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**The concept of civilization
(*wenming*) in Chinese public
service advertising (*gongyi
guanggao*): the case studies of
Ningbo and Deyang**

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Abstract

The present thesis analyzes the development and transmission of the Chinese concept of civilization (*wenming*) in Chinese public service advertising (*gongyi guanggao*). This work intends to underline how the concept of civilization is conveyed and employed in modern China, and how its meaning and implications aim to improve its citizens behavior. The first chapter consists in a general overview on the public service advertising category where its boundaries, history and definitions are presented in a global perspective. In the second chapter the focus shifts to Chinese public service advertising, providing an insight into its evolution and employment, and its involvement with the political scene of the country through the years. Following these considerations, a discussion on the roots of the concept of civilization, its implications, and the use of the term “*wenming*” in the political discourse will be held. In the last chapter a brief survey of the approach that will be employed for the analysis of the case studies will be presented. The campaigns that are taken into consideration were launched by the cities of Ningbo, in Zhejiang province, and Deyang, in Sichuan province.

Keywords: *wenming*, civilization, *gongyi guanggao*, Chinese advertising, PSA.

摘要

本文论文分析了在中国的公益广告中，发展和传播过程中国文明的含义。旨在强调文明概念在现代中国的传播和运用，以及它的含义和含义是如何改善公民行为的。

第一章，包括对公共服务广告类别的总体概述，以及从全球的角度来阐述其历史和定义。随着这些结论，能够更好地了解公益广告的产生过程，简要的说明由市场营销创造的社会广告，进行引导人民行为的方法。

第二章，重点转向中国。首先介绍 20 世纪到现在中国与商业广告关系，而后深入了解公益广告演变和当今发展情况，以及这些年来公益广告在国家政治舞台上的参与。

第三章，探讨‘文明’这个概念的起源和含义。从中国出现文明的时候到它如今的含义与使用。以及讨论‘文明’这个词在政治话语中的含义与如何使用。

第四章，为了更好的理解公益广告中的‘文明’与政治的关系，进行了两个案例研究分析。简要地介绍分析了所采用的方法和分析的结果。

分析的两个研究案例是浙江省宁波市和四川省德阳市发布的公益广告。

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Introduction

We have seen and heard public service advertising (PSA) since we were children, in any kind of media communication system: on TV, in the newspapers, on the radio, on posters hung in our cities. PSA made us think of and re-evaluate certain aspects of our lifestyle or behaviors, sometimes even without realizing they were the reason why we had such thoughts. Yet how many times did we actually pay close attention to those messages or the way they were delivered, both with words and images? How many times did we ask ourselves: what is a PSA, and what lies underneath this means?

Public service advertising is a form of communication that might help in identifying a country's important issues or the topics the national debate focuses on, but its relevance is often overlooked.

This kind of advertising might go unnoticed in many countries but China, where the cities are covered with hundreds of posters advocating the importance of a righteous behavior, and the necessity to contribute to the formation of a prosperous country. It is probably because of the posters' colorful and joyful appearance that they catch the eye of foreigners and tourists, who, sometimes unaware of the socio-political context that generated these ads, curiously glance at them. The idea for this work has had the same approach, as the initial astonishment of marveled eyes that slowly turned into the will to understand the dynamics and the implications hidden behind those posters hung in all the Chinese cities.

Chinese PSA, which go by the name *gongyi guanggao* 公益广告, present different features than other countries' better known public service advertising; these dissimilarities are rooted in the country's past and its political history, to whom the public service advertising practice is closely linked.

While the visual component of the posters draws its characteristics from Chinese traditional art, the messages they convey are more akin to the political discourse, as they spread information about governmental policies and attempt to influence the citizens' behavior towards certain topics. Following these premises, it is evident how *gongyi guanggao* constitute an important communication means for the ruling class, thus assuming, in some campaigns, what are considered propagandistic features.

Amidst the main topics featured in Chinese PSA, a concept has emerged in the last decades: 'civilization.'

In the years that followed the end of the Mao-era, the increasing importance 'civilization' has assumed in the country's political and social discourse has been mirrored by PSA, that have been used since then to sensitize the population on this matter.

The concept of ‘civilization,’ in Chinese *wenming* 文明, was introduced into the country at the end of the XIX century as a foreign importation; the term had thus assumed a negative connotation, as it was often related to the Western’s colonization of China that happened consequently. Since its introduction in the country, *wenming* had been part of the national debate on the need for China to enter the international scene and establish itself as a powerful, modern country. As the argumentations on the topic developed, the concept of ‘civilization’ itself started being molded and re-evaluated to follow the needs of the ruling class and its power discourse. This process of assessment of the term has led to its present formulation, which encompasses more than one implication.

The development of this idea on a political discourse level has been followed by its employment in the governmental policies, and both had been reflected in PSA, that had the role to further legitimize the authority and build consensus among the population.

It is starting from these assumptions that the present work pursues the goal to underline the close relationship between the Chinese governance and *gongyi guanggao*, with a focus on the ‘civilization’ topic, which has had an important role in the country since the 1980s. In order to better comprehend the outcomes of the historical survey, two case studies will be presented: the public service advertising campaign of Ningbo city, in Zhejiang, and the campaign of Deyang, in Sichuan. The two campaigns have been chosen because of their evident adherence to the governance policies, and for the local features they present, to observe how national measures are transposed into smaller realities.

The choice of focusing on advertisements published on governmental websites has also been determined by the particular period of time in which the present work has been developed: due to the extraordinary international situation the access to various offline resources has been significantly limited.

In the first chapter, the public service advertising domain is defined and distinguished from other non-profit forms of advertising. Then, a brief history of the development of the practice in the United States and in Italy is presented, in order to provide a benchmark for the Chinese context illustrated in the second chapter. The last section of the first chapter presents an introduction to social marketing, the application of marketing techniques to the social communications domain, and is employed in the production of public service advertisement.

The second chapter focuses on China, firstly providing a brief history of the country’s complex relationship with commercial advertising through the years and then, in the second part, illustrating the historical development of the *gongyi guanggao* practice. In order to provide a more exhaustive overview on the present situation of the country’s public service advertising, the main regulations and laws concerning PSA are illustrated.

The third chapter presents a survey on the development of the concept of ‘civilization’ and of its employment by the Chinese governance through the years. Starting from the introduction of the term *wenming* into the country and of the debate that it generated, the chapter proceeds with an overview on the main political connections and implications of the term under the leaderships that succeeded to Mao, namely Deng, Jiang, Hu, and Xi, until present implications of ‘civilization’ in political and social policies are discussed.

In the last chapter the corpus and the methodology framework employed for the analysis are illustrated, providing a contextualization of the work. Finally, the two campaigns are analyzed with both a semiotic and a discursive approach, also considering the visual and textual metaphors that recur in the advertisements.

In the conclusions, general considerations on the outcomes of the work are illustrated, highlighting the elements that connect the representation of *wenming* in *gongyi guanggao* and the close relationship this term has with the Chinese domestic soft power discourse.

1 Public Service Advertising: An Overview

1.1 What is Public Service¹ Advertising?

Although the definition of public service advertising (PSA) might seem simple, finding a proper description defining the main features and the rules this category must abide to, is not easy at all. Any kind of definition would not be exhaustive or clear enough, unless one first takes a step back and analyzes the greater picture Public Service Advertising is framed in.

As the name suggests, Public Service Advertisements (PSA) are a form of advertising,² but a substantial difference between the two main areas included in the word *advertising* needs to be marked. The first area is referred to as *commercial advertising*, and even though it is not the focus of this work, it will be seen later that some principles or strategies which were created in this branch and supposed to be employed in it were, later in time, transposed to our field of interest. The second area is the one PSA belongs to, and it has been the subject of many attempts of definition over the years. The most widespread labels are *non-commercial advertising*, *non-profit advertising*, and *non-product advertising*.³ These labels are all litotes, defining what this branch is not, instead of what it actually is.⁴ As Gadotti states, the use of litotes seems to underline the sort of estrangement advertising techniques go through when they are to be applied for a different achievement than the one they were born for: selling in the trading domain.⁵ Firstly, the focus should be on what falls into the non-commercial advertising, which was defined by E. Sandage at the very beginning of her work as:

Advertising devoted to the presentation of ideas, opinions, or beliefs rather than to the dissemination of information about goods and services. Such advertising is used by business and nonbusiness entities to tell their publics about themselves in order to enhance image and build goodwill among these publics. It is used by business and nonbusiness entities—individuals, groups, and institutions—to express ideas, opinions, and beliefs and have them distributed, unedited, to large audiences via the mass media of communication. Thus, this form of advertising,

¹ For a discussion on the definition of the boundaries of public services and publicness in its broad meaning, see Janet Newman and John Clarke, *Remaking the Public in Public Services* (London: Sage Publications, 2009).

² For considerations about what could possibly be an appropriate definition of *advertising*, see Jef I. Richards and Catharine M. Curran, "Oracles on 'Advertising': Searching for a Definition," *Journal of Advertising* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 63-77, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4189215>; Micael Dahlén and Sara Rosengren, "If Advertising Won't Die, What Will It Be? Toward a Working Definition of Advertising," *Journal of Advertising* 45, no. 3 (July 2016): 334-45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2016.1172387>; Mara Einstein, *Advertising. What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³ In this work the term that will be used is *non-commercial advertising*.

⁴ Giovanna Gadotti, *Pubblicità Sociale. Lineamenti, Esperienze e Nuovi Sviluppi* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2003), 26. The author points out that these three litotes refer to two slightly different domains: while the first two have a similar meaning, and refer to all forms of advertising which don't sponsor the sale of goods, the third one only indicates advertisements which do not sell a specific good or product, but does not include *institutional advertising*, leaving it out of the category.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

in many respects, can be seen as an extension of personal speech by providing modern facilities for its distribution.⁶

In other words, as it is stated later:

Noncommercial advertising is the use of paid, nonpersonal, media communication by an identified sponsor to accomplish objectives that are not related directly to the promotion of products or services.⁷

E. Sandage considered the most relevant authors and their works, analyzing and comparing them in order to develop a widely accepted framework for non-commercial advertising. In his studies, C. H. Sandage referred to this category as *non-product advertising*, describing with this label all those “idea advertising not related directly to products or commercial services.”⁸ Regarding the scope of this kind of advertisement, he suggested a wide range of uses:

It would include individual company and trade association advertising of a public relations character as well as individual and group efforts to secure action on matters of public interest. It would also include the use of advertising to sell religion, political ideas, social change, and economic ideologies.⁹

In his surveys Mandell used the term *non-commercial advertising* to refer to the category, and used the type of advertiser as a criterion to divide the non-commercial sub-categories. He observed that:

Every year we see and hear advertising by federal, state, and local governments, by charitable institutions, by religious organizations, or by political groups. Such advertising may have many purposes, such as support of civic ventures, soliciting donations and contributions, support of candidates for political office, and so on. The methods used in the preparation of such advertising are basically the same as those used in commercial advertising. It should be made clear, however, that the groups mentioned above may also engage in advertising programs for commercial purposes, just as businesses sometimes use noncommercial advertising.¹⁰

One of the latest definitions presented by E. Sandage in her work is partly based on the one given by Dunn and Barban. As the authors states, what they call *public relations advertisement* in the first edition of *Advertising: Its Role in Modern Marketing*, is “the use of paid, nonpersonal, media communication by an identified sponsor to accomplish objectives that are not related directly to the

⁶ Elizabeth A. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising: Development of Conceptual Framework and Definitions; Comparative Analysis of Growth Since 1952* (PhD diss., Illinois: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1983), 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸ Charles H. Sandage, *Advertising Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (Homewood: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1953), 98, quoted in Elizabeth A. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Maurice I. Mandell, *Advertising*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980), 12, quoted in Elizabeth A. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 35.

promotion of products or services.”¹¹ This definition is used by E. Sandage to describe non-commercial advertising, changing the label Dunn and Barban give.

These considerations help draw a line between what can be considered commercial and what can be considered non-commercial advertising. Taking a closer look at the non-commercial advertising category, its four sub categories will be briefly analyzed in this work, namely *institutional advertising*, *advocacy advertising*, *political advertising*, and *public service advertising*.¹² These four categories respond to very specific needs of a firm, a no profit organization, or a government. Over the years their subdivision and categorization has been developed following many different criteria, such as the ad objective or its sponsor. In the following description of the categories, the criteria will be the object of the advertisements, while each category’s sponsors will be briefly discussed, but will not be considered as a crucial discriminating factor.

Institutional advertising is definitely the most difficult category to place into the non-commercial advertising framework,¹³ as it is perceived by many as wider than the other categories. Following the framework developed by E. Sandage, it is possible to agree with her stating that institutional advertising is “the use of paid, nonpersonal, media communication by an identified sponsor to accomplish objectives that create a favorable image of the advertiser and are not related directly to the promotion of products or services.”¹⁴ In her work she analyzes the definitions of the category developed and presented by other authors. Firstly, Mandell, who defined institutional advertising as “a business tool to sell ideas rather than products or services.”¹⁵ Secondly, Dunn and Barban, who stated that the ultimate goal of institutional advertising is communicating to the public the activities the organization is involved in, which could otherwise go unreported by other media channels.¹⁶ Thirdly, Gilson and Berkman, according to whom institutional advertising has the goal of conveying a positive impression of a company to its public.¹⁷ Finally, E. Sandage also reports the Leading Nationals Advertisers definition of institutional advertising: “advertising devoted primarily to selling the corporate personality, with its first objective going beyond the direct sale of a single

¹¹ S. Watson Dunn and Arnold M. Barban, *Advertising: Its Role in Modern Marketing*, 5th ed. (Hinsdale: The Dryden Press, 1982), 647, quoted in Elizabeth A. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 70.

¹² In this work the employed framework will be the one suggested and developed by E. Sandage, but the employed labels will be the ones proposed by Dunn and Barban, as they seem to be the most widespread ones nowadays. For a more detailed discussion, see Elizabeth A. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*.

¹³ Many authors used this label as an umbrella term for many different categories, including advocacy advertising. For an in-depth discussion on the topic, see Elizabeth A. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 30, 36.

¹⁴ Elizabeth A. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 84.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

product or service.”¹⁸ To be classified as institutional advertising, an advertisement has to fulfill one or more qualifications, namely:

It must educate, inform, or impress the public regarding the company's policies, functions, facilities, objectives, ideals, and standards.

It must build favorable opinion about the company by stressing the competence of the company's management, its scientific knowhow, manufacturing skills, technological progress and product improvements, and its contribution to social advancement and public welfare, and on the other hand, to offset unfavorable publicity and negative attitudes.

It must build up the investment qualities of its securities or improve the financial structure of the company.

