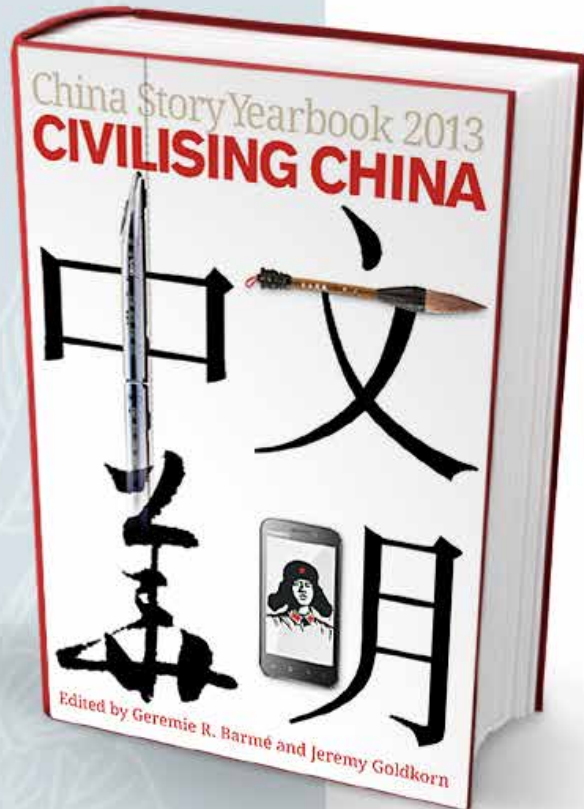


The China Story



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CONCLUSION

A CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS

Geremie R. Barmé

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CIVILISING CHINA

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As China becomes wealthier and more confident on the global stage, it also expects to be respected and accommodated as a major global force — and as a formidable civilisation. Through a survey and analysis of China's regional posture, urban change, social activism and law, mores, the Internet, history and thought — in which the concept of 'civilising' plays a prominent role — *China Story Yearbook 2013* offers insights into the country today and its dreams for the future.



Chinese football fans, Guiyang, June 2011.
Source: ImagineChina



'Charter 08'.
Source: inmediaHK.net

The following month, editors at the *Southern Weekly* waded into the debate, praising the government's response to the Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan for respecting 'universal values'. Like Chang Ping's editorial for the *Southern Metropolis Daily*, this editorial attracted allegations of traitorous attitudes from conservative groups who read any advocacy of universal values as a Western plot to undermine the Communist Party. The controversy re-emerged during the August 2008 Beijing Olympics. The official slogan of the Games was clearly universalist: 'One World, One Dream'.

Conservative commentators skewered the slogan. Dissidents and liberal academics, on the other hand, published 'Charter 08' — a manifesto supporting universal values — under the aegis of the well-known writer (and now jailed Nobel Peace Prize laureate) Liu Xiaobo.

In his report to the Eighteenth Party National Congress in November 2012, however, President Hu Jintao spoke about 'universal values' and 'core socialist values' without conveying any sense that there might be a contradiction between the two. As Hu put it, one of China's development goals is to 'constantly increase the credibility of the system of justice, and to effectively respect and protect human rights' (*sifa gongxinli buduan tigao, renquan dedao qieshi zunzhong he baozhang* 司法公信力不断提高, 人权得到切实尊重和保障). Hu went on to say that democracy, freedom, equality, justice and rule of law (*minzhu, ziyou, pingdeng, gongzheng, fazhi*



Lily pad lights.
Photo: Hsing Wei

民主、自由、平等、公正、法治) were to be 'encouraged' (*changdao* 倡导), after which he went on to reiterate the need for an 'active cultivation of socialist core values' (*jiji peiyu shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhi guan* 积极培育社会主义核心价值观).

Speaking at a National Thought Work Conference on 20 August 2013, the new party leader Xi Jinping reiterated the importance of 'core socialist values' and a tireless struggle to maintain ideological unity in the face of a rapidly changing world. China's economic achievements and relative social cohesion at a time of continued global uncertainty, he said, give the Party reason to celebrate its successes and persevere on its chosen path. As it does so, Xi emphasised, the Party needs 'to tell the China story well, to make sure China's voice is heard' internationally (*jiang hao Zhongguo gushi, chuanbo hao Zhongguo shengyin* 讲好中国故事, 传播好中国声音).

The Struggle Against Rumours



Chinese-American investor and Weibo celebrity Xue Manzi (Charles Xue) at an event in Beijing, 20 April 2012.

Source: ImagineChina

According to reports in the Hong Kong media, at the August 2013 National Thought Work Conference, Xi Jinping spoke about the need to purge online rumours and for the state to build a 'strong army to seize ground of new media'.

On 20 August, Beijing police detained several people connected with Beijing Erma Interactive Marketing and Planning, including Internet celebrity Qin Huohuo, on suspicion of rumour-mongering. Later official reports accused Qin of being behind slander of the Chinese Red Cross, a para-state organization whose reputation had been devastated by criticism online, particularly on Sina Weibo.

On August 23, Chinese-born American-passport-holding businessman and famous microblogger Charles Xue (Xue Biquan, or Xue Manzi) was arrested and accused of soliciting prostitutes. Over the next two weeks, Xue was featured in multiple China Central Television (CCTV) news shows in which he confessed firstly to soliciting prostitutes, and then to misleading his more than twelve million followers on Weibo for vanity; Xinhua reported that 'he offered to appear handcuffed as a negative example to publicise the online rumors crackdown'.

As part of the same campaign, another famous microblogger, the real estate developer Pan Shiyi was featured in a CCTV package, stuttering and agreeing with the interviewer that 'online rumours' could harm society.

Such triumphalism masks the fact that there is an abiding clash of cultures within the Chinese Communist Party itself. Its strict materialist worldview precludes any endorsement of abstract human worth and universal value. But, rhetorically at least, it recognises the potentially positive role of values that, like Marxism itself, first evolved in the West. Some within the party-state don't see these as mutually exclusive. In Chapter Four, Jiang Bixin, Deputy Chief Justice of the Supreme People's Court, is quoted as saying:

Concepts such as democracy, freedom, equality, rule of law, justice, integrity, and harmony should be incorporated into core socialist values These concepts have never been merely patents of the bourgeoisie, but are the product of the civilising process which is commonly created by all human beings.

Perhaps it is in similar embrace of both socialist and universal values that legal and party thinkers will discover a third theoretical way forward — one that affirms the achievements of the Party while also allowing for it to moderate its ideological stance to fit the increasingly sophisticated demands of its people as part of its own civilising process.

