler and clearer official messages to more diverse audiences, reaching a much broader circulation. These performances often contain direct messages of the vicissitude of a certain nation and the successes achieved by the current regime, thereby emphasizing the sanctity of the dominant power. For instance, in Mussolini’s Italy, people’s value was impacted by the rules of military parades held by the fascist government, in which “a perfect salute and an impeccable march” could confirm and consolidate the fascist spirit of every person, and the failure of doing so could indicate a person’s reluctance to sacrifice, that further implies the inability of Italy to achieve world supremacy (Falasca-Zamponi, 2000, p.184). That is also the case for the military parades in the Soviet Union, which were characterized by “no uncertainties, no contradictory or discordant notes, no puzzles or paradoxes, no challenges” (Handelman, 1997). Thus, through these spectacular performances characterized by the absolute docility of both spectators and participants, the state’s emphasis on nationalism can be further bolstered, thereby reinforcing its control.

However, spectacular performances may not always be perceived by people in the intended way of the leaders, which means there is a possibility that spectacles can have side effects stemming from people’s dissatisfaction with the government. These side effects manifest as alternative or dissenting voices compared to the official narrative of the spectacles, posing a threat to the stability of the regime due to their potential to induce precariousness. A classic example is the Soviet Union under Gorbachev’s Perestroika and Glasnost, during which cynicism extended even to Gorbachev himself, as reflected by the prevalence of anecdotes (Russian political jokes) containing explicit or implicit ironic views on the Soviet spectacular performances among the high-ranking party cadres (Davies, 2007). Thus, in opposition to the official messages, sarcastic views on spectacular performances may emerge, wherein these alternatives can undermine dominant power and ultimately contribute to political instability.

1.2 Spectacular Performances in Contemporary China

Today’s China, an authoritarian state where democratization was not conducted even though a thorough economic reform was implemented (Cheek, 1998, p.220), exhibits characteristics of people holding sarcastic views towards spectacular performances. The form of spectacular performances in contemporary China differs slightly from that of other states due to its unique past. The Chinese people are not merely spectators; rather, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) allows them to actively participate in some spectacular performances, such as crowd parades (qunzhongyouxing) and anniversary celebrations, reflecting the political rhetoric of the CCP as “the People’s Party”. Furthermore, since the Reform and Opening-Up, Chinese society today has become economically more affluent. Therefore, as argued by Peerenboom, the increasing desire for democratic political participation and expression has emerged as a result of economic prosperity (Peerenboom, 2008, p.257-8). Consequently, in contrast to the official “mainstream” voice, alternative narratives regarding spectacular performances may emerge and rapidly spread through various channels facilitated by the well-developed internet.

Surveillance, a crucial component of the CCP’s propaganda and thought work, is the tool used to monitor and control people’s reception of spectacular performances. Mostly, surveillance remains invisible, but it can become perceivable due to state actions, such as arresting dissenters and mass deleting online posts that oppose the created mainstream narrative. After the Reform and Opening-Up, state surveillance was relatively loosened to a large degree by the CCP, leading to the formation of an atmosphere of political inclusiveness. However, in the recent decade under Xi Jinping’s leadership, state surveillance has continued to be intensified, with the propaganda machine tautologically emphasizing the official mainstream voice, all in order to consolidate his power.

This essay aims to explore the relationship between the efficacy of spectacular performances and state surveillance in contemporary China by comparing cases from the Deng, Jiang, and Hu eras with those from the Xi era. It will employ Foucauldian theories regarding power mechanisms to comprehensively understand this relationship. This essay argues that after the implementation of the Reform and Opening-Up policy in 1978, although the CCP to a certain degree loosened state surveillance and allowed alternative views, in the long term it effectively minimized alternative and sarcastic views of the

spectacular performances, thereby enhancing the regime's durability. However, after Xi Jinping came to power, the CCP changed direction by proactively educating the people on the "correct" way of perceiving spectacular performances, forcing them to adhere to narratives that consistently glorify Xi. Ultimately, heightened surveillance resulted in a growing antithetical sentiment and sarcastic views towards CCP's spectacular performances, culminating in massive anti-Xi and anti-CCP protests in China, exemplified by the most recent "White Paper Revolution", in which modernization, broader education, and greater connectivity among people, such crucial elements of the formation of nationalism argued by Gellner and Anderson that serve as a critical juncture of the reception of spectacular performances, have the exact opposite effects in today's China.