It must sell the company as a good place to work (and so is often designed to appeal to college graduates or to people of certain skills).¹⁹

In his attempt to provide a definition of the category, Sethi states that “it is intended primarily to generate goodwill and carries a minimum of corporate identification,” and that “this form of advertising deals with certain specific characteristics of the corporate advertiser rather than with specific products or services - the purpose of the typical commercial advertisement”²⁰. Starting from these definitions of institutional advertising, we can infer that any kind of advertisement which has the purpose of conveying a positive image of its sponsor goes by this name.

Advocacy advertising, also known as “issue-oriented advertising” or “controversy advertising,” is believed by many to be closely related to the genre of institutional advertising;²¹ its topics are still controversial, therefore the public has not developed a generally shared opinion on them yet. It is defined by Cutler and Muehling as “a special type of advertising in which organizations express their opinions on controversial issues in hopes of swaying public sentiment,”²² and by Sethi²³ as “advertising concerned with the propagation of ideas and elucidation of controversial social issues of public importance in a manner that supports the position and interests of the sponsor while expressly

¹⁸ “1971-72 Expenditures for Corporate and Association Advertising,” *Public Relations Journal* (November 1973): 31, quoted in Elizabeth A. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Even though the term used is company, its meaning can be extended for it to include any kind of organization and any kind of sponsor, like no-profit organizations, governments, or private firms.

²⁰ S. Prakash Sethi, “Institutional/Image Advertising and Idea/Issue Advertising as Marketing Tools: Some Public Policy Issues,” *Journal of Marketing* 43, no. 1 (January 1979): 68–78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224297904300108>.

²¹ S. Prakash Sethi, “Advocacy Advertising—The American Experience,” *California Management Review* 21, no. 1 (Oct. 1978): 55–68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/41165295>.

²² Bob D. Cutler and Darrel D. Muehling, “Advocacy Advertising and the Boundaries of Commercial Speech,” *Journal of Advertising* 18, no.3 (1989): 40-50.

²³ In his works Sethi focuses on corporate sponsored advocacy advertising, thus the reported considerations are mainly referred to those sponsors.

denying the accuracy of facts and downgrading the sponsor's opponents.”²⁴ Later in the same paper, Sethi also states that:

Advocacy advertising covers a broad spectrum of attempts to change or sustain public opinion and social policy on specific short-term issues, as well as on long-term fundamental values that underlie social and political institutions. Nevertheless, all advocacy ad campaigns share certain common characteristics in terms of corporate posture, depiction of the adversary, and claim to social legitimacy through identification with widely held social beliefs or representation of public interest.²⁵

Even though Sethi develops his considerations looking at the American experience, they can be considered valid in a broad sense and applied to the category worldwide. As mentioned, he remarks that there is a common ground for advocacy ads, and later in his analysis he asserts that there are two key elements to control and define in an advocacy advertisement: its content and its environment. Controlling and defining these two elements will present the topic to the public in the most favorable manner to the sponsor and will make an objective and balanced viewpoint out of a one-sided viewpoint. Besides, in order to gain public approval, Sethi points out that in advocacy advertising, sponsors place their ad in a sociocultural environment which is usually determined by traditional values or widely held beliefs, thus making an opposition to the sponsor’s viewpoint seem an opposition to that specific set of values or beliefs.²⁶

Dunn and Barban state that advocacy advertising is “usually argumentative, deals with controversial subjects, and is directed toward either specific or general targets and opponents,” and point out that, as a result of Supreme Court decisions regarding the USA First Amendment, it was granted substantial freedom of speech.²⁷

All these authors agree that the main feature of advocacy advertising lies in its taking a debatable and openly one-sided stand on the topic it presents to the public. As it might seem obvious, this definition is based upon what is generally considered controversial and what is not considered as such; some issues perception among the masses changes within few years, and topics which were once considered controversial might be widely accepted as non-controversial afterwards. As Sethi remarked, “advocacy presupposes the existence of a controversial position, either latent or crystalized,

²⁴ Sethi, “Advocacy Advertising—The American Experience.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ S. Watson Dunn and Arnold M. Barban, *Advertising: Its Role in Modern Marketing*, 5th ed. (Hinsdale: The Dryden Press, 1982), 651, quoted in Elizabeth A. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 51. The discussion on whether the State should be allowed to control advocacy advertisement is still being debated. For further readings on the topic see Sethi, “Advocacy Advertising—The American Experience”; Sethi, “Institutional/Image Advertising and Idea/Issue Advertising”; Robert J. Gwyn, “Opinion Advertising and the Free Market of Ideas,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 34 (Summer 1970): 246-55; Kent R. Middleton, “Advocacy Advertising, the First Amendment, and Competitive Advantage: A Comment on Cutler & Muehling,” *Journal of Advertising* 20, no. 2 (June 1991): 77-81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1991.10673215>.

and is tied to a specific time and place. Thus, what is controversial in one country may be totally acceptable in another country.”²⁸ An example of this phenomenon can be found in animal rights campaigns, which were once fought against by a significant amount of people who considered, for instance, vivisection a needed practice, while nowadays this kind of campaigns is no longer seen as controversial: they are considered a natural corollary of the newly generally accepted concept of “animal rights.” There are different kinds of organizations using advocacy to try to attract the favor of public opinion to their cause: non-profit organizations and private firms are the two main ones, while government organizations do not need to gain consensus, since they should by definition serve the population and stand for their benefits, and therefore do not need advocacy advertisement.²⁹

The third category of non-commercial advertising is *political advertising*. As the name suggests, political advertising is that branch of advertisements which is strictly related to politics and political discourse in general. As Gadotti states, political advertising takes to an extreme the concept of partiality which is present in advocacy advertising: in political advertising the one-sided viewpoint, the advertisement’s partiality, is itself the message to be conveyed. While in advocacy advertisements the partiality is presented in relation to a specific topic on which the sponsor wants to draw the attention of the public, in political advertising the partiality of the message is linked to an ideology, a set of beliefs, or a program, which is completely opposed to others.³⁰ Due to these features, the author also noticed that political advertising appears to be the category which shares more common traits with commercial advertising than the others in the non-commercial domain, by having its message “centered on a ‘brand’ and a slogan.”³¹ This analogy was noticed and fully analyzed by Shama, who developed a full discussion on the similarities between political advertising and commercial advertising; in fact, according to his studies, he affirms the similarities between three developmental stages of political advertising parallel to those of business advertising: candidate-orientation, sales-management orientation, and marketing orientation.³²

E. Sandage takes into consideration some definitions of this branch developed by the scholars she based her research on. For instance, C. H. Sandage states that such advertising is used “by political parties and candidates as a means of getting their messages before vast numbers of people,”³³ while

²⁸ Sethi, S. Prakash, “The Role of Advocacy Advertising in External Communications,” *Journal of General Management* 4, no. 3 (March 1977): 5-6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030630707700400301>.

²⁹ Gadotti, *Pubblicità Sociale*, 31.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.29.

³² Avraham Shama, “The Marketing of Political Candidates,” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 4, no. 3 (September 1976): 766. An in-depth discussion about the relationship between politics and marketing in the USA can be found in Bruce I. Newman, *The Mass Marketing of Politics: Democracy in an Age of Manufactured Images* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999).

³³ Charles H. Sandage, *Advertising Theory and Practice*, 5th ed. (Homewood: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1958), 120, quoted in Elizabeth A. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 25.

Dunn and Barban considered it a kind of advertising which “involves the promotion of political candidates and political issues.”³⁴ The outcome of E. Sandage analysis on the political advertising category, is the following:

Political advertising is the use of paid, nonpersonal, media communication by an identified sponsor to accomplish objectives that are directly related to political campaigns to elect candidates to public office, or pertain to propositions, referenda, or other such matters on the ballot in an election.³⁵

In her investigation for a definition of the category boundaries she observes that it can be sometimes akin to advocacy advertising, as the issues advocacy ads deal with are political in nature. In order to discriminate between these two categories, which may overlap, in her definition of *political advertising* she underlines that “advertising generated during political campaigns in order to elect candidates to public office, or to persuade the electorate pro or con regarding propositions, referenda, or other such matters that will appear on the ballot.”³⁶

Political advertising is also defined by Kaid as:

the communication process by which a source (usually a political candidate or Party) purchases the opportunity to expose receivers through mass channels to political messages with the intended effect of influencing their political attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors.³⁷

In her further political advertising analysis, Kaid points out that the defining characteristics of the category are the control of the message and the use of mass communication channels to spread this message;³⁸ on this basis, she proceeded with the consideration that the “ability to control completely the message presented to an audience is one of the greatest advantages of all forms of political advertising,”³⁹ as “other forms of political communication, from speeches to debates, are subject to interpretation or filtering by news media or other participants in the political process.”⁴⁰

Before considering what Public Service Advertising is, a non-commercial advertising category not mentioned in E. Sandage framework will be shortly defined: *propaganda*. This work cannot include a complete discussion on the definition of this category since “the barrage of

³⁴ Watson Dunn and Arnold M. Barban, *Advertising: Its Role in Modern Marketing*, 5th ed. (Hinsdale: The Dryden Press, 1982), 656, quoted in Elizabeth A. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 52.

³⁵ Elizabeth A. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 153.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

³⁷ Lynda Lee Kaid, “Political Advertising,” in *Handbook of Political Communication*, ed. D. D. Nimmo & K. R. Sanders (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981), 250, quoted in *Handbook of Political Communication Research*, ed. Lynda Lee Kaid (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2004), 156.

³⁸ Lynda Lee Kaid, “Political Advertising: A Summary of Research Findings,” in *The Handbook of Political Marketing*, ed. Bruce I. Newman, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), 423–38, quoted in *Handbook of Political Communication Research*, ed. Lynda Lee Kaid (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2004), 156.

³⁹ Kaid, *Political Communication*, 156.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

propaganda encompasses many different types [of advertising]: PSAs, government ads, charity appeals, corporate-image campaigns, issue advertising, many religious messages, social ads, political spots, counter-ads, and cause-related publicity.”⁴¹

The first appearance of the term ‘propaganda’ dates back in 1622, as it was used in *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, indicating the will of spreading faith in the Roman Catholic Church.⁴² Referring to the perception of propaganda at the beginning of the XX century, Rutherford states it was considered as something the enemy or the counterpart did, or “the intellectual equivalent of mugging: propaganda meant lies and lying, the misinformation the enemy manufactured to persuade its victims and the unwary.”⁴³ The author proceeds explaining that the negative notion of the term still persists in ordinary conversation, but later on his survey he points out that propaganda is an attempt to determine happenings in the public sphere, as it constitutes “an intentional and sponsored message, a deliberate kind of ‘symbolic practice’ that seeks to persuade the body politic, or some significant constituency within the public sphere.”⁴⁴ In his considerations about the kind of public propaganda is addressed to, he underlined that the receiver of this kind of advertising is “the good citizen,” and asserts that propaganda is “both the language and the instrument of power.”⁴⁵

As a consequence of such an historical process, a similar path to define propaganda is followed by Jowell and O’Donnell, who stated that “to identify a message as propaganda is to suggest something negative and dishonest.”⁴⁶ In their survey the authors provide a well-informed discussion on a possible proper definition of propaganda, taking into account the opinions of many scholars, who discussed its boundaries analyzing this kind of advertising from different perspectives. Jowell and O’Donnell decided to consider propaganda as a communication phenomenon, stating that it is “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.”⁴⁷

As Gadotti remarks in her work, the perception of propaganda changed during and after World War I, when it was largely used by many countries, and because of its employment by totalitarian governments.⁴⁸ Since the term carries within a significant number of negative meanings and implications related to its employment in abuse of power contexts, the author argues that its original

⁴¹ Paul Rutherford, *Endless Propaganda: The Advertising of Public Goods* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 8-9.

⁴² Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2015), 2.

⁴³ Rutherford, *Endless Propaganda*, 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Jowett and O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁸ Giovanna Gadotti and Roberto Bernocchi, *La Pubblicità Sociale. Maneggiare con Cura* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2010), 22.

meaning has been compromised, therefore it should not be used in the non-commercial advertising domain.⁴⁹

It is to be remarked that the use of the term *propaganda* is still being discussed, as it brings controversy. Some scholars, for instance Pratkanis and Aronson, use it as a synonym for “mass persuasion.”⁵⁰

The last category to be defined will be the focus of this work: Public Service Advertising. The overview of the non-commercial advertising domain previously illustrated has the goal to define what is not a PSA, in order to facilitate the definition of the category.

E. Sandage mentions the definition of Public Service Advertising proposed by Mandell: the category is seen by the author as a “means of using advertising to promote noncontroversial causes in the interest of the public.”⁵¹ In the framework he developed, Mandell divided the category into two slightly different branches: Public Service Advertisement, and Public Service *Institutional* Advertisement. He makes this distinction since he observed that many firms use part of their advertising to promote issues of public interest, and asserts that “the motive for such advertising is in some cases altruistic, in others to build good public relations in a subtle way. In the latter case, the advertising is perhaps only a form of public relations institutional advertising.”⁵² Making a distinction between PSA promoted by commercial sponsors and non-commercial ones, Mandell argues that it is thanks to the employment of such form of advertising by business firms that the category has been developed and therefore has gained importance as well as usefulness.⁵³ While using the nature of the sponsor as criterion to discriminate between the two subcategories, Mandell underlines that, even though the real intent behind a firm donating part of its advertising is to build goodwill, its immediate end is the public service. He states that PSA can be considered a message “designed to give unbiased information on some public problem and is in the public interest,”⁵⁴ which results as an attempt at defining a common ground for the two branches he identifies.

Furthermore, E. Sandage provides an overlook on Gilson and Berkman development of a category definition. The authors rely on the International Advertising Association statement, which defines PSA as “communications presented in the conventional formats of advertising [...] which urges its audience to implement or support some kind of social or economic cause deemed beneficial

⁴⁹ Gadotti, *Pubblicità Sociale*.

⁵⁰ Anthony R. Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson, *Age of Propaganda. The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*, Revised Edition (Santa Cruz: University of California, 2001), 19.

⁵¹ Maurice I. Mandell, *Advertising*, 12, quoted in E. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 37.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

by the consensus of the broad general public,”⁵⁵ and underlines that, in most cases, it specifically encourages some kind of action from the public. Gilson and Berkman point out that PSA is “prepared by advertising professionals and exhibited in space and time donated by the media for the 'public good' and without charge,”⁵⁶ marking a distinction between PSA and advertisements paid and sponsored by non-profit organizations, which seek contributions. According to their definition, public service advertising is described as noncontroversial, unlike those ads paid and sponsored by non-profit organizations, presented to the public in a time or space donated by the media, and as an advertisement developed and run under the patronage of Advertising Council, companies, or other organizations at their own expenses.⁵⁷

E. Sandage also reports Dunn and Barban definition of the category. According to their studies, public service advertising has as its main feature the focus on a topic that is particularly relevant in the public welfare domain, and which is often worth of public attention and action. The authors proceed arguing that including as a characteristic of this category the fact that PSA are run on time or space donated by the media is unnecessary, as it brings focus on the sponsor rather than on the objective of the ad.⁵⁸

The outcome of E. Sandage analysis is the following:

Social objectives advertising is the use of paid, nonpersonal, media communication by an identified sponsor to accomplish objectives that are directly related to the implementation or support of noncontroversial social, cultural, or economic causes recognized as beneficial by public consensus, but not related to the promotion of products or services.⁵⁹

She decided to place both public service advertising and charitable and philanthropic advertising in the same category, which is *social objectives advertising*, underlining that there is a substantial difference between the two: the former urges the public to take action other than giving money, while this is the goal of the latter.⁶⁰

In her survey Gadotti states that public service advertising, which she labels *social advertising*, is a “non-deceiving form of communication, promoted in the interest of the public it refers to rather than the sponsor.”⁶¹ She explains that this form of communication has as objective “the impartial

⁵⁵ Christopher Gilson and Harold V. Berkman, *Advertising Concepts and Strategies* (New York: Random House Inc., 1980), 547, quoted in E. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 44.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Such as trade association or local, state, and federal government.

⁵⁸ E. Sandage, *Noncommercial Advertising*, 51-2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁶¹ Gadotti and Bernocchi, *La Pubblicità Sociale*, 22.

display of public interest topics, to the public it refers to.”⁶² The author later remarks that non-controversy lies among the main characteristic of this branch of advertising, and agrees that this criterion might not lead to a certain or fixed classification of an advertisement in this category. Regarding this issue, Gadotti agrees with Mancini on stating that this non-controversial feature of PSA has to be partial by definition, since there are no topics which can be considered fully non-controversial, and illustrates the analysis Mancini led on the issue, providing two parameters which can be used. The first is “the most widespread an idea is in a community, the most its controversy level is ought to decrease,”⁶³ while the second is based on the distinction between topic and value. This discrimination allows to state that, while a topic always brings within controversy, the set of values it refers to usually does not have opponents. According to these parameters, public service advertising can be defined as non-controversial.

Nowadays public service advertising is considered part of a broader domain, called *social communication*. Social communication is a wider and more general approach to persuasion, which only partially relies on advertising, but includes any form of communication aimed at urging public attention on a specific issue.⁶⁴ Later in her analysis, Gadotti argues that there are three different objectives pursued in social communication, namely: plea to the public, communication aimed at sensitization, and communication with the goal of educating. In doing so, she implied that in the first category the objective is to urge the public to demonstrate its endorsement for the cause, supporting the sponsor of the campaign, usually with an economic donation; for instance, fund raising campaigns, usually sponsored by no-profit organizations, belong to this kind of social communication. The goal of sensitization-aimed communication is to urge the public to demonstrate their support or concern for the cause, for example by showing solidarity to weaker parts of the population, or to safeguard nature; in the second category, the sponsor persuades its public to change their behavior towards the topic it presents. In the third and final category, communication with educational goals, the sponsor has the aim to change the behavior of the public in their own interest; part of this branch are those campaigns which encourage smokers to quit their habit, or those which motivate people to have a healthier lifestyle.⁶⁵

In her studies, Gadotti considers that PSA aims at intervening in topics of social interest, urging the public to change its behavior or to act; this category of advertising is closely related to a society’s current issues, but which role does it have in said society? By asking this question, Gadotti

⁶² Gadotti, *Pubblicità Sociale*, 27.

⁶³ Paolo Mancini, *La Comunicazione Pubblica* (Roma: Laterza, 1996), 233, quoted in Gadotti, *Pubblicità Sociale*, 211.

⁶⁴ Gadotti, *Pubblicità Sociale*, 24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

introduces the discussion on the role of advertising (intended in its wider meaning) as *shaper* or *mirror* of its time and social context.⁶⁶ As she argues, since PSA goal is to draw attention on some topics considered important by the sponsor or of social interest in a certain period of time, this form of advertising acts as a shaper of society, as it aims at influencing the public attitude towards those issues. At the same time, bringing attention on the previous topics, Gadotti remarks that PSA also has a mirror function, as it reflects society's issues and the promotion of social changes.⁶⁷

1.2 Public Service Advertising in a global perspective

1.2.1 The United States of America

Public Service Advertising as we know it nowadays, was created and largely employed in the United States during World War I. Before that event,⁶⁸ there were various forms of communication which can be considered the 'ancestors' of today's PSA, such as public campaigns.⁶⁹ In 1917, the Committee on Public Information was created, with the aim of producing propaganda, a term they claimed to be using in its original meaning of "propagation of faith,"⁷⁰ and it proceeded creating campaigns of public interest.⁷¹ During World War II, the War Advertising Council was created as an attempt to employ advertising facilities for other purposes than commercial ones, providing information and trying to persuade public opinion, With the aim of educating people about their role in the country effort for war, in those years it produced some famous campaigns, among these "Rosie the Riveter," "Loose lips might sink ships," and "Uncle Sam."⁷² After the war had come to an end, the name of the institution changed, and nowadays it is known as Ad Council.

This organization has been the sponsor for many important campaigns in the years, such as "Only You Can Prevent Wildfires," whose aim was to call attention on the prevention of wildfires and featured the famous character Smokey Bear,⁷³ and "People Start Pollution, People Can Stop It"

⁶⁶ Gadotti and Bernocchi, *La Pubblicità Sociale*, 24. For further readings on the topic, see also Lantos, Geoffrey P, "Advertising: Looking Glass or Molder of the Masses?" *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 6 (1987): 104-28. www.jstor.org/stable/30000158.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁸ See Maurice Mandell, *A History of the Advertising Council* (PhD diss., Indianapolis: University of Indiana, 1953).

⁶⁹ See Ronald E. Rice and Charles K. Atkin, eds., *Public Communication Campaigns*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2013), 60-64.

⁷⁰ George Creel, *Rebel at Large: Recollections of Fifty Crowded Years* (New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1947), 158, quoted in Robert Jackall and Janice M. Hirota, *Image Makers: Advertising, Public Relations, and the Ethos of Advocacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 13.

⁷¹ Some major campaigns are presented in William M. O'Barr, "Public Service Advertising and Propaganda," *Advertising & Society Review* 13, no. 2 (2012). <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/484935>.

⁷² O'Barr, "Public Service and Propaganda."

⁷³ See Ronald E Rice, "Smokey Bear," in *Public Communication Campaigns*, 3rd ed., eds. Ronald E. Rice and Charles K. Atkin (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2001), 276-79. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452233260.n17>. The campaign was created during World War II; it was not related to environmental issues but aimed at preventing wildfires caused by weapons. Its features changed with the time, and in recent times it aimed at underlining the difference between controlled and un-controlled fires in the wild.

campaign.⁷⁴ Apart from the Ad Council, there are other organizations which develop PSA, among these Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the United Way, March of Dimes, Mothers against Drunk Driving, and the Partnership for a Drug-Free America.⁷⁵ The latter has sponsored many campaigns against drugs, such as the so called “Frying Egg” one, which have proved to be effective.⁷⁶ Nowadays the Ad Council conducts circa 35 campaigns per year, concerning a wide range of topics.⁷⁷

PSA are developed and produced by professionals who decide to donate their time, and are subsequently distributed by the Ad Council to broadcasters and publishers, which can choose to donate time or space to run them. According to the Communication Act issued in 1934, “broadcasters have a mandate to serve the public interest of the communities in which they operate,”⁷⁸ which implies that the Federal Communications Commission renews the above-mentioned broadcaster licenses only if they abide by their commitment to public service.

The presence of PSA developed and sponsored by the Ad Council or by other organizations has become more and more frequent in the mass media; their campaigns support different issues of public interest and are an influential voice in the American society.

1.2.2 Italy

In Italy, the PSA category development process took longer than in the United States to come to an end, and its evolution path was largely based on the American Ad Council experience. There had been no major campaigns to be noticed until 1971, when *Pubblicità Progresso* was founded. The process which led to the establishment of this organization had begun some years before: in fact, the idea of instituting an organization similar to the Ad Council was already discussed in 1958 in a Congress held in Milan.⁷⁹ *Pubblicità Progresso* is a non-profit organization, whose aim is “to contribute to the resolution of civil, educational and moral issues concerning the social sphere, thanks to a process which involves development, coordination and realization of communication campaigns which aim to encourage social conscience and actions aimed at common good.”⁸⁰

The first campaign to be developed and promoted by the organization is dated back in 1971, and it was concerned with urging people to donate blood. Over the years, *Pubblicità Progresso* was

⁷⁴ O’Barr, “Public Service and Propaganda.”

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* See also Bill Goodwill, “Public Service Advertisement – Background and Future,” *PSA Research Center*. <http://www.1.psaresearch.com/bib9830.html> (last accessed 24 April 2020).

⁷⁷ “Public Service Advertising,” *AdAge*, 15 September 2003. <https://adage.com/article/adage-encyclopedia/public-service-advertising/98838> (last accessed 27 April 2020).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Gadotti, *Pubblicità Sociale*, 84.

⁸⁰ From *Pubblicità Progresso* Statute, art. 3. Available at <https://www.pubblicitapgresso.org/it/home-page/chi-siamo> (last accessed 27 April 2020). Unless otherwise stated, all translations into English are by the author of this work.

engaged in most of the country's major campaigns of public interest, which dealt with a wide range of different topics. Among these famous campaigns, "No al razzismo" ("Say no to racism"), proposed in 1990, which attempted to urge the population to fight racism; "E Allora?" ("So what?"), launched in 2003, which aimed at sensitizing the public towards disabled people; "Punto su di te" ("I count on you"), displayed in 2014-2015, which had the goal to fight for gender equality;⁸¹ and other campaigns concerning topics such as the environment safeguard, or smoking dangers.

As Gadotti points out in her analysis, the development process *Pubblicità Progresso* went through, sometimes placed the organization in the position of supplying other institutions duties (for example those of schools, families, or the government) in providing forms of public communication, even though the organization remarked its reluctance in acting by this means.⁸²

Regarding the broadcasting of Italian PSA, after the campaigns are developed and proposed to public or private broadcasters, these can choose which campaigns to run in the time or in the space donated. For what concerns campaigns promoted by public administrations, Italian law states that radio and television broadcasters can run them with respect to some air-time related percentages fixed by the law.⁸³ The time dedicated to the transmission of PSA can be donated, but, if not, the price should not exceed 50% of the official price. It is to mention that the airing of PSA is not included in the amount of advertisements a broadcaster can run in proportion to its airtime, thus, since transmitting PSA does not imply a loss of profit, it is convenient.⁸⁴

1.3 Social Marketing

In order to complete this general introduction to public service advertising a brief overview of social marketing will be proposed, since PSA is the main field in which social marketing finds application.⁸⁵

In 1951, Wiebe asked "Why can't you sell brotherhood and rational thinking like you sell soap?,"⁸⁶ thus starting the process which led to the development of social marketing. In 1969, Kotler and Levy argued that marketing had to be considered as a broader concept than just the selling of products, hence stating that it should be regarded as a social activity, whose principles could be

⁸¹ All the mentioned campaigns are available at <https://www.pubblicitaprogesso.org/it/campagne/campagne> (last accessed 27 April 2020).

⁸² Gadotti, *Pubblicità sociale*, 113-114. The term "public communication" identifies a form of communication with instructive goals, developed and sponsored by public administrations for the population.

⁸³ Legge 7 giugno 2000, n. 150, "Disciplina delle Attività di Informazione e di Comunicazione delle Pubbliche Amministrazioni," art. 3.

⁸⁴ For an in-depth analysis of the Italian PSA development and distribution process, see Gadotti, *La Pubblicità Sociale*, 47-127.

⁸⁵ While being the most widespread practice used to develop PSA, social marketing is just one of the practicable approaches. Other relevant conceptualizations are, for example, the Communication-Persuasion Matrix and other theories applicable to public campaigns, as discussed in Rice and Atkin, *Public Communication Campaigns* 4th ed., 17-9.

⁸⁶ G.D. Wiebe, "Merchandising Commodities and Citizenship on Television," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1951): 679-91. <https://doi.org/10.1086/266353>.

employed for marketing services, persons and ideas.⁸⁷ Following this statement, in 1971 Kotler and Zaltman further developed this idea, and declared that “social marketing is a promising framework for planning and implementing social change,”⁸⁸ thus introducing what will later be considered as the main goal of this practice: influencing behaviors. In their work the authors remark that “social marketing is a much larger idea than social advertising and even social communication,”⁸⁹ and, in order to stress this feature, they assert that “social marketing is the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research.”⁹⁰ Kotler and Zaltman developed their first attempt to elaborate a social marketing framework with respect to the key variables in the marketing mix; while doing so, they underlined that social marketing should not be considered a marketing approach to social objectives, but rather a particular marketing technique.⁹¹

In 1980 Fox and Kotler elaborated an overview on the first ten years of the social marketing experience, considering its evolution and possible future development. In their survey they remark that the main difference between social marketing and social communication lies in the former’s employment of marketing mix formulas.⁹² The authors examined situations which call for a social marketing approach, evaluated the practice accomplishments, and discuss its hurdles and critics, in order to provide a complete analysis of the practice past and future employment.

In his 1994 survey Andreasen observes that the definitions previously developed by other scholars have some limitations, since they do not answer some key questions regarding social marketing features, such as whether or not any technique aimed at influencing behavior can be considered social marketing. Following these considerations, Andreasen declares that social marketing is “the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part.”⁹³ Since social marketing draws its technologies from commercial marketing,

⁸⁷ Philip Kotler and Sidney J. Levy, “Broadening the Concept of Marketing,” *Journal of Marketing* 33, no. 1 (January 1969): 10–5. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224296903300103>.

⁸⁸ Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman, “Social Marketing: An Approach to Planned Social Change,” *Journal of Marketing* 35, no. 3 (1971): 3. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1249783>.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 8. A complete explanation of the social marketing framework developed by Kotler and Zaltman can be found in the article.

⁹² In the article, marketing mix four characteristics (the four P’s) are named: marketing research, product development, use of incentives, and facilitation. Karen F. A. Fox and Philip Kotler, “The Marketing of Social Causes: The First 10 Years,” *Journal of Marketing* 44, no. 4 (September 1980): 25–6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224298004400404>.

⁹³ Alan R. Andreasen, “Social Marketing: Its Definition and Domain,” *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 13, no. 1 (1994): 110. www.jstor.org/stable/30000176.

in his work he remarks that its bottom line should be the same: behavior change. At the same time, he noticed that most marketers seem to forget what the ultimate goal of social marketing is, focusing on short-term accomplishments, such as conveying an idea or encouraging variation in attitude, instead of questioning whether or not these means lead to a behavior change. Stating so, Andreasen asserts that the original definition Kotler and Zaltman developed for the practice had to be reinterpreted, since it did not focus on what he believes are the boundaries of social marketing. The author then argues that social marketing should not be considered as a technology that can be employed for educational or propaganda purposes, as in these domains such a strategy would not be effective. In this work Andreasen also analyzes social marketing characteristics from a practical perspective, discussing the methods which should be employed while practicing social marketing, agreeing with Kotler and Zaltman in including marketing mix techniques.