2. The Reform and Opening-Up Era

2.1 Domestic and Foreign Anti-Models for Surveillance

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, during the massive democratic movements exemplified by the Democracy Wall in Xidan, Beijing, Deng Xiaoping chose to loosen state surveillance by allowing political discussions to a considerable extent, and stated "What is the harm of a little opposition?" to Yu Guangyuan, a senior member of Deng's Political Research Office (Vogel, 2011, p.254). Deng highly praised the Democracy Wall and expressed that the CCP should let the masses speak out, which is "a kind of democracy" (Jiang, 2015, p.87). After the 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee, Deng's theories of "seek truth from facts" and "practice is the sole criterion of truth" overcame Hua Guofeng's "Two Whatevers", and prevailed among the whole CCP (Pye, 1993). Thus, China began a thorough process of de-ideologization from Maoism, allowing the Chinese people to debate taboo topics that were considered counterrevolutionary during the Mao era and adopt a form of ideological Westernization (Yu, 2015, p.356-9). The era of Maoist China, characterized by extremely coercive surveillance practiced in everyday life, is considered an anti-model for the CCP. This is because such coercive surveillance is not suitable for the operation of a modern market economy that relies on international trade (Brady, 2010, p.175-98). Therefore, Deng's loosening of state surveillance aimed at modernization and development by eliminating the extreme components of Maoism – a domestic lesson learned by the CCP.

However, the extensive de-ideologization and loosening of

surveillance gradually led to political demands among the Chinese people for democratizing China in the 1980s. These demands eventually triggered massive subversive protests against the CCP. The first noticeable student demonstration occurred in 1986, which was not clearly and completely considered a democratization movement (Kwong, 1988). However, the next and unprecedented one put the Communist regime at stake – the Tiananmen Incident in 1989. Millions of people across the entire country were mobilized, demanding political change. After the Tiananmen Incident, Deng Xiaoping remarked that the CCP's biggest mistake in the past decade was the lack of political thought work (The Party Literature Research Center of the CCP Central Committee, 1991, p.491). He emphasized his "both-hands theory", advocating that the CCP should focus more on political thought work in the future (The Party Literature Research Center of the CCP Central Committee, 1991, p.535-42). Thus, based on the domestic experience of the 1980s, Deng recognized that loosening surveillance to a large degree could also pose risks to the CCP's leadership, as it may lead to a potential challenge to the fundamental legitimization of the CCP by Western ideologies.

Furthermore, a foreign lesson from China's former "big brother", the USSR, also demonstrated to the CCP that a total lifting of surveillance could result in subversions and the disintegration of a communist state. Gorbachev's Perestroika and Glasnost, which similarly completely lifted state surveillance and allowed political discussions on taboo topics, led to large-scale ideological turbulence, ultimately resulting in the failure of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to retain control over the state. Exactly like Yegor Gaidar's ironic description, which stated that Russia in 1991 had the most liberal society (O'Clery, 2012, p.57-8), all state media, including Pravda, which belonged to the CPSU, were criticizing the communist regime (Shimotomai, 1988, p.52-3; Shiokawa, 2021, p.198-9). Therefore, the CCP's high-ranking cadres of the Publicity Department concluded that political "liberalism" (ziyouhua) contributed significantly to the disintegration of the USSR. They asserted that China should "Resolutely maintain the dictatorship of the proletariat and never develop bourgeois democratic freedoms" and "Resolutely uphold Marxism and not allow ideological pluralism" (Shambaugh, 2008, p.58). As pointed out by Brady, loosening surveillance to a considerable extent is also considered another form of anti-model for the CCP (Brady, 2010, p.175-8).

2.2 Relatively Loosened Surveillance

Faced with these two different kinds of anti-models, Deng chose a middle ground, partially removing omnipresent surveillance but retaining some to prevent subversive speeches that could destabilize the regime. The next two supreme leaders, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, followed Deng's legacy, emphasizing the CCP's intervention in issues related to the "overall situation" and "political principles" (People's Daily, Jan. 22, 1999; People's Daily, Jan. 23, 2008). Hence, the CCP allowed democratization in China to a certain degree, as depicted by Brady as "the most undemocratic practices of modern Western societies" (Brady, 2009). Most people who made non-subversive criticisms of the government – dissents that may displease the regime but are not likely to pose a meaningful threat – would not be punished by the CCP due to the relatively loosened surveillance in the past several decades governed by Deng, Jiang, and Hu. Consequently, as suggested by the findings of Qin and Wu, there was a relatively high degree of diversity of voices and social plurality observed in the past decades (Qin and Wu, 2017).