In a survey elaborated in 2002, Andreasen analyzes the limits and the challenges social marketing faces,⁹⁴ asserting that, in order to get recognition among other approaches to social change, this practice needs the marketers to apply marketing to it, thus underlining the features which make this strategy the most appropriate to employ in certain situations.

In a study conducted in 2010, Dann broadly discusses the social marketing definitions previously provided by some scholars and briefly analyzes the historical evolution of the category, hence developing the idea that social marketing is “the adaptation and adoption of commercial marketing activities, institutions and processes as a means to induce behavioral change in a targeted audience on a temporary or permanent basis to achieve a social goal,”⁹⁵ underlining that the aim of social marketing is to “archive a social goal.”

In their mass communication means analysis, Baran and Davis assert that this domain can be divided into two fields, macroscopic and microscopic theories, and that social marketing belongs to the macroscopic field, as this domain is “more interested with how the social order as a whole is affected.”⁹⁶ In their discussion on social marketing, the authors stated that it is “practically oriented and essentially source-dominated. It assumes the existence of a benign information provider seeking to bring about useful, beneficial social change,”⁹⁷ in accordance with their idea that macroscopic

⁹⁴ In this analysis, Andreasen asserted that there are five levels of competition social marketing faces, namely: general, intervention-level, subject-market, product, and brand. According to his opinion, the one level social marketing does not need to face challenges in, is the first one, the general level. Alan R Andreasen, “Marketing Social Marketing in the Social Change Marketplace,” *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 21, no. 1 (April 2002): 3–13. [10.1509/jppm.21.1.3.17602](https://doi.org/10.1509/jppm.21.1.3.17602).

⁹⁵ Stephen Dann, “Redefining Social Marketing with Contemporary Commercial Marketing Definitions,” *Journal of Business Research* 63, no. 2 (February 2010): 151. [10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.02.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.02.013).

⁹⁶ Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*, 7th ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 2014), 159.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

theories “focus attention on the way social elites operate media to earn profits and exercise influence in society.”⁹⁸

According to Lee and Kotler, the marketers attempt to make the public act in one of four ways, namely: accepting a new behavior, rejecting a potentially undesirable behavior, modifying a current behavior, or abandon an unacceptable behavior. The authors referred that Andreasen suggested to introduce a fifth and a sixth category, specifically continuing a behavior and switching a behavior.⁹⁹ Later in their analysis, Lee and Kotler stress that, while the goal of commercial marketing is producing financial profit for the corporation, the goal of social marketing is contributing to individual and societal gain.¹⁰⁰ In order to accomplish this task, the techniques social marketing applies are similar to those of commercial marketing, but the difficulties it faces are significantly more complex to address, as the main competitors are not other brands offering the same product, but a set of preferred behaviors of the audience they ought to change.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁹⁹ Nancy R. Lee and Philip Kotler, *Social Marketing: Behavior Change for Social Good*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publication, 2019), “We focus on behavior change.”

¹⁰⁰ One of the critics to social marketing consists in its being focused mainly on the target audience individual behavior and does not try to intervene in environmental factors. The approach which focuses on individuals belonging to the targeted categories is called “downstream,” while the one which focuses on factors belonging to the environment these targeted groups live in, is called “upstream.” There is a third category, referred to as “midstream,” which consists in those individuals surrounding the targeted audience (i.e. friends, family). In recent years, social marketing practitioners acknowledged this problem and agreed on the need for the practice to direct its effort towards mid and upstream, as reaching a more effective behavior influence would be enhanced in the downstream. Lee and Kotler, *Social marketing: Behavior change*, “Social Marketing Upstream and Midstream”; Rob Donovan and Nadine Henley, *Principles and Practice of Social Marketing. An International Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 44-69.

¹⁰¹ For a complete analysis on the social marketing practice, its techniques and applications, see Lee and Kotler, *Social Marketing*; Baran and Dennis, *Mass Communication Theory*; Donovan and Henley, *Principles and Practice of Social Marketing*; Philip Kotler and Eduardo Roberto, *Social Marketing: Strategies for Changing Public Attitudes* (New York: Free Press, 1989); William A. Smith, “Social Marketing: An Overview of Approach and Effects,” *Injury Prevention* 12, no. 1 (April 2006): i38-43, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/ip.2006.012864>; Philip Kotler and Nancy R. Lee, *Marketing in the Public Sector: A Roadmap for Improved Performance* (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006); Philip Kotler and Nancy R. Lee, *Up and Out of Poverty: The Social Marketing Solution* (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009); Hong Cheng, Philip Kotler, Nancy Lee, *Social Marketing for Public Health: Global Trends and Success Stories* (Burlington: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2011).

2 The Evolution of Chinese Advertising

2.1 A Brief History of Chinese Commercial Advertising

Modern commercial advertising was introduced in China at the end of the XIX century by foreign firms as a means to promote their business in the Chinese country, and was thus considered a “foreign trademark” for an extended period of time.¹⁰² At present the 1920s and 1930s are considered to be the “old golden time” for advertising in China,¹⁰³ as foreign firms were allowed to advertise their products in many different Chinese media. In his work Wang points out that the encounter between China and foreign products through advertising in those decades “left a deep imprint on Chinese economic and cultural life.”¹⁰⁴ In his survey Chen also remarks that those years brought to China a substantial increase of advertising artistic quality, as well as better advertisers. These professionals started researching accurately the factors linked to the customer’s satisfaction, in order to produce advertisements that could be pleasant because of both their artistic quality and their usefulness.¹⁰⁵

With the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the country’s scenario for advertising changed,¹⁰⁶ and the role of the practice began its gradual decline. Since advertising would have no reason to exist in a state-regulated economy, as there would not be any ground of competition among different providers of a service or goods, and even though during the first years of the communist governance no specific or explicit laws concerning advertising were issued, the participation of Western companies in advertising came to an end.¹⁰⁷ In 1956 the advertising industry started being affected by the ongoing construction of a Chinese socialist economy, and all the private advertising agencies operating in China became state run.¹⁰⁸ During the Cultural Revolution (*wenhua dagemin* 文化大革命) from 1966 to 1976,¹⁰⁹ commercial advertising went

¹⁰² Wang Jian, “From Four Hundred Million to More than One Billion Consumers: A Brief History of the Foreign Advertising Industry in China,” *International Journal of Advertising* 16 (1997): 241-60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0265-0487.1997.00059.pp.x>.

¹⁰³ Xu Baiyi, “The Role of Advertising in China,” (Working paper. Urbana, IL: Department of Advertising, University of Illinois, 1989), quoted in Gao Zhihong, “What’s in a Name? On China’s Search for Socialist Advertising,” *Advertising & Society Review* 4, no. 3 (2003). [10.1353/asr.2003.0014](https://doi.org/10.1353/asr.2003.0014).

¹⁰⁴ Wang Jian, “Foreign Advertising Industry in China,” 247.

¹⁰⁵ Chen Peiai 陈培爱, *Zhongwai guanggao shi xinbian* 中外广告史新编 (A History of Chinese and Foreign Advertising), (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009), 56.

¹⁰⁶ Along with the one with advertising, the country’s relationship with media also changed in those years, reflecting the turbulent situation China faced from 1949 on. An in-depth analysis on the government-media interconnection can be found in Xu Jian and Sun Wanning, “Media since 1949: changes and continuities,” in *The SAGE handbook of contemporary China*, ed. Wu Weiping and Mark Frazier (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2018), 1172-92. A discussion concerning the development of Chinese media after 2008 can be found in James F. Scotton and William A. Hachten, *New Media for A New China* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

¹⁰⁷ Giovanna Puppini, “Advertising and China: How Does a Love/Hate Relationship Work?,” in *The Changing Landscape of China’s Consumerism*, ed. Hulme A. (Cambridge: Chandos/Elsevier, 2014), 177-95.

¹⁰⁸ Chen, *Zhongwai guanggao*, 74.

¹⁰⁹ Guido Samarani, *La Cina del Novecento. Dalla Fine dell’Impero ad Oggi* (Torino: Einaudi, 2004), 249-81.

missing as the economy became state-centered and state-regulated.¹¹⁰ Applying orthodox communist values, the government spread the idea that advertising was a “manifestation of capitalist decay and consumerism,”¹¹¹ thus banning the practice in China. This part of Chinese advertising history was characterized by many concurring factors, which caused the advertising industry to lose its role in the country. As Puppin states these factors were:

a planned economy that did not account for consumers’ needs and demands; the stress on heavy industry rather than the service sector; the nationalization of private enterprises and the subsequent lack of competition; the rationalization of food staples and other daily necessities, which slowed down consumption; limited trade with Western countries. In addition, the media were requested to act exclusively as ‘the mouthpiece of the Party’, and they too became state owned.¹¹²

As a result of this situation, commercial advertising disappeared from the country; however, the debate is still open, as some scholars argue that the phenomenon was replaced by some other forms of communication, which were more akin to political rather than commercial propaganda.¹¹³

With the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party held in 1978, Deng Xiaoping led China into a new chapter of its history, introducing the Open-Door Policy, which allowed the country to open its trading system to foreign business.¹¹⁴ Following this change in the political and economic scene of the country, advertising was officially reintroduced.¹¹⁵ In his survey Stross points out that “the first announcement of the return of advertising was made indirectly, in January 1979, when an editorial appeared in a Shanghai newspaper, calling for ‘restoring the good name of advertising.’”¹¹⁶ The editorial Stross refers to is “*Wei guanggao zhengming* 为广告正明” (Restoring the Good Name of Advertising) written by Ding Yunpeng, who states that, even though people would associate the word “advertising” to something implicitly bad, the practice has been

¹¹⁰ “During the Cultural Revolution, commercial advertising was banned as a tool by which capitalists manipulate public opinion. [...] The very small role played by markets and competition in the economic life of China during this period implied very little need for advertising anyway. Until 1979, most economic activity was devoted not to the production of consumer goods, whose sales advertising might stimulate, but instead to the production of heavy industrial products. The state-owned industries that utilized these products did not need to be convinced of their good quality. Their only task was to take whatever inputs they were assigned and produce whatever items state planners ordered them to produce. Advertising played virtually no role in the planned economy.” In Daniel C. Lynch, *After the Propaganda State. Media, Politics, and ‘Thought Work’ in Reformed China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 55.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 81. The will of getting rid of any form of commercial advertising and fight decentralization was applied to the extent that some firm, brand, shop or product names were changed into more “neutral” and politically correct ones: for example, ‘Wangfujing Department Store’ was changed into ‘Beijing Department Store,’ and ‘*Quanjudu*’ into ‘Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant.’ For a further analysis on the topic, see Chen, *Zhongwai guanggao*, 81-3.

¹¹² Puppin, “Advertising and China,” 181.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Samarani, *La Cina del Novecento*, 301-26.

¹¹⁵ Hongmei Li, “Advertising in China,” *China Currents* 16, no. 1 (January 2017). <https://www.Chinacenter.net/2017/China-currents/16-1/advertising-in-China/> (last accessed 25 May 2020).

¹¹⁶ Randall Stross, “The Return of Advertising in China: A Survey of the Ideological Reversal,” *The China Quarterly* 123 (September 1990): 485. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000018889>.

useful in developing capitalist countries economy, thus its application should be studied in socialist countries as well. While the editorial was presented solely as a one person's opinion, it was the first of a series of studies and discussions aimed at re-introducing the practice in China. The main trouble scholars had to face was the difficulty of legitimizing a system which had previously been denounced: they had to "sell the legitimacy of selling."¹¹⁷ In order to contribute to the rehabilitation of advertising, in his report Ding states that advertising could be useful for "beautifying the people's cities," and making the public appreciate the "socialist economy and culture."¹¹⁸ Mentioning some examples of advertising in Western countries, Ding also reports some non-commercial advertisements, since public service could be seen as the category in which public and private interests could merge.

The debate over advertising legitimation was carried on for many years by Chinese scholars, who had to find a way to make the employment of the practice legit and not in discordance with the previous policies. In his research Chu reports that a Chinese trading journal stated that, in a socialist society, the role of advertising is to "promote the production of the society, and to meet the materialistic and cultural needs of the people,"¹¹⁹ in order to give to this new development of the category an ideological foundation. Following the debate over advertising legitimation, and in order to provide, besides theoretical or ideological reasons, some historical foundation for the return of the practice in the country, scholars started digging in the Chinese past, with the aim to demonstrate that the use of advertising was by no means a newly imported practice. By doing this, they underlined that its employment and evolution were deeply rooted in and related to the country's tradition. It was because of this will to de-emphasize both the newness of the practice and its links to capitalism that they often mentioned the "ancient origins of advertising and its seemingly omnipresent character, stripped of a capitalist context and found at the beginning of recorded history."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Ding Yunpeng 丁允朋, "Wei guanggao zhengming" 为广告正明 (Restoring the Good Name of Advertising), *Wenhui bao* 文汇报, 14 January 1979, quoted in Stross, "The Return of Advertising," 486.

¹¹⁹ *Xinwen Zhanxian* 6 (1979): 55, quoted in James Chu, "Advertising in China: Its Policy, Practice and Evolution," *Journalism Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (March 1982): 40–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769908205900106>.

¹²⁰ Stross, "The Return of Advertising," 487. The historical advertisements milestones which were identified to provide validation for the practice, as Stross remarks, "belonged to no particular historical or economic setting; they were merely 'firsts.'" The identification of these "firsts" had the aim to explain the development of advertising in the country, placing the beginning of the practice back in the country's past, in order for it to be employed in modern China not as an imported technique, but rather a native one, which gradually evolved within the years. As Gao mentions in his survey, Yi divides the history of the Chinese advertising development into three main stages: the first one, considered "ancient advertising," covers the period between 5000 B.C. and 1840 A.D., the second, referred to as "advertising in old China," goes from 1840 to 1949, and the third one, "advertising in New China," which started in 1949. This subdivision is widely accepted and agreed on by other scholars. (Yi Dong, "*Zhongguo guanggao de fazhan qushi zongguan* 中国广告的发展趋势总管 (A General Introduction to The Development of Chinese Advertising)," *Guanggao Shijie* 广告世界 (Advertising World) No. 2 (1994): 4–8, quoted in Gao, "What's in a Name?"). For detailed discussion on Chinese advertising historical development, see Chen, *Zhongwai guanggao*, 3-83.

The concept of ‘socialist advertising’ or ‘socialist advertising with Chinese characteristics’ was introduced in those years in order to defend and justify the national advertising industry.¹²¹ Proposing such an approach had the aim of differentiating Chinese advertising from its foreign counterpart, and had the goal to “implement the process of rectifying the name of socialist advertising, ending up in satisfying the need of many theoreticians and advertising professionals to promote the name and the status of the phenomenon.”¹²² As Zhang underlined, socialist advertising had to be differentiated from capitalist as well as old style Chinese advertising, because of its duty to serve socialism and the people’s interests.¹²³

Four main differences were underlined between capitalist and socialist advertising. Firstly, the main goal of socialist advertising was to “serve the purpose of building a socialist market economy;”¹²⁴ secondly, one of its defining features was its truthfulness in contrast to capitalist ads, which focused on their role in the business field rather than in the social sphere;¹²⁵ thirdly, it had to follow the country’s plans of production, thus resulting more practical in terms of advertising budgeting, and it had to serve the society interests;¹²⁶ finally, it had to reflect and to abide to socialist material and spiritual civilization.¹²⁷ As Puppini underlines, while material civilization refers to the country’s economic development, socialist spiritual civilization is a more composite concept, whose guiding lines can be found in the Four Cardinal Principles,¹²⁸ while it also adheres to the

¹²¹ Puppini, “Advertising and China,” 183.

¹²² Song Shunqing 宋顺清, *Shehui zhuyi guanggaoxue* 社会主义广告学 (The Discipline of Socialist Advertising) (Taiyuan: Shanxi caijing xueyuan chubanshe, 1983), 4, quoted in Puppini, “Advertising and China,” 183.

¹²³ Zhang Nanzhou 张南舟, “Jianli juyou Zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi guanggaoye” 建立具有中国特色的社会主义广告业 (Developing socialist advertising with Chinese characteristics), *Xiamen Daxue Xuebao (Zhhexue shehui kexue ban)* 3 (1986): 145-49.

¹²⁴ Puppini, “Advertising and China,” 183.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 184; Stross, “The Return of Advertising,” 497-8; Gao, “What’s in A Name?”

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*; Tao Yongkuan 陶永宽, “Tantan shehuizhuyi guanggao” 谈谈社会主义广告 (Comments on socialist advertising), *Zhongguo Guanggao* 82, no.2 (1982): 4–5, quoted in Gao, “What’s in A Name.” As Stross remarks, some scholars argued that “advertising could serve as the matchmaker, disseminating needed economic information about surpluses and shortages, and saving resources,” thus resulting as a useful means for the country’s socialist economy improvement (Stross, “The Return of Advertising,” 489). Since the main goal of advertising had to be maximizing the profits for the state and consequently enhancing people lives, in case there was competition between products or services its aim had to be the promotion of the best option for the customer, to the detriment of the others. (Puppini, “Advertising and China,” 184).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ The Four Cardinal Principles were introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1979, and they had the aim of setting the reform’s boundaries, especially when it would come to the interrelation between politics, ideology, and economic-social transformation of the country. The principles were, namely: Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thought, the leading role of the Communist Party, the socialist path, and the people’s democratic dictatorship (Samarani, *La Cina del Novecento*, 304). Nowadays they are included in what is deemed as ‘watchwords’ (*tifa* 提法). “Covering relevant political matters, *tifa* are always used deliberately and they are commonly seen as political signals or signposts.” See Alessandra C. Lavagnino, “From ‘Chinese Characteristics’ (*Zhongguo Tese* 中国特色) to ‘Chinese Dream’ (*Zhongguo Meng* 中国梦) - The Chinese Political Discourse Today,” in *Understanding China Today: An Exploration of Politics, Economics, Society, and International Relations*, eds. Silvio Beretta, Axel Berkofsky, Lihong Zhang (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 278.

modernization reform and the Open Door Policy, involving at the same time a wide set of values, such as moral education and fight against corruption.¹²⁹

Ding asserts that a correct ideology is the soul of socialist advertising, and proceeds pondering whose interests Chinese socialist advertising ought to pursue, concluding that socialist advertising functions were, namely: serving the construction of socialist material and spiritual civilization, promoting the consumer interests, and facilitating the implementation and circulation of government policies.¹³⁰ Puppin remarks that other scholars worked out a different subdivision of the characteristics of Chinese socialist advertising:

The intrinsic properties of Chinese socialist advertising involved the so called ‘three natures, one style’ (*sanxing yige*): it had to be ideological, true, and artistic in nature as well as national in style. An alternative was ‘four natures, one style’ (*sixing yige*): ideological, political, true, and artistic nature as well as being national in style. Another was ‘five natures, one style’ (*wuxing yige*): ideological, informative, true, scientific, and artistic in nature as well as national in style.¹³¹

During the 1990s scholars continued their research for socialist advertising with Chinese characteristics from different perspectives, attempting to find satisfying definitions and regulations for the practice. Among these, Zheng asserts that “Chinese characteristics” had to be found in the traditional Chinese cultural traits, and in the country’s social conditions, which had to undertake the role of foundations for the creativity process in the making of advertising. At the same time, he posits that ‘socialist’ defined the guiding ideas and development path of the country’s advertising industry;¹³² as a matter of fact, in those years advertisements which involved elements linked to traditional Chinese culture, proved to be quite appreciated by the public.¹³³

The debate on socialist advertising with Chinese characteristics presented some issues: the arguments were sometimes contradictory, and it was only conducted on a theoretical level, which became too complex, while practical examples were never provided.¹³⁴ This process of legitimation received quite some negative reviews because of its weaknesses, and the strongest attack to the practice was conducted in 1983-84, during the ‘spiritual pollution campaign,’ when advertising was accused of showing foreign influences and having integrated the ‘profits-point-of-view’ that

¹²⁹ Puppin, “Advertising and China,” 184.

¹³⁰ Ding Yunpeng 丁允朋, “Woguo shehuizhuyi guanggao tezheng chuyi” 我国社会主义广告特征刍议 (Tentative Discussion on the Characteristics of Our Country’s Socialist Advertising), *Zhongguo Guanggao* (China Advertising) 13 (1985): 4–6, quoted in Gao, “What’s in A Name?”

¹³¹ Puppin, “Advertising and China,” 184.

¹³² Zheng Jian, “Dianshi guanggao de zhongguo tese” 电视广告的中国特色 (The Chinese Characteristics of Television Advertising), *Guanggao Shijie* (Advertising World) 98, no. 3 (1998):18–20, quoted in Gao, “What’s in A Name?”

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Puppin, “Advertising and China,” 184-5.

characterized the Western ads.¹³⁵ As Stross points out in his survey, even though the defining features of socialist advertising with Chinese characteristics given were rather vague, merely mentioning such an aspiration for advertisements seemed to be sufficient to divert criticism.¹³⁶

Despite the attacks to the category, the advertising industry kept on developing and evolving in the country. Thanks to Deng's Open-Door policy it became possible for China to confront the rest of the world, not only in the trading domain, but also in the advertising domain. While the encounter with foreign advertising turned out to be disadvantageous for Chinese advertisers, it became a good chance for those professionals to carry out some self-criticism.¹³⁷ It was obvious that a gap existed between Chinese style and Western style ads, and one of the main issues was the difficulty of decodify certain Chinese elements, which constituted a barrier for a non-Chinese public.¹³⁸

In the same years, following the outcomes of the discussion on socialist advertising, the government applied its strict rules to foreign advertisements as well, emphasizing in more than an occasion that the regulations were sometimes perceived as shockingly firm by foreign companies.¹³⁹ While these regulations were firmly applied to foreign campaigns in order to present an inflexible outer face to Western businesses, Chinese authorities were struggling with national advertisements, which were often proved to be misleading if not completely false.¹⁴⁰

It was among these difficulties and partly to solve them that the Advertising Law of 1995 was issued, clearly declaring that

advertising should conform to the construction of socialist spiritual civilization, abide by social ethics and professional ethics, and defend national dignity and interest, and that advertising should not undermine social stability, endanger personal and property safety, harm the public interest, obstruct social order, violate social ethics, or contain pornographic, superstitious, terrifying, violent, or disgusting content.¹⁴¹

The main goal of such a severe legislation was to underline the government's battle against the possible negative effects of socialist advertising.

As a result of the confrontation with Western advertising held through the years, a new style of Chinese advertising was gradually being shaped, and the focus shifted from what were previously called 'Chinese characteristics' to what became 'Chinese elements.' The main difference between these two labels lies in their historical and ideological implications. The former refers to a rather

¹³⁵ Stross, "The Return of Advertising," 496.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 497.

¹³⁷ Giovanna Puppini, "Intervista a Giovanna Puppini," *Mondo Cinese* 161, (October 2017): 28-9.

¹³⁸ Puppini, "Advertising and China," 186.

¹³⁹ Stross, "The Return of Advertising," 497.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 498.

¹⁴¹ Gao, "What's in A Name?"

inward-looking and protectionist approach to advertising, which was supposed to draw its creativity from Chinese national culture, following both a renewed interest for the country's traditional culture and the will to protect it from Western influence.¹⁴² On the other hand, the latter indicates a phase of the phenomenon in which the objectives are: to revive Chinese culture, to stress the role of its cultural components in the ads creativity, to help the brands in their internationalization progress, and to strengthen the country's soft power.¹⁴³

Even though this overview is far from being exhaustive on the topic, this brief history of the relationship between China and commercial advertising shows that the Chinese approach to the practice reflected many social and economic scenarios the country had to face in the years, and that the practice undertook both the role of *mirror* and *shaper* of the society and the time it was framed in.

2.2 History of Chinese Public Service Advertising

Following the trend of searching for the ancient roots of commercial advertising, a similar process was applied for public service advertising (*gongyi guanggao* 公益广告 in Chinese). As Xu explains, “the origins of Chinese PSA can be dated far back in time, but the beginning of the practice [as it is known nowadays] was slow, and it happened right during the country's development.”¹⁴⁴ The author points out that, long before commercial advertising, social advertising was introduced to communicate news and information, becoming an important part of its society.¹⁴⁵

The first appearances of PSA in China are dated as early as 2000-3000 B.C., however, as Zhang underlines, those were rather simple forms of advertising, which were mostly issued as notices by the rulers of those times, who, in fact, could be considered as the first advertisers in history.¹⁴⁶ According to the author, at that time there were some forms of communication which can be considered quite akin to social advertising. Among these, Zhang identifies as the main type the official

¹⁴² Gao in his work underlines that “the Chinese professionals’ renewed search for the Chinese characteristics of advertising in the late 1990s was not an isolated incident but closely reflected the larger social and political environment of the time. China’s accelerated economic reforms in the 1990s led to escalating social problems, such as high unemployment, widening income gaps, and rising crime rates, which seriously undermined social stability and threatened the rule of the Chinese Communist Party. In reaction, the regime opted for political conservatism, resorting to the old socialist ideology and strengthening political work in various social arenas. Because of the intensified socialist propaganda, the Chinese society in the late 1990s witnessed a strong resurgence of nationalism, which incorporated great pride in Chinese civilization and socialist achievements, strong anti-foreign sentiments, and an earnest search for ‘Chineseness’” (Gao, “What’s in A Name?”).

¹⁴³ Puppini, “Advertising and China,” 187-190.

¹⁴⁴ Xu Zhenbo 许振波, “Woguo gongyi guanggao de lishi, xiankuang yu weilai” 我国公益广告的历史、现状与未来 (Past, present, and Future of Chinese Public Service Advertising), *Journal of Huaibei Professional and Technical College* 6, no.1 (February 2007): 33.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Zhang Mingxin 张明新, *Gongyi guanggao de aomi* 公益广告的奥秘 (The Secrets of Public Service Advertising) (Guangzhou: Guangdong jingji chubanshe, 2004), 2.

bulletins released by the government (*guanfang* 官方), since their content mostly concerned information on social politics and military affairs.¹⁴⁷ The author cites as examples the *Book of Documents* 尚书 and the *Book of Rites* 周礼, in view of the fact that their content can be considered as a means of informing the masses about the behaviors considered to be righteous, as well as an attempt at influencing people's actions. Afterwards, Zhang proceeds with a brief overview of other forms of written production which can be considered PSA ancestors,¹⁴⁸ and illustrates three key features to bear in mind while approaching old forms of *gongyi guanggao*. Firstly, it is to be remembered that these communication means were in the service of the rulers, hence it was inevitable for them to carry eulogies to the power; nevertheless, "they also had a public interest-orientated component after all."¹⁴⁹ Secondly, those literary works or history records were news information providers in those times, but this did not impede them to carry out a public service role as well. Finally, the author remarks that a clear distinction between political advertising and public service advertising cannot be made when it comes to this category.

Once discussed *gongyi guanggao* origins in ancient history, Zhang focuses on their development in Chinese feudal society; he underlines that during this time their production increased, as well as the number of new different kinds of PSA, which he groups in three main sub-categories. The first one includes the PSA found in the aforementioned forms of communication: official bulletin documents, government notices, and history records. The second sub-category consists in public service-related contents found in the works of philosophers or literates, such as those attributed to Confucius, Mencius and Mozi. Finally, the third one comprises the propagation and manifestation of charitable or philanthropic activities among single individuals and groups.¹⁵⁰

Approaching the XX century, as Chen underlines, the "historical development of public service advertising in China went through a process that changed it from a spontaneous to a conscious phenomenon, and from a social and political orientation to a public service orientation."¹⁵¹ According to the author, this process took place because of the changing scenario of the country in the years: "in ancient times political and military issues long puzzled the future and destiny of the nation, hence, the contents of public announcements were mostly concerned with political or military topics, rather than focused on public welfare."¹⁵² Despite of this consideration, the author remarks that in Chinese

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-6.

¹⁵¹ Chen, *Zhongwai guanggao*, 189.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 190.

history a few examples of ‘pure’ *gongyi guanggao* can still be found: for example the writings of Tian Yiheng, a Ming dynasty scholar who encouraged the masses to take care of the environment.¹⁵³

Little attention was paid to this particular means of communication in the years before the formation of the country as it is known nowadays; as a matter of fact, it was during the XX century that Chinese PSA features and their employment as a functional communication channel started being developed.

As Zhang states, “adopting a different approach, and by this means including propaganda, it can be argued that the phenomenon of *gongyi guanggao* appeared simultaneously with the beginning of the establishment of the New China.”¹⁵⁴ According to the author, although those communication forms generally associated with the term ‘propaganda’ cannot be considered as proper *gongyi guanggao*, because they were mainly concerned with politics and military affairs, it can be said that they fall into the category of “propaganda with public service characteristics.”¹⁵⁵

In his work, Nathan reports that Liang Qichao¹⁵⁶ perceived media (particularly newspapers) as a means of shaping the public opinion by performing what he called “eight duties”: “remonstration, guidance, encouragement, repetition, taking the large view, concentrating on main themes, propagating knowledge, and penetrating society.”¹⁵⁷ As Nathan points out, later in the century these features were summed up in the term ‘propaganda.’ It is noticeable how some of the intrinsic characteristics of the Chinese concept of propaganda can be correspondingly found in public service advertising, such as the idea that this communication channel has to guide and encourage its public, focusing on some key themes and providing knowledge about these issues, in an attempt of penetrating public opinion. As Nathan observes, while the function of the traditional means of governmental communication was “to train but not to remake society,”¹⁵⁸ over the years the government requirements for communication forms increased, and leaders would use propaganda “not only to bring out people’s inherent social natures, but to make them perceive and act on the overriding common interests they shared with the State.”¹⁵⁹

It was because of this new interest in propaganda that at the beginning of the XX century, for instance during the 1911 Revolution and the May 4th movement, the distribution of media such as

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁵⁴ Zhang, *Gongyi guanggao de aomi*, 27.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Chinese historian, philosopher, politician and journalist, Liang Qichao (1873-1929) is considered to be one of the main intellectual leaders of China in the first two decades of the 20th century.