In response to the small fraction of subversive speeches or actions, the CCP resolutely suppressed them without the slightest mercy. Falun Gong, considered a "heretical teaching" (xiejiao) by the CCP, serves as a prototypical example illustrating the CCP's suppression of subversive organizations. Due to Falun Gong's nature, which fosters intensified loyalty to a non-CCP member with an alternative belief system other than communism, coupled with a massive, well-organized, and unexpected protest in 1999, the CCP recognized its political threats, declared Falun Gong an illegal organization, and cracked down on it (Ming, 2011, p.16-7). Another example is the suspension of Freezing Point (bingdian) of the China Youth Daily, the official newspaper of the Communist Youth League. Freezing Point was particularly praised by readers for its in-depth reports and critical analysis of social problems in China. However, this feature led to dissatisfaction from the regime, resulting in Freezing Point being suspended for weeks and its editor-in-chief, Li Datong, being removed in 2006 (Li and Ben, 2006).

As discussed above, during the Reform and Opening-Up era, state surveillance in China was generally loosened, but there were still instances of targeted suppression of subversive speeches or actions. While rejecting dichotomized notions that portray China as authoritarian at all times and political dissent as intolerable (Wong, 2021, p.183-4), it is important to

acknowledge that there was a considerable degree of freedom of speech and political discussions, as long as they were considered non-subversive by the regime.

2.3 "Hello, Xiaoping!", "Toad", and the Wenchuan Earthquake

In such a politically plural era, the spectacular performances launched by the CCP reached their peak in terms of having positive effects on shoring up the dominant power of the Party and consolidating the durability of the regime. By allowing proactive participation in spectacular performances and implementing loosened surveillance, the CCP was more effectively able to instill the "right" understanding of these performances in the Chinese people by demonstrating the intimacy between the CCP and the populace. The crowd parade segment of the military parade in 1984 best illustrates this. During the parade, students from Peking University spontaneously held a banner emblazoned with the phrase "Hello, Xiaoping!" (Xiaoping Nihao!) (Lin et al., 2015). As noted by Vogel, this informal and spontaneous greeting from the masses, unlike the orchestrated slogan "Long live Chairman Mao" performed by the Red Guards, served to demonstrate widespread public support for Deng, thereby significantly bolstering his leadership (Vogel, 2011, p.465-6). Therefore, it could be argued that both the "big man" and "chiefdom" characteristics noted by Sahlins, signifying Deng's de facto supreme position within the party and his close intimacy with the Chinese people (Sahlins, 1963), were demonstrated and further enhanced through these spectacular performances. Consequently, his dominant power was reaffirmed.

The successor of Deng, Jiang Zemin, arguably the most famous and intriguing political figure in Chinese subculture due to his nickname "toad" (haha) given by the younger generations in China, inherited Deng's political legacy. As noted above, even though Jiang suppressed some subversive organizations, he to a considerable degree allowed a diversity of voices in Chinese society, as exemplified by the jokes made by people about national leaders, including his own nickname "haha". Lu argues that the toad worship culture symbolizes resistance to the authority of the Great Firewall, initiated by the CCP in 1998, and people's desire for free speech (Lu, 2021). However, what Lu failed to take into account is that the peak popularity of this toad worship phenomenon occurred during the Xi Jinping era, indicating that this subcultural phenomenon should be examined from a retrospective perspective, as people have nostalgic views.

As Fang noted, one important reason for the prevalence of the toad worship phenomenon is the implicit criticism toward Xi Jinping, largely attributed to a freer past with loosened state surveillance and fewer ideological campaigns (Fang, 2018).

Indeed, as Fang and Lu have pointed out, some people utilized toad worship as a means to express their political dissent against the CCP. However, this acquiesced subcultural phenomenon itself demonstrates the loosened surveillance and further indicates the intimacy between the party and the Chinese people. This could be observed through people's reception of the spectacular performance in late 2022 – Jiang's funeral. The third "Letter to the whole Party, the Army, and the People of all ethnic groups in the Country" (Gao Quandang Quanjun Quanguogezurenmin Shu) published by the CCP proclaimed Jiang's death and highly evaluated his achievements (Xinhua News Agency, Nov. 30, 2022). The Chinese people, including intellectuals who were critics of Jiang's policies, left positive comments about him, viewing him as a reformer, and cherishing the memory of that more open, plural, democratic, and freer era (Shepherd et al., 2022).

Hu Jintao, akin to his predecessor Jiang, similarly adhered to Deng's surveillance strategy. Although empirical research conducted by numerous scholars indicates that Hu also emphasized ideological campaigns, this emphasis was primarily confined to inner-party speeches. Publicly, he was widely perceived as reformist and moderate in tone (Shambaugh, 2008, p.158-9). The public sentiment towards the special coverage of the Wenchuan earthquake provided by China Central Television, which demonstrates the correctness of the CCP's leadership in guiding rescue efforts and the greatness of the People's Liberation Army, can best indicate the CCP's public mobilization under Hu's leadership. During this natural crisis, the Chinese people tended to believe in the official messages delivered by the state-run media, indicating a significant reinforcement of the CCP's political trust among the public audience, thereby consolidating the CCP's political legitimacy (You et al., 2019).

Thus, in the Deng, Jiang, and Hu eras characterized by loosened surveillance, the effects of spectacular performances tended to align with the CCP's desired narrative. Chinese people were more willing to accept official messages and be "positively affected", serving as a crucial part of consolidating the CCP's durability.

3. The Xi Era

3.1 Re-ideologization and Intensified Surveillance

Xi Jinping, employing markedly different approaches to state surveillance and ideological control, initiated a comprehensive re-ideologization process among CCP members and the entire nation. Viewing himself as the "Mao Zedong of the 21st century", Xi Jinping dismantled much of Deng's legacy through actions such as amending the constitution and serving a third term (Ding and Panda, 2022, p.30). Xi's re-ideologization is intrusive to people's lives. In China, particularly among CCP members and college students, individuals are compelled to study Xi's thoughts daily by completing mandatory quizzes on mobile apps such as Xuexi Qiangguo and Qingnian Daxuexi (Liang et al., 2021).

With the collective memory of a significantly freer past among Chinese people, Xi's retrogression inevitably sparked criticism. However, compared to his predecessors, Xi shows much less tolerance for any alternative views and suppresses dissenters much more coercively. He utilizes modern cyber technologies and frontier innovations to enhance state surveillance. Therefore, under his leadership, the CCP has a much more effective and coordinated surveillance system than ever before (Qiang, 2019).

Xi also employs spectacular performances to reaffirm his dominant power, but with much more attention on alternative narratives even though they are not likely to pose any threat to the CCP. For instance, Xi held more military parades than his predecessors. Normally, China holds a military parade once every decade, but Xi has organized three within the past decade: the Victory Parade in 2015 commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Anti-Japanese War, the 2017 People's Liberation Army (PLA) Day Parade, and the routine parade in 2019 celebrating the 70th anniversary of the PRC. The topics of military parades were "both sacred and highly censored", with any alternative views other than the propagated mainstream voice strictly prohibited. However, even within such a highly censored political environment, there were still some "snippets" presenting sarcastic views of the parades, particularly regarding their high costs (Delury et al., 2015). Similar to Jiang, Xi was also caricatured as "Winnie the Pooh", and some individuals poked fun at him during the military parade by placing a Winnie the Pooh toy next to him while he rode in the car (Freudenstein, 2020). Unlike the party's tolerance of "toad worship", anything related to Winnie the Pooh was highly censored and became a

political taboo in China.

Another method that Xi constantly employs to stimulate nationalism is through anti-foreign spectacular performances, facilitated by massive propaganda campaigns and patriotic ceremonies. The CCP consistently dictates and promotes the mainstream view, while any related comments on the internet are subject to coercive surveillance by the state. Any distorted or alternative views are highly likely to be punished via various forms. For instance, during the Sino-Indian conflict in 2020, four Chinese soldiers were killed, and one was wounded. The valor and sacrifice of these soldiers swiftly elevated them to exemplary status, catalyzing expansive study campaigns within both the PLA and the broader populace. These campaigns, characterized by their grandeur and scale, were orchestrated to meticulously promote the ethos of dedication and selflessness epitomized by the fallen soldiers, predominantly through the pervasive dissemination of propaganda. In response to these nationalistic spectacular performances, Qiu Ziming, a former reporter, posted sarcastic comments on the incident. Soon after, the government deleted his post, and he was arrested and sent to jail (Global Times, May 31, 2021). Another noticeable case is Xi's anti-Americanism campaign. During the past decade, Xi notably prioritized the propaganda efforts aimed at commemorating the Korean War. The most noticeable spectacular performance is the transfer of People's Volunteer Army soldiers' remains from Korea to China, a highly sanctified ceremony that has been conducted multiple times during the Xi era (Ministry of Veterans Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2020). Furthermore, a series of Korean War movies were produced recently and flourished in China. In response to these state-initiated spectacular performances, Luo Changping, an influential journalist, posted objective but alternative views regarding the fate of the company that froze to death during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, a narrative particularly emphasized by these campaigns. The company was referred to as the "ice sculpture company" (Bingdiaolian) by the propaganda machine, but Luo called it a "silly company" (Shadiaolian) in his post and further questioned the legitimacy of the Korean War. Like Qiu, Luo was also sentenced to seven months in prison (Global Times, May 5, 2022). The arrests of Qiu and Luo were also extensively reported by the state media. These practices echo the struggle sessions during the Mao era, where Chinese people were informed by the state of the consequences of perceiving spectacular performances "incorrectly".