¹⁵⁷ Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy. The Individual and the State in 20th Century China* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 1986), 133.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

newspapers and magazines was considered the main channel to spread and promote revolutionary ideas. Early Communists set up many revolutionary newspapers and magazines to carry out propaganda activities against imperialism and feudalism, as well as to spread Marxism Leninism.¹⁶⁰ Concomitantly, Liang Qichao began working on the idea that the employed Chinese language needed to become more accessible for its messages to reach a wider audience. The language modernization through its simplification became one of Liang's main contribution to modern Chinese culture. His proposal included changes in "vocabulary, syntax, organization, and even punctuation – all aimed at making his writing more effective as propaganda."¹⁶¹ The language reform that was carried out during the May 4th movement helped Chinese language get closer to the population, thus aptly enhancing the effectiveness of propaganda, as Liang had theorized.

During the years which anticipated the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949,¹⁶² while the country was overturned by both the Civil War between nationalists and communists, and the Japanese invasion during World War II, many slogans were issued to draw the attention of the masses to the main issues China was facing. Some of these expressions, such as "overthrow Japanese imperialism!" (*dadao Riben diguozhuyi* 打倒日本帝国主义), or "overthrow Nanjing and liberate China!" (*dadao Nanjing qu, jiefang quan Zhongguo* 打到南京去, 解放全中国) became widely known; these expressions were aimed at instructing the masses, awakening, and inspiring the revolutionary spirit in the population, while endeavoring to unite extensive revolutionary forces in order to achieve the final victory.¹⁶³ Those slogans played a fundamental role in spreading the seeds of revolution at that time, and can thus be classified as public service-oriented advertisements, since the perorated cause was aimed at public good.¹⁶⁴

The slogans appeared on different media; among them, on what were called *dazibao* 大字报 (also known as *tatzepao*), literally "paper of big letters or bold characters,"¹⁶⁵ or "wall posters."¹⁶⁶ This form of communication was not a product of modern China, instead, it was the evolution of those imperial edicts which were hung on city walls in former times. Even though the roots of this practice could be found in the Chinese past, it was under the Soviet influence that the employment of

¹⁶⁰ Xu, *Woguo gongyi guanggao*, 33.

¹⁶¹ Nathan, *Chinese Democracy*, 140. Liang's efforts for a language that would have been closer to the masses and simpler than classical Chinese (*wenyanwen* 文言文) were highly appreciated by the communists, who, in fact, supported the adoption of vernacular Chinese (*baihuawen* 白话文) as the nation's official language, as well as the simplification of the written characters.

¹⁶² For an in-depth analysis of the PRC foundation background, see Samarani, *La Cina del Novecento*.

¹⁶³ Xu, *Woguo gongyi guanggao*, 33.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Frederick T. C. Yu, *Mass Persuasion in Communist China* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 137.

¹⁶⁶ Barry M. Broman, "Tatzepao: Medium of Conflict in China's 'Cultural Revolution,'" *Journalism Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (Spring, 1969): 100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769906904600115>.

these posters was brought back in vogue¹⁶⁷. In his work, Chu mentions the fact that *dazibao* significance in the country was first proclaimed in the occasion of the Party's 13th Congress, when they were described as a "medium of influencing the masses and as a form of manifesting their activity."¹⁶⁸

In the PRC early years, the media in which public service-oriented propaganda appeared mainly included broadcasting, newspapers, street slogans and banners. These forms of communication played a great role in educating and uniting the people: during the 1950s the main objective pursued by propaganda was to reach large part of the population, in order to influence it with the new ideology and, hence, the Party's goal of building a socialist country. Not losing sight of the ultimate scope, the Korean conflict brought a good chance to call for a fight against Western influences both outside and inside China, and draw attention onto the importance of making China a strong socialist country.¹⁶⁹ As a consequence of these circumstances, slogans such as "Fight the USA, help Korea, protect our homes and defend the country" (*kang Mei, yuan Chao, baojia weiguo* 抗美援朝, 保家卫国), or "One for all, all for one" (*wo wei renren, renren wei wo* 我为人人, 人人为我), were issued and became well known.¹⁷⁰ This kind of public service-oriented propaganda had a far-reaching influence on the cultivation and establishment of the population's sense of public morality and social responsibility, and, as a consequence, these slogans and formats were further developed in the following years to support governmental policies.

Because of the turmoil the country was experiencing during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, according to some scholars the production and diffusion of what could previously be considered *gongyi guanggao* ancestors experienced a tragic interruption.¹⁷¹ Contrarily, other academics argue that the only industry to experience a suspension was commercial advertising, while the employment of public service-oriented propaganda did not experience an interruption, even though its contents were significantly closer to political and ideological propaganda.¹⁷²

After the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution, since the government did not promptly take any official decision regarding PSA guidelines or the employment of this practice, the campaigns

¹⁶⁷ Stefan Landsberger, "The Future Visualized: Chinese Propaganda Art in the Modernization Era," *China Information* VIII, no. 4 (Spring 1994): 15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X9400800402>.

¹⁶⁸ James W. Markham, *Voices of the Red Giants* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1967), 350, mentioned in *Popular Media in China. Shaping New Cultural Patterns*, ed. Godwin C. Chu (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1978), 185.

¹⁶⁹ Some examples of propaganda posters regarding these topics can be found in Marien van der Heijden, Stefan R. Landsberger, Kuiyi Shen, *Chinese Posters. The IISH-Landsberger Collections* (München: Prestel, 2009), 34-77.

¹⁷⁰ Xu, *Woguo gongyi guanggao*, 34.

¹⁷¹ Zhang, *Gongyi guanggao de aomi*, 28.

¹⁷² Chen, *Zhongwai guanggao*, 191. For an analysis on the revolutionary propaganda, see Barbara Mittler, "Popular Propaganda? Art and Culture in Revolutionary China," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 152, no. 4 (December 2008): 466-89. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40541604>.

were issued and run at local levels.¹⁷³ The contents and the approach adopted by such campaigns were approximately the same as the ones used in the past, and the main advocated topics were concerned with the importance of a harmonious family, of respecting the elders, and of caringly helping each other.¹⁷⁴

During the years which followed the establishment of Deng Xiaoping's leadership and the consequential opening of the country, many campaigns supporting State-propaganda were issued; among these, the 1984 "Love my country, fix my Great Wall" (*ai wo Zhonghua, xiu wo changcheng* 爱我中华, 修我长城) campaign, which received support and funding also from other countries.¹⁷⁵ Those campaigns had similar contents as *gongyi guanggao* and were launched accordingly to the country's economic situation and its administrative measures.

In the 1980s the public service advertising field gained increasing attention from both private and public organizations, and in 1986 what is considered to be the first official *gongyi guanggao* was broadcast. The advertisement was developed and released by Guiyang television in collaboration with the Water Saving City Office, and the goal of the campaign was to heighten public awareness on the importance of reducing water waste, with the slogan "Cut down the amount of water you use" (*jiyue yongshui* 节约用水).¹⁷⁶

On 26 October 1987, Chinese Central Television (*Zhongguo zhongyang dianshitai* 中国中央电视台) issued its first public service advertising program during television primetime,¹⁷⁷ "Advertise Broadly" (*Guang'er gao zhi* 广而告之), which was aired once or twice a day, for 30 seconds or a minute each. The program guidelines were to "call attention to [relevant issues], admonish, and criticize,"¹⁷⁸ and it employed various artistic means to pursue its goal of educating the masses through entertainment. Advertise Broadly is considered the first example of *gongyi guanggao* because its contents were concerned with the same issues as Chinese PSA, such as the importance of patriotism, of a civilized behavior, of environmental safeguard, of traffic safety, etc. The broadcast of the program gradually increased until 1998, when it was broadcast 16 times per day, and it had a significant impact on people. Its diffusion and importance set the basis for the future developments of the practice, and the ads aired during Advertise Broadly were often considered as examples to look

¹⁷³ Zhang, *Gongyi guanggao de aomi*, 28.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁷⁵ Chen, *Zhongwai guanggao*, 192.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ The term "television primetime" refers to the block of time when the audience peaks for programming. "Primetime advertising" indicates those ads that are broadcasted during primetime tv programs and have the means to reach the widest possible public. In the commercial advertising field this block of time is the most expensive to purchase because of its higher exposure to the public.

¹⁷⁸ Chen, *Zhongwai guanggao*, 193.

up to. The program also highlighted how commercial and non-commercial advertising had to be contextually employed to foster the country's development, both on the economic and the social side. Furthermore, it marked the beginning of the practice of implementing public service advertising in the country's policy decisions, a praxis which officially began in 1996.¹⁷⁹ Since the impact of Advertise Broadly was so significant, in 1996 the State Administration for Industry and Commerce (*Guojia gongshang hangzheng guanli zongju* 国家工商行政管理总局),¹⁸⁰ which is the governmental body supervising the advertising practice in China, and the Office of the Central Guidance Commission on Building a Spiritual Civilization (*Jingshen wenming jianshe bangongshi* 精神文明建设办公室), which is directly under the jurisdiction of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, jointly launched at a national level a public service advertising campaign on the revival of the traditional Chinese values, *Zhonghua hao fengshang* 中华好风尚,¹⁸¹ which lasted one month, from the 1st of September to the 1st of October. The elaboration of this month-long campaign was announced through a notice, issued on 18 June 1996, which focused on five guidelines for the development of the advertisements. Firstly, it stressed that it was of crucial importance for the participants to fully acknowledge the deepest meaning of the campaign and to act accordingly, developing advertisements that would have enhanced Chinese traditional virtues. Secondly, it was important to promote the campaign and draw the advertising industry interest on it, inducing them to participate to the project with their contributions, which would have been examined and assessed by Industry and Commerce local administrators. Thirdly, all the advertisements had to display the "*Zhonghua hao fengshang* 中华好风尚" symbol; they had to be broadcast by provincial televisions during primetime (6 pm – 9 pm) and had to be published in the newspapers every week. Fourthly, advertising industry organizations at all levels were supposed to engage, individually or cooperating with some special units, in an active diffusion and communication of the campaign and its goals. Finally, it was important to diligently choose the advertisements after a process of selection through public appraisal.¹⁸² After the end of the PSA month, the local levels of the administrations for Industry and Commerce had to elaborate a report on the outcome of the campaign, and had to send it to the State Administration for Industry and Commerce (SAIC).

¹⁷⁹ Zheng, *Gongyi guanggao de aomi*, 28-30.

¹⁸⁰ In 2018 this organization has been merged into the State Administration of Market Regulation (*Guojia shichang jiandu guanli zongju* 国家市场监督管理总局).

¹⁸¹ Liu Xingxing 刘星星, "Zhongguo gongyi guanggao xiaoshi 中国公益广告小史" (Brief history of Chinese public service advertising), *Zhongguo wenming wang*, 8 May 2014, http://www.wenming.cn/wmwmobile/zt/201311/t20131120_1592021.shtml (last accessed 7 June 2020).

¹⁸² "Guanyu kaizhang 'Zhongguo hao fengshang' zhuti gongyi guanggao yue huodong de tongzhi 关于开展“中华好风尚”主题公益广告月活动的通知" (Notice on the Campaign for the Revival of Chinese Traditional Values), 18 June 1996, http://www.110.com/fagui/law_168254.html (last accessed 7 June 2020).

During the conferences held to develop and establish the guidelines of the campaign, Yang Weiguang, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television and head of Chinese Central Television (CCTV), delivered a speech entitled “Strengthening Television Public Service Advertising and Promoting the Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization” (*Jiaqiang dianshi gongyi guanggao, tuidong jingshen wenming jianshe* 加强电视公益广告, 推动精神文明建设). In his speech, he stressed the need to build a socialist spiritual civilization, arguing that PSA was the ‘light cavalry’ of the process of sensibilization of the masses, and that this field needed to be carefully studied and understood, in order to help guiding social progress and national civilization.¹⁸³

In 1997 the State Administration for Industry and Commerce published the “Advertising Code of Ethics” (*Guanggao huodong daode guifan* 广告活动道德规范), a document in which the importance of abiding by the country’s ethical and moral directions was stressed. The code remarked that all the advertising organizations had the duty to carry out and participate in public service campaigns, in order to support the development of China’s socialist spiritual civilization and guide the population towards this goal.¹⁸⁴ The 1997 regulation was developed to implement the 1994 Advertising Law,¹⁸⁵ which did not provide any specific guideline or direction for the *gongyi guanggao* practice.

During the subsequent years Chinese PSA focused on topics that followed the main issues the country was facing at the time, and on topics that echoed and supported relevant governmental policies. In 1999 the SAIC and the Office of the Central Guidance Commission on Building a Spiritual Civilization (WMB) jointly emanated the notice “On Further Improvement of *Gongyi Guanggao*” (*Guanyu jin yi bu zuo hao gongyi guanggao gongzuo youguan wenti de tongzhi* 关于进一步做好公益广告工作有关问题的通知), which underlined the important role PSA had in publicizing the Party’s policies, guiding public opinion, and spreading the importance of spiritual civilization. The 1999 regulation stressed that public service advertising activities should strictly abide by the directives of the Party and of the authorities, and focused on the goals and requirements of the central government. It remarked that the Local Offices for Civilization and the Administration for Industry and Commerce should strengthen cooperation and carefully organize, coordinate, supervise, and manage all the public service advertising activities, not losing sight of the ultimate scope: building spiritual civilization. Furthermore, it stressed the importance of an accurate selection

¹⁸³ Liu, “Zhongguo gongyi guanggao xiaoshi.”

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ “Zhonghua renmin gonghe guo guanggao fa” 中华人民共和国广告法 (Chinese Advertising Law), 27 October 1994, available in Chinese at <https://www.pkulaw.com/chl/c741e11afef0bbc2bdfb.html> (last accessed 8 June 2020), and in English at http://www.leggicinesi.it/view_doc.asp?docID=107 (last accessed 8 June 2020).

of public service advertisements by the offices in charge at different local levels, and it emphasized the importance of establishing a sharp distinction between commercial and non-commercial advertisements. On a final note, it communicated that the national *gongyi guanggao* competition that used to take place annually would be held biennially, but local authorities could decide whether to organize their local PSA competition every year or every two years.¹⁸⁶

In 2000 the “Set Up New Customs and Move Towards a New Century” (*Shuli xin fengshang, maixiangxin shiji* 树立新风尚, 迈向新世纪) campaign was launched by WMB and SAIC, and in the years which followed many national campaigns were issued: the field of Chinese public service advertising gradually improved its efficacy and techniques, as it gained increasing importance as a means of communication with the masses.