3.2 The Pandemic, the 20th National Congress, and the "White Paper Revolution"

Besides the sarcastic and alternative narratives mentioned above regarding Xi's spectacular performances, the extremely coercive surveillance ultimately triggered massive protests against Xi and the CCP, widely considered to be unprecedented in scale since 1989.

During the pandemic, the Chinese government initiated massive lockdowns in most major cities across the country, which were rigidly and incrementally implemented by local cadres. After the lockdown in Wuhan had achieved some positive results, Xi utilized the propaganda apparatus to assert to the populace that all anti-COVID policies and deployments were "under his personal command and direction" (Li, 2022). In September 2020, Xi Jinping organized a grand award ceremony in Beijing to honor and commend the "People's Heroes" who had made significant contributions and sacrifices in the fight against COVID-19 (CGTN, Sep. 7, 2020). However, many individuals expressed their discontent due to the absence of the name Li Wenliang. Dr. Li was a physician who first alerted the public to the existence of the new virus back in December 2019. Following his warning, he was promptly arrested by the police on charges of "spreading rumors" and compelled to issue a statement of repentance. Li's "crime" was also extensively reported with negative intent by the state media prior to the official recognition of the existence of the new virus (BBC News Zhongwen, Sep. 8, 2020).

With tightened state surveillance, the CCP held the 20th National Congress in October 2022. Due to Xi's amendment to the Chinese constitution, he was unsurprisingly "appointed" and "elected" to serve his third term, and the politburo is now filled with his loyal followers. This spectacular performance, however, contrary to Xi's original intent of reaffirming his dominant power over China, triggered massive protests across the entire nation and even overseas, leading the regime to face an unprecedented level of political instability since 1989.

The first world-shocking but relatively small-scale anti-Xi protest occurred in Beijing on October 13th, 2022, only three days before the opening of the 20th National Congress. A man burned a tire and placed two huge banners on the Sitong Bridge. The left banner stated "NO PCR test, but food! No lockdowns, but freedom! No lie, but dignity. No Cultural Revolution but reform! No dictator but vote! We are not slaves, we are citizens!"; the right banner stated "Students strike! Workers strike! Remove the dictator and national traitor Xi Jinping! We

want to eat. Arise! People who don't want to be slaves! Save China by opposing dictatorship and authoritarianism! Elect the president with one person one vote!" (Davidson, 2022). The explicit and direct criticism of Xi indicates that dissatisfaction with him was not only related to his strict COVID policies but also, to a significant extent, to his repressive surveillance measures. Xi is widely regarded as the second Mao among the Chinese people, as he abolished Deng's legacy of Reform and Opening-Up and was on his way to initiating a second cultural revolution.

One month after the ending of the 20th National Congress, massive, unorganized, but extremely influential anti-Xi and anti-CCP protests erupted across the globe among Chinese people. The protests were triggered by a fire that occurred in Xinjiang on November 24, 2022. It was widely believed that the local government physically locked people in their homes, either by welding the doors shut or by placing locks or barriers from the outside. This incident resulted in the deaths of at least 10 people. At this time, Xi's coercive approach to surveillance finally resulted in extremely negative impacts, as people did not believe the government's clarification that they did not block the exit. Soon after the Xinjiang tragedy, massive anti-Xi and anti-CCP protests flourished in dozens of major cities in China. The most noticeable and influential slogan, "Xi Jinping, step down! CCP, step down!" was first shouted out by the protesters on Urumqi Road in Shanghai. This slogan soon flourished in many other places across the globe, as people were not merely demanding the end of the so-called "dynamic Zero-COVID" policy, but much more. They called for democratization, free speech, and freedom of the press directly on the streets in China (Ott and Palmer, 2022).

I went to observe the protest at the Chinese embassy in London on November 27th, 2022. Each person was given a piece of white paper with nothing on it, which was influenced by the famous Russian political joke that the government arrested a person holding a white paper for the reason "we know what you want to express". The protesters were primarily Chinese people from mainland China, and they kept repeating slogans from the Beijing Sitong Bridge Protest and the Urumqi Road Protest. People also voiced their political desires for the release of Peng Zaizhou, the man who conducted the Sitong Bridge Protest and was later arrested, as well as for the protesters in Shanghai who were arrested by the government. Protesters in London went much further than those in mainland China. Some people were holding Xi's portrait, but with a symbolic mustache resembling

Hitler's, along with a big red cross on his face. Chinese international students across the whole UK gathered in front of the embassy. A student from the University of Cambridge delivered a speech on Xi's retrogression, exemplified by his third term, intensified surveillance, and fake content of state media. Some people held banners with slogans "Friends, go on the streets. Is this kind of government trustworthy?... Don't believe the mainstream in the media anymore... I missed the Urumqi Road in Shanghai last night, and I sometimes feel guilty. Hope your awakening will not be several years after". The temperature in London on that day hovered around zero Celsius, yet a protester stood bare-chested, adorned with bright red paint spelling out "Our China" on his body, and held aloft a banner bearing the slogan "Our freedom, our rights". In response to the CCP's official narrative attributing the protests to being "guided by foreign powers", the protesters overtly expressed their satire with the statement "I am not a foreign power, I am Chinese youth!" They also referenced a classic quote from the movie "The Death of Stalin": "Foreign powers? From where? the moon?" Furthermore, a mainland Chinese student from University College London delivered a speech, expressing that she used to be a "little pink", but now understood the rationale behind advocating for independence for Taiwan and Hong Kong. She also argued that Xinjiang should seek independence due to Xi's leadership. To my surprise, no one criticized her for her "politically incorrect" statement.

This worldwide "White Paper Revolution" could be argued as the most serious challenge to the CCP since 1989. Through the examination of the contents of the political slogans and public sentiments, the desire to lift the dynamic Zero-COVID played the role of a trigger, which ignited the long-suppressed anger of the Chinese people due to Xi's coercive surveillance and constant ideological campaigns. The side effects were enormous and probably fatal, with Chinese people completely distrusting state media, and therefore any spectacular performances that intend to shore up Xi's dominant power would be perceived sarcastically as mere laughingstocks.

4. Surveillance and Efficacy of Spectacular Performances

As Lucian Pye's notion in his book that China is a "civilization-state, pretending to be a nation-state" (Pye, 1992, p.235), stimulating nationalism through spectacular performances is a key weapon for the CCP to enhance the cohesion among Chinese people, thereby reinforcing its own dominant power. The

divergent public sentiments concerning spectacular performances between the Reform and Opening-Up era and the Xi era, as discussed above, underscore a profound erosion of public perception towards such displays. Under Xi's regime, ideological intrusiveness has markedly intensified in individuals' daily lives, and political repression has assumed a more coercive nature. Consequently, the notably reinforced ideological oversight across all spheres of existence has led to heightened public consciousness regarding the omnipresence of the CCP and its pervasive sway over diverse domains.

The mechanisms of state power are starkly elucidated by the growing awareness among the Chinese populace regarding the escalating state interventions in their daily lives – a phenomenon that, according to Foucault, carries adverse repercussions for the efficacy of power. Foucault's concept of Panopticism suggests the formation of a docile body, wherein individuals are regulated by an "omnipresent and omniscient power" facilitated through imperceptible surveillance (Foucault, 1995, p.195-8). Furthermore, in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault posits that power is "tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself", and the effectiveness of power is "proportional to its ability to conceal its own mechanisms" (Foucault, 1978, p.86). With the heightened visibility of power mechanisms comes an increased recognition of their coercive nature, leading to the emergence of resistance – consequently, the pervasive nature of power results in side effects manifesting across various facets of society.

From this Foucauldian perspective, the de-ideologization during the Reform and Opening-Up era could be viewed as the CCP's attempt to shift its image from its Maoist past to a more democratic country, by concealing its power mechanisms, that is, minimizing the perceived political coerciveness and ideological intrusiveness that had been long-entrenched. Regarding these subversive speeches that were perceived as having potential political threats, the CCP showed its intolerance, thereby facilitating self-discipline among Chinese people under an "omnipresent and omniscient" state surveillance that could control the emergence of political instability to the minimum level. Therefore, Chinese society became much more pluralistic and diverse, and individuals tended to offer "positive" feedback or conform to the "correct" response when reacting to the CCP's spectacular performances with minimized resistance.

However, Xi discarded much of Deng's political legacy, specifically in the fields of surveillance and ideological campaigns. Xi's re-ideologization prompted Chinese people,

who had experienced a relatively more open political climate and engagements with democratic nations through various channels, to once again acknowledge the coercive political authority wielded by the CCP, reminiscent of the Mao era. Through his intensified ideological campaigns and significantly heightened surveillance measures, the CCP has re-exposed and consistently showcased its bureaucratic power mechanisms, which led to robust resistance against the party due to the perceived political penetration and intrusiveness, as viewed through the lens of Foucault. Consequently, the rapid increase in cynicism towards Xi and the CCP within China has led to a significant decline in perceiving the official messages "correctly", and therefore, this has paved the way for the emergence of sarcastic perspectives and even subversive protests toward the orchestrated spectacular performances. Thus, contrary to Gellner and Anderson's approaches to nationalism, Chinese people who had received a broader education and facilitated a well-developed communication network through modern technologies, did not posit positive reactions toward the stimulation of nationalism via spectacular performances in the Xi era but rather, they had the exact opposite receptions, primarily due to their growing resistance toward the intensified surveillance.