The year 2001 was later declared “The year of *gongyi guanggao*,”¹⁸⁷ because of the attention the practice gained. In that year, the Chinese Communist Party’s Propaganda Department (*Zhongyang xuanchuan bu* 中央宣传部),¹⁸⁸ the WMB, the SAIC, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (*Guojia guangbo dianying dianshi zongju* 国家广播电影电视总局),¹⁸⁹ and CCTV jointly launched the “National Competition on Ideological and Moral Public Service Advertising” (*Quanguo sixiang daode gongyi guanggao dasai* 全国思想道德公益广告大赛).¹⁹⁰ In the same year, CCTV took part in several *gongyi guanggao* campaigns, broadcasting 30 seconds or one minute long spots at least 22 times a day in its 11 TV channels, and important websites, such as *Sina* and *Renmin*,

¹⁸⁶ “Guanyu jin yi bu zuo hao gongyi guanggao gongzuo youguan wenti de tongzhi” 关于进一步做好公益广告工作有关问题的通知 (On Further Improvement of *Gongyi Guanggao*), available at http://www.110.com/fagui/law_139704.html (last accessed 8 June 2020).

¹⁸⁷ Zhang, *Gongyi guanggao de aomi*, 32.

¹⁸⁸ The Propaganda Department is a functional department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, in charge of ideological work, that was founded in May 1924 under the provision of the Party Constitution’s Art. 34. The Department was closed during the Cultural Revolution, and its establishment was resumed in 1997 (an in-depth analysis of Chinese propaganda institutions and their functions before the Cultural Revolution can be found in Yu, *Mass Persuasion*, 70-89). Its main functions nowadays include: managing the activities of theoretical research, study, and promulgation; guiding public opinion and coordinating the activities of journalistic units; guiding the production of intellectual works on a macroscopic level; and other similar tasks which it has to carry out accordingly with the Central Committee of the Communist Party. From <https://web.archive.org/web/20110809085135/http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64114/75332/5230610.html> (last accessed 7 June 2020). An exhaustive analysis of the mechanisms of the Chinese propaganda machine can be found in David Shambaugh, “China’s Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy,” *The China Journal* 57, (January 2007): 25-58, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20066240> (last accessed 7 June 2020). The Propaganda Minister defines itself as a “body that provides spiritual guidance for China’s media and, by extension, for the broader population. It aims to propagate the government’s latest thinking into society, seeking not only to inform but also to sway public opinion toward the Party’s latest views.” See Doug Young, *The Party Line: How the Media Dictates Public Opinion in Modern China* (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons Singapore Pte. Ltd., 2013), 32.

¹⁸⁹ This organization has been called “State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television” between 1998 and 2013, when it became the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (*Guojia xinwen chubanshang guan dian zongju* 国家新闻出版广电总局). In 2018 it was reorganized into what is nowadays known as the National Radio and Film Administration (*Guojia guangbo dianshi zongju* 国家广播电影电视总局). An analysis on how the policy-making process is articulated in China can be found in Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China. Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

¹⁹⁰ Liu, “Zhongguo gongyi guanggao xiaoshi.”

formed the “Online Public Service Advertising Alliance” (*Wangluo gongyi guanggao lianmeng* 网络公益广告联盟).¹⁹¹

In 2001 the WMB and the Chinese Communist Party’s Propaganda Department (CCPPD) issued the “Program for Improving Civic Morality” (*Gongmin daode jianshe shishi gangyao* 公民道德建设实施纲要), a document in which the steps that needed to be taken to build a material and spiritual socialist civilization were described, and *gongyi guanggao* are mentioned as one of the fundamental means for the country to reach this target.¹⁹²

In the following years, the development of public service advertising in China closely followed the country’s economic and social situations and necessities, focusing on sensitizing the population on certain issues, such as those campaigns concerned with water saving or environmental safeguard. Nevertheless, as Ding remarks in his survey, the development of the category can also be observed when it comes to the variety of topics the *gongyi guanggao* industry is concerned with. The author identifies six different genres of Chinese PSA. The first one is concerned with what he labels “Code of General Behavior and Ethics,”¹⁹³ where Chinese traditional values, such as respecting the elders and cherishing harmony in the family, can be found. Most of above-mentioned values are considered part of modern morality as well, for example abiding by public order or caring for public property. The second category implies a higher level of moral commitment, which usually refers to the importance of loving the country and acting for national interest. The third one is concerned with environment safeguard, and it promotes the relevance of pursuing an eco-friendly and sustainable development of the country. The fourth theme is aimed at encouraging the population to look after personal health and safety and it includes, for instance, anti-smoke, prevention of diseases, or criminal prevention campaigns. The fifth one includes social welfare activities, such as donating blood. The last category is mainly focused on creating a favorable image of the country or of the local territory it refers to, through campaigns which promote the fight against corruption or advocate human rights.¹⁹⁴

Many successful PSA campaigns have been carried out by the institutions in the years. Among these, the 2004 “Labor Brings Value to Life” (*Laodong chuangzao rensheng jiazhi* 劳动创造人生价值); 2005’s “Save Natural Resources, Live a Healthy Life” (*Jieyue ziyuan, jiankang shenghuo* 节约

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² “Gongmin daode jianshe shishi gangyao” 公民道德建设实施纲要 (Program for Improving Civic Morality), available at <https://www.pkulaw.com/chl/9853b5dc10a7e00cbdfb.html> (last accessed 7 June 2020).

¹⁹³ Ding Ding 丁丁, “Shilun gongyi guanggao zai woguo de fazhan” 试论公益广告在我国的发展 (Discussion on the development of Chinese Public Service Advertising), *Ningxia Shehui Kexue* 2, (1999): 8.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

资源, 健康生活); the Olympic Games campaign in 2008, “One World, One Dream” (*Tong yi ge shijie, tong yi ge mengxiang* 同一个世界 同一个梦想); or the “A Honest Competition Makes a Good Man” (*Renren zhenzhen bisai, gangan jingjing zuo ren* 认认真真比赛, 干干净净做人).¹⁹⁵

Large use of propagandistic PSA was employed during the 2008 Olympic Games, held in Beijing.¹⁹⁶ Aiming at influencing the citizens’ behavior, the ads advocated values deemed fundamental by the government.¹⁹⁷ The campaigns, as Kloet, Chong and Landsberger point out, had the goal to “stress the ‘civilizational’ value of Chinese culture to its people and, in tandem, to promote what are deemed good civilized manners among its citizenry.”¹⁹⁸

It is during the Olympic Games that the world *dream* (*mengxiang* 梦想) starts being featured in the campaigns issued both by the government and private enterprises. The advertisements of the Olympic campaigns, as Puppini underlines, make large use of slogans (*kouhao* 口号) with strong dream-related linguistic correlations, thus being one of the first examples of this kind of rhetoric in the public service-oriented advertising domain.¹⁹⁹

As Puppini points out, *gongyi guanggao* presence in the city landscape gradually increased in the years, and the variety of topics this means focused on rose accordingly.²⁰⁰

From 2013 on, as reported in the governmental website *Wenming*, the people who have paid attention to their surroundings noticed that in the city landscape, for example outside the construction sites, there have no longer been just a grey sequence of fences, but many colorful posters permeated with Chinese culture have started flourishing. These new *gongyi guanggao* belong to the “spread civilization, cultivate new customs” (*Jiang wenming shu xinfeng* 讲文明树新风) campaign, consequently launched after President Xi Jinping 习近平 took office in 2013. This campaign aims at

¹⁹⁵ Liu, “Zhongguo gongyi guanggao xiaoshi.”

¹⁹⁶ See Stefan Landsberger, “Harmony, Olympic Manners and Morals — Chinese Television and the ‘New Propaganda’ of Public Service Advertising,” *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 8, no. 2 (2009): 331-55. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156805809X12553326569632>.

¹⁹⁷ See also Stefan Landsberger, “To spit or not to spit –Health and Hygiene Communication through Propaganda Posters in the PRC –A Historical Overview,” in *Health Communication: Challenge and Evolution. Beijing: Asia Media Research Center, Communication University of China* (2010): 7-32. https://www.academia.edu/5336077/To_spit_or_not_to_spit_Health_and_Hygiene_Communication_through_Propaganda_Posters_in_the_PRC_A_Historical_Overview.

¹⁹⁸ Jeroen de Kloet, Gladys Pak Lei Chong, and Stefan Landsberger, “National Image Management Begins at Home: Imagining the New Olympic Citizen,” in *Soft Power in China*, ed. Jian Wang (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 117.

¹⁹⁹ Giovanna Puppini, “Come si Costruisce un Sogno: Slogan Pubblicitari A Servizio Delle Olimpiadi di Pechino 2008” (How To Construct A Dream: Advertising Slogans To Serve The 2008 Beijing Olympics), *Cosmopolis* III, no. 1 (2008), 43-53. <http://www.cosmopolisonline.it/20080624/puppini.php>.

²⁰⁰ See Giovanna Puppini, “Il Volto ‘Nascosto’ di Pechino: Immagini e Slogan dalla Metropolitana” (The “Hidden” Face of Beijing: Images and Slogans from the Tube), in *China and the World: Proceedings of the XI AISC Conference*, ed. Paolo De Troia (Rome: Edizione Nuova Cultura, 2010), 305-24. Regarding the presence of PSA in Beijing subway, an interesting comparison with other cities has been conducted in Steven W. Lewis, “The Potential for International and Transnational Public Service Advertising in Public Spaces in American and Chinese Global Cities: Conclusions from a 2010 Survey of Advertisements in Subways in Beijing, New York, Shanghai and Washington, DC,” *Public Relations Review* 38, (2012): 765-78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.10.007>.

highlighting the cultural connotations of PSA, while involving the principles of the “Chinese Dream” (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦),²⁰¹ as well as socialist core values²⁰² at the same time. Advertisements related to this series are usually engaged in conveying important principles for the country, such as the central role of an upright education, of respecting the elders, of civilized travelling, of safeguarding the environment, and of similar themes advocated by the Chinese socialist ideology.

In the years the public service advertising industry has started employing more communication channels in comparison to the past:²⁰³ with the development and wider distribution of the Internet, which has become accessible to most Chinese citizens, *gongyi guanggao* have started appearing in websites and social media, while their use also increased in public places.²⁰⁴ As Puppini explains in her work, PSA can be found in different media and platforms in the country. *Gongyi guanggao* can be featured in traditional media, hence on newspapers or journals (*pingmian gongyi guanggao* 平面公益广告), on broadcasting programs (*guangbo gongyi guanggao* 广播公益广告), and on television (*dianshi gongyi guanggao* 电视公益广告). Besides these platforms, PSA can also appear online (*wangluo gongyi guanggao* 网络公益广告), and outdoor, as posters hung in the cities (*huwai gongyi guanggao* 户外公益广告), or banners appearing on public transportation (*jiaotong gongyi guanggao* 交通公益广告).²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ The discussion on the Chinese Dream has been carried on for many years and it has not come to an end yet, as the topic and its applications have been widely analyzed by scholars all over the world. An interesting reading which analyzes the historical, social, and political environment which led to the development of this concept can be found in Mingfu Liu, *The China Dream* (New York: CN Media Time, 2015). The first official speech in which President Xi mentioned the term was delivered in 2012, slightly after his election as General Secretary of the Party (<https://www.economist.com/leaders/2013/05/04/xi-jinping-and-the-chinese-dream>, last accessed 9 June 2020), even though some traces of his future leadership guidelines can already be found in his first discourse after the election, held on 15 November 2012 (<http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2012-11-15/121925587435.shtml>, last accessed 9 June 2020). Within the years, the Chinese Dream has become the core of Chinese political, economic, and social scene, and the term is strictly linked to the presidency of Xi. In a broad sense, it can be said that the Chinese Dream concept aims at influencing the individuals behavior in the name of the role they have in the construction of a glorious China, while at the same time the term is also used to refer to China’s future goals.

²⁰² “The ‘core socialist values’ (*shehuizhuyi hexin jiazhi guan* 社会主义核心价值观) advocated by Xi follow the same threefold categorization: patriotism (*aiguo* 爱国), dedication (*jingye* 敬业), integrity (*chengxin* 诚信), and friendship (*youshan* 友善) are individual virtues, freedom (*ziyou* 自由), equality (*pingdeng* 平等), justice (*gongzheng* 公正) and rule of law (*fazhi* 法治) are social virtues, whereas prosperity (*fuqiang* 富强), democracy (*minzhu* 民主), civility (*wenming* 文明) and harmony (*hexie* 和谐) are national values.” See Paolo Magagnin, “Putting into Practice ‘Core Confucian Values’: Intertextuality and Ideology in Xi Jinping’s May 4th 2014 Speech,” in *Media and Politics: Discourses, Cultures, and Practices*, eds. Bettina Mottura, Letizia Osti, Giorgia Riboni (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 231.

²⁰³ For a discussion on the effects of media development in the social environment of China, see Yungeng Xie, ed., *New Media and China’s Social Development* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., 2017); Ke Xue and Mingyang Yu (eds.), *New Media and Chinese Society* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., 2017). A well-inquired analysis on Chinese media culture can be found in Haiqing Yu, *Media and Cultural Transformation in China* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

²⁰⁴ Liu, “Zhongguo gongyi guanggao xiaoshi.”

²⁰⁵ Giovanna Puppini, “La Pubblicità Sociale in Cina: un Quadro Generale,” *Mondo Cinese* 123, (2005): 34-5. http://www.tuttocina.it/Mondo_cinese/123/123_pupp.htm#.WISdi3lpypo.

In 2015 the city of Yiwu launched a China Dream-related initiative, manufacturing many items (such as suitcases, teacups, or kitchen supplies) branded with the China Dream logo, in order to sensitize the population.²⁰⁶

In 2015 the country elaborated and emanated a new Advertising Law (*Zhonghua renmin gonghe guo guanggao fa* 中华人民共和国广告法) that replaced the one issued in 1994. While integrating its former version on many other aspects of commercial advertising and its regulations, the 2015 Law also included some directives for *gongyi guanggao*.²⁰⁷ PSA are mentioned in Art. 22, in which the government prohibits the advertisement of tobacco products; in Art. 39, where the use or display of any kind of advertisements in schools and kindergartens is forbidden except for *gongyi guanggao*; and finally in one of the last articles of the law, Art. 74, which is entirely dedicated to public service advertisement. Art. 74 states that:

The State encourages and supports the development of public service advertising activities [as they] promulgate values and advocate the practice of civilization.