5. Conclusion

This essay has examined the relationship between surveillance and the efficacy of spectacular performances. During the Reform and Opening-Up era characterized by the CCP's loosened surveillance, Chinese people were relatively more inclined to believe the official messages of the spectacular performances due to greater plurality and diversity, coupled with less political intrusiveness in society, in which the regime was more effective in controlling the state ideology to avoid potential turbulence. With a general tolerance towards most non-subversive speeches and targeted suppression of subversive ones, the CCP bolstered its governmentality by upholding Panopticism and concealing its power mechanisms, as understood through Foucault's perspective. In contrast, during the Xi era, Chinese people tend to be more recalcitrant by satirizing spectacular performances, due to the significantly heightened state surveillance and ideological intrusiveness. The effectiveness of the spectacular performances intended to bolster Xi's dominant power has been considerably diminished, stemming from the realization of the Party's power mechanisms and the heightened coercive tactics reminiscent of Mao's era, which resonated among the Chinese

populace who collectively experienced a relatively freer past. Occasionally, these sarcastic views from Chinese people can ultimately develop into massive protests, which may even topple the Communist regime.

Distinct from those orthodox approaches to nationalism, cases in authoritarian states show that the crucial elements involved in forming and enhancing nationalism have the opposite effects, in which a much broader circulation of people equipped with modern education would cause their resistance toward understanding spectacular performances “correctly” when they face heightened ideological campaigns and state surveillance, thereby weakening nationalism. Some leaders recognized this. For instance, people in Turkmenistan made jokes about their leader who was constantly being glorified by the state media, and the leader realized and urged his subjects to be more restrained in sanctification (Hann and Pelkmans, 2009). After the “White Paper Revolution”, the CCP should take heed of these dynamics. There are still ferments even though the CCP lifted the COVID restrictions since the pandemic was merely a trigger that sparked people’s long-term detestations of Xi’s retrogression, particularly his deteriorated surveillance, which has eradicated Deng’s legacy and attempts to sanctify himself as the second Mao. The most recent “flowers revolution” that mourned Li Keqiang could best illustrate the existence of this ongoing tension in Chinese society (The Economist, Nov. 2, 2023).

In such a post-trust era in China, where state media no longer holds authority due to the collective memory and ingrained individualism formed over the past decades, how the CCP deals with the cacophony of resistant voices toward spectacular performances requires future research and observation. In other words, the CCP needs to steer people toward the “right track” in their reception of spectacular performances, aiming to consolidate both their “big man” and “chiefdom” characteristics among the Chinese population. However, this task is particularly difficult due to China’s unique past and an anachronistic reinforcement of surveillance by Xi. The Chinese government cannot suppress all alternative views like in the Mao era, owing to people’s experiences of Deng’s reform. Moreover, the CCP is now facing an overall decline of trust in official messages due to the vast amount of information coming from the so-called democratic world that cannot be completely blocked.

References

- Anderson, B. (2006) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso.
- Brady, A. (2009) “Mass Persuasion as a Means of Legitimation and China’s Popular Authoritarianism”, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 53(3), p.434-57.
- Brady, A. (2010) *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Cheek, T., Juan, D. (1998) *Market Economics and Political Change: Comparing China and Mexico*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Davidson, H. (2022) “‘We All Saw It’: Anti-Xi Jinping Protest Electrifies Chinese Internet”, *The Guardian*. October 14, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/14/we-all-saw-it-anti-xi-jinping-protest-electrifies-chinese-internet> (Accessed on April 17, 2024)
- Davies, C. (2007) “Humour and Protest: Jokes under Communism”, *International Review of Social History*, 52(s15), p.291-305.
- Delury, J., Smith, S., Repnikova, M., Raghavan, S. (2015) “Looking Back on the Seventieth Anniversary of Japan’s Surrender”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 74(4), p.797-820.
- Ding, A. and Panda, J. (2022) *Chinese Politics and Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping: The Future Political Trajectory*, Routledge.
- Falasca-Zamponi, S. (2000) *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy*, University of California Press.
- Fang, K. (2018) “Turning a Communist Party Leader into an Internet Meme: The Political and Apolitical Aspects of China’s Toad Worship Culture”, *Information, Communication & Society*, 23(1), p.38-58.
- Foucault, M., Translated by Robert Hurley. (1978) *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M., Translated by Alan Sheridan. (1995) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage Books.
- Freudenstein, R. (2020) “Why the Chinese Communist Party Doesn’t Like Winnie the Pooh”, *European View*, 19(2), p.245-6.
- Gellner, E. (1983) *Nations and Nationalism*, Cornell University Press.
- Handelman, D. (1997) “Rituals/Spectacles”, *International Social Science Journal*, 49(153), p.387-99.
- Hann, C. and Pelkmans, M. (2009) “Realigning Religion and Power in Central Asia: Islam, Nation-State and (Post)Socialism”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61(9), p.1517-41.
- Jiang, S. (2015) *Citizen Publications in China Before the Internet*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kwong, J. (1988) “The 1986 Student Demonstrations in China: A Democratic Movement?”, *Asian Survey*, 28(9), p.970-85.
- Li, D. and Ben, C. (2006) “Unsubstantiated Accusation”, *Index on Censorship*, 35(4), p.167-74.
- Li, G. (2022) “The Translation of Commentaries in Hubei Documentaries of MFA Presenting Chinese Provinces to the World”, *Art and Performance Letter*, 3(3), p.1-8.
- Liang, F., Chen, Y., Zhao, F. (2021) “The Platformization of Propaganda: How Xuexi Qiangguo Expands Persuasion and Assesses Citizens in China”, *International Journal of Communication*, 15(20), p.1855-74.
- Lin, F., Sun, Y., Yang, H. (2015) “How are Chinese Students Ideologically Divided? A Survey of Chinese College Students’ Political Self-Identification”, *Pacific Affairs*, 88(1), p.51-74.
- Lu, I. (2021) “Remediating China’s Virtual Borders: The Ambient Myth of Moha (Toad Worship)”, *Visual Culture Wars at the Borders of Contemporary China*, p.155-76.
- Ming, X. (2011) *The Cultural Economy of Falun Gong in China*, The University of South Carolina Press.
- O’Clery, C. (2012) *Moscow, December 25, 1991: The Last Day of the Soviet Union*, Public Affairs.
- Ott, H. and Palmer, E. (2022) “China’s Xi Jinping Faces Calls to Step Down as Deadly Fire Sparks Unprecedented Protests over ‘Zero-Covid’ Policy”, *CBS News*, November 28, 2022. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/xi-jinping-step-down-china-deadly-fire-protests-zero-covid-policy/> (Accessed on April 17, 2024)
- Party Literature Research Center of the CCP Central Committee (1991) *Shi San Da Yi Lai*, People’s Press.

- Peerenboom, R. (2008) *China Modernizes: Threat to the West or Model for the Rest?*, Oxford University Press.
- Pye, L. (1992) *The Spirit of Chinese Politics*, Harvard University Press.
- Pye, L. (1993) “An Introductory Profile: Deng Xiaoping and China’s Political Culture”, *The China Quarterly*, 135, p.412-43.
- Qiang, X. (2019) “The Road to Digital Unfreedom: President Xi’s Surveillance State”, *Journal of Democracy*, 30(1), p.53-67.
- Qin, B. and Wu, Y. (2017) “Why Does China Allow Freer Social Media? Protest versus Surveillance and Propaganda”, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(1), p.117-40.
- Reinhard, W. (2019) “The Representation of Power and the Power of Representation”, *Distinguished Lecture*, p.1-17.
- Sahlins, M. (1963) “Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5(3), p.285-303.
- Shambaugh, D. (2008) *China’s Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Shepherd, C., Chiang, V., Wu, P., Kuo, L. (2022) “In China, Former President Jiang’s Death Comes at an Unsettled Time”, *The Washington Post*, December 3, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/11/30/china-president-jiang-zemin-dies/> (Accessed on April 17, 2024)
- Shimotomai, N. (1988) *Gorubachofu No Jidai (Gorbachev Era)*, Iwanami Shoten.
- Shiokawa, N. (2021) *The Disintegration of A State: Perestroika and the End of the Soviet Union*, The University of Tokyo Press.
- Vogel, E. (2011) *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Wong, Y. (2021) “Assessing the Era of Jiang Zemin”, in Hua, S. ed., *Chinese Ideology*, Routledge.
- You, Y., Huang, Y., Zhuang, Y. (2019) “Natural Disaster and Political Trust: A Natural Experiment Study of the Impact of the Wenchuan Earthquake”, *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 6(1), p. 140-65.
- Yu, M. (2015) *Xing Su ‘Xin Ren’: Zhong Gong Xuan Chuan Yu Su Lian Jing Yan*, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica.

[受付日 2023. 11. 28]

[採録日 2024. 7. 4]