Mass media have the duty to issue public service advertising. Radio stations, TV stations, periodical publications units shall publish public service advertisements in accordance with the established layout, time block and duration. All measures for the administration of public service advertising shall be formulated by the State Administration for Industry and Commerce, jointly with the concerned departments.²⁰⁸

In 2016 the SAIC, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (*Gongye he xinxi huabu* 工业和信息化部) and other four departments jointly issued the “Interim Measures for the Promotion and Management of Public Service Advertising” (*Gongyi guanggao cujin he guanli zanxing banfa* 公益广告促进和管理暂行办法). The document in Art. 4 specifies which organs oversee PSA management and administration at different levels. It is stated that:

Public service advertising activities are carried out under the guidance and coordination of the Central Committee and the Central Guidance Committee on Building a Spiritual Civilization at all levels.

The administrative department for Industry and Commerce shall perform the duties of advertising supervision and guidance, and be responsible for the planning and relevant management of public service advertising.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Liu, “Zhongguo gongyi guanggao xiaoshi.”

²⁰⁷ A comparison between the 1994 Advertising Law and the 2015 revision of the Advertising Law can be consulted at <https://www.pkulaw.com/compare/ecbe05451e7d33d8bdfb-c741e11afef0bbc2bdfb.html> (last accessed 7 June 2020).

²⁰⁸ “Zhonghua renmin gonghe guo guanggao fa” 中华人民共和国广告法 (Advertising Law of China), 24 April 2015, available at <https://www.pkulaw.com/chl/ecbe05451e7d33d8bdfb.html> (last accessed 8 June 2020).

²⁰⁹ “Gongyi guanggao cujin he guanli zhexing banfa” 公益广告促进和管理暂行办法 (Interim measures for the promotion and management of public service advertising), 15 January 2016, available at <https://www.pkulaw.com/chl/e08473983b129b91bdfb.html> (last accessed 8 June 2020).

The document proceeds listing the authorities that manage the distribution of PSA at different levels and in different fields.²¹⁰ In Art. 5 it states that *gongyi guanggao* should follow the requirements of national laws and regulations, and abide by socialist moral standards; they should reflect the national and social public interests; they should make use of a proper language; and finally they should ensure that both artistic and cultural means are appropriate.²¹¹

In Art. 7, the document indicates the rules that private companies must observe if they want to engage in a PSA campaign and produce their advertisements. For instance, the trademark of an enterprise can be displayed for 5 seconds or up to 1/5 of the total time length of the advertisement for what concerns audio and video ads, while, if a standard logo is used, its appearance shall not be longer than 3 seconds, or up to 1/5 of the total time of the advertisement. This is because the corporate name or the trademark shall not distract the public from the message or the content of the PSA. Finally, Art. 7 states that commercial advertisements shall not be designed, produced, or published disguised as public service advertisements.²¹²

Art. 8 indicates that the sources of public service advertisement include public service advertisement wire copies (*gongyi guanggao tonggao* 公益广告通稿), public service advertisement work database (*gongyi guanggao zuopinku* 公益广告作品库), and self-designed and produced contributions. Moreover, the media have the obligation to publish PSA that have been approved by the Central Guidance Commission on Building Spiritual Civilization. The competent departments must create a *gongyi guanggao* database, whose free of charge contents can be used by the public. Finally, Art. 8 also underlines that individuals as well as working units shall design, produce, and publish PSA in autonomy, but always under the guidance of the department.

This regulation also provides clear rules as to when, where, and for how long *gongyi guanggao* should be issued by the different media. For what concerns television and broadcasting stations, it states that:

²¹⁰ “The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television shall be responsible for the guidance and management of the production, publication, and broadcasting of public service advertisements in the press, the publication, and the television media; the Department of Communications shall be responsible for the guidance and management of the production, publication, and broadcasting of public service advertisements by telecommunication operators; the network information department shall be responsible for the guidance and management of the production, publication, and broadcasting of public service advertisements of Internet enterprises; railway, highway, waterway, civil aviation, and other transportation management departments are responsible for the guidance and management of public transport vehicles and related public service advertising activities; the Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development shall be responsible for the guidance and management of the installation of urban outdoor advertising facilities, the enclosure of construction sites, and the publication and broadcasting of public service advertisements in scenic spots. Other member units of the Central Guidance Commission on Building Spiritual Civilization shall actively do an efficient job in the relevant field of public service advertising and support the management of other departments if the task responsibility is shared.” *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² China struggled for quite some time on this issue, as Puppini discusses in her work “Il ‘Caso di Zia Gong Li’: la Pubblicità Sociale Cinese in Bilico tra Finalità Opposte,” *Asiatica Venetiana* 10/11 (2009): 137-54.

3 Civilization with Chinese Characteristics

It can be noticed how in the previously presented overview the term ‘civilization’ appeared quite often on both Chinese commercial and non-commercial advertising. The employment of the locution ‘civilization’ has three slightly different meanings. Firstly, it can refer to an approximated notion of ‘society’ or ‘people,’ as it indicates a group of individuals who share common language, geography, and history; if used with a reference to this concept, China can boast to have inherited what is considered the civilization with the longest continuative history.²¹⁸ Secondly, the term can refer to a notion quite akin to the concept of ‘culture:’ it can designate the mindset, the particular set of beliefs, values, or practices which mark the difference between different populations. Finally, ‘civilization’ is used to refer to what is perceived as the process of improvement of a particular society or nation, in which its later levels of development are deemed as superior to the earlier ones.²¹⁹

The Chinese word for ‘civilization’ is *wenming* 文明, which is composed of the characters *wen* 文, ‘culture,’ and *ming* 明, ‘bright,’ and was imported during the XIX century, when a consistent number of Chinese scholars were sent to Japan to study.²²⁰ The reason of this ‘migration’ was that, while China had not opened to the West yet, Japan was already building relationships with Western countries and encouraging cultural exchanges. When Chinese scholars went back to their country, they imported some words which were not known in China, as they labeled some concepts that were not familiar for the country. Actually, the word *wenming* has already appeared in the *Book of Documents* and in the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* or *I Ching* 易经),²²¹ but the meaning it conveyed was slightly different from the one it has nowadays. In the *Book of Changes* the term appears, for instance, in relation to the terms *tongren* 同人 and *dayou* 大有:²²² the connotation it brings is concerned with the importance for human beings of uniting and cooperating to build a prosperous society, and for mankind to be able to build a harmonious unity with nature.²²³

²¹⁸ For a narration of its development, see Marcel Granet, *Chinese Civilization* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958).

²¹⁹ Huang Xingtao, “The Formation of Modern Concepts of ‘Civilization’ and ‘Culture’ and Their Application During the Late Qing and Early Republican Times,” *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 5, no. 1 (June 2011), 3-4.

²²⁰ Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 647-8.

²²¹ Quan Dingwang 全定旺, “Liang Qichao dui ‘wenming’ gainian de zhuanhuan ji sixiang ziyuan” 梁启超对 “文明” 概念的转换及思想资源 (Liang Qichao’s transformation of the term “civilization” and his resources), *Journal of Hebei Normal University for Nationalities* 37, no. 1 (February 2017): 71-2.

²²² *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 185-97.

²²³ Sang Aixie 桑爱叶, “‘Yijing’ zhong de ‘wenming’ xin jie” 《易经》中的“文明”新解 (A New Interpretation of ‘Civilization’ in the Book Of Changes), *Beijing Wenming*, 27 April 2016, available at http://bj.wenming.cn/wmwx/201604/t20160427_3319730.shtml (last accessed 10 June 2020). As Chen underlines, “the classical Chinese philosophical cosmology emphasizes continuity, dynamism, relativity, relationships, and the totality. It is not a self-centric philosophy that assumes a subject-object dichotomy and focuses on static, isolated, and substantial entities. Starting from its organic holism, the classical Chinese perspective views everything in the cosmos as interrelated and interdependent. Each thing’s own existence

The concept of civilization as it is intended nowadays has developed and has been discussed for many decades. Among the scholars who first took part in a discourse on civilization, the German philosopher Kant operates a distinction between what ‘civilization’ and ‘culture’ are, arguing that:

To a high degree we are, through art and science, cultured. We are civilized – perhaps too much for our own good – in all sorts of social grace and decorum. But to consider ourselves as having reached morality – for that, much is lacking. The ideal of morality belongs to culture; its use for some simulacrum of morality in the love of honor and outward decorum constitutes mere civilization.²²⁴

Kant proceeds analyzing the role governments have in raising citizens with a mature morality, thus underlining that this issue is to be considered as a social and not as an individual matter. He remarks that:

So long as states waste their forces in vain and violent self-expansion, and thereby constantly thwart the slow efforts to improve the minds of their citizens by even withdrawing all support from them, nothing in the way of a moral order is to be expected. For such an end, a long internal working of each political body toward the education of its citizens is required. Everything good that is not based on a morally good disposition, however, is nothing but pretense and glittering misery.²²⁵

As it is noticeable, in this work the philosopher argues that what he calls ‘civilization’ is itself of no use, and what humanity requires to improve its condition is culture, *ergo* morality. By this means, Kant introduces the idea that, on a rhetorical and gnoseological level, the term ‘civilization’ has a more articulated denotation than the one it could seem to convey.

One of the first and most relevant authors to engage in a well-inquired study on the concept of civilization is John Stuart Mill, who observes that the term ‘civilization’ “sometimes stands for ‘human improvement’ in general, and sometimes for certain kinds of improvement in particular.”²²⁶ In his survey Mill proceeds analyzing the employment of the terms ‘civilization’ or ‘civilized,’ which he notices can assume two different meanings. The first one regards those countries considered to be better for several reasons: they are believed to be farther advanced in the path leading to perfection, and generally happier or wiser. The second circumstance in which ‘civilized’ is employed gives the term a sharper specificity, as it labels the kind of civilization deemed as the parameter for what can

and value manifests only in its relations to other things. Thus, relationships of symbiotic harmony should be established between humans and nature, between persons, and between cultures” in *The Core Values of Chinese Civilization*, Lai Chen (Singapore: Springer, 2017), 3.

²²⁴ Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View” (1784), in *On History*, Immanuel Kant, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963), 7th thesis.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ John Stuart Mill, “Civilization,” in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J.M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963-1991), vol. XVIII: 119. Available at <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/mill-the-collected-works-of-john-stuart-mill-volume-xviii-essays-on-politics-and-society-part-i>.

be considered ‘civilized,’ and what instead is ‘savage’ or ‘barbarian.’²²⁷ Moving forward with his discussion, Mill mainly focuses on the second meaning, and tries to analyze the reasons that in the years led to such a peculiar denotation. The author observes that “where we find human beings acting together for common purposes in large bodies, and enjoying the pleasures of social intercourse,”²²⁸ and “where the arrangements of society, for protecting the persons and property of its members, are sufficiently perfect to maintain peace among them,”²²⁹ we tend to call the population ‘civilized.’ Mill finds in co-operation the pivotal feature of civilization, and describes it as “the sacrifice of some portion of individual will, for a common purpose,”²³⁰ which will eventually turn out beneficial for the whole community. According to him, it is because of certain populations’ unwillingness to compromise and co-operate that they are not considered ‘civilized.’ Mill underlines that in a civilization process the power switches from a few persons to the masses, who become the new leading force in the new reality; inevitably, public opinion gains importance in the society, undertaking the role of those institutions or organizations established to protect the individual. Consequently, Mill notes that the individual might get lost in the dimensions of public opinion, and might begin depending on it more than he used to do.

Later on, Norbert Elias analyzes in his work the concept of civilization, arguing that it is a Western postulation to express its self-consciousness.²³¹ Elias asserts that the term

[...] sums up everything in which Western society of the last two or three centuries believes itself superior to earlier societies or ‘more primitive’ contemporary ones. By this term Western society seeks to describe what constitutes its special character and what it is proud of: the level of its technology, the nature of its manners, the development of its scientific knowledge or view of the world, and much more.²³²

By declaring this, he focuses on the European perception of this idea, which is not the same in all the countries. In his survey Elias compares the understanding of ‘civilization’ in France and England to the German one. By going through the analysis of this difference, he points out that the French and English word ‘civilization’ seems to encompass an idea that in German language is conveyed by different words, such as ‘*Zivilisation*’ and ‘*Kultur*.’ Although discussing how the notion of civilization differs from each country, through the analysis of different countries’ civilization-related

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

²³¹ Norbert Elias, *The civilizing process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 5.

²³² *Ibid.*

documents Elias reveals that what he calls the ‘civilizing process’ seems to have risen from a set of similar premises.

In his work he observes that “the concept of civilization indicates quite clearly in its XIX century usage that the process of civilization – or, more strictly speaking, a phase of this process – had been completed and forgotten.”²³³ As a consequence, “people only wanted to accomplish this process for other nations, and also, for a period, for the lower classes of their own society. [...] They wished above all to disseminate it, and at most to develop it within the framework of the standard [they had] already reached.”²³⁴

Following these considerations, Elias provides his definition of the ‘civilizing process,’ that is “a change of human conduct and sentiment in a quite specific direction.”²³⁵ The author then underlines that this process is neither the product of a long-termed plan or rational path, nor a “random coming and going of order-less patterns.”²³⁶ Instead, it is an order *sui generis* which arises from the interdependence of the people’s plans and actions, and encompasses all the intended and reasoned plans of the totality of individuals who constitute it.²³⁷ As Elias states, “it is this order of interweaving human impulses and strivings, this social order, which determines the course of historical change; it underlies the civilizing process.”²³⁸

Considering another, more practical, denotation of the concept, according to Durant and Durant,

Civilization is social order promoting cultural creation. Four elements constitute it: economic provision, political organization, moral traditions, and the pursuit of knowledge and the arts. It begins where chaos and insecurity end. For when fear is overcome, curiosity and constructiveness are free, and man passes by natural impulse towards the understanding and embellishment of life.²³⁹

While the considerations of Mill stress the tight relationship between the idea of civilization and the Western mindset, the description of the concept (or rather, the process) provided by Durant and Durant appears to be anchored to the Western context the authors were raised and educated in.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 88.

²³⁴ *Ibid.* 88-9.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 365.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ For a discussion on the relationship between the individual and the society see Norbert Elias, *The Society of Individuals*, trans. Michael Schröter (New York: Continuum, 2001).

²³⁸ Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 366.

²³⁹ Will Durant and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization, Vol. 1: Our Oriental Heritage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1935), chapter 1.

During the XIX century, while discussions on ‘civilization’ evolved, social evolution theories started flourishing in the West.²⁴⁰ The development of these theories coincided with the expansion of the Western colonies in parts of the world that were deemed as ‘uncivilized’ by the colonizers. Progressing in the process of expansion of their countries, Western states established their hegemony in the Asian countries, imposing themselves as the bearers of the highest standards of civilization. By doing so, they adhered to the definition of ‘supremacy’ provided by Gramsci, who argues that “the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and ‘intellectual and moral leadership.’”²⁴¹

A similar notion is employed by Harrell, who perceives the civilizing process as

a kind of interaction between peoples, in which one group, the civilizing center, interacts with other groups (the peripheral peoples) in terms of a particular kind of inequality. In this interaction, the inequality between the civilizing center and the peripheral peoples has its ideological basis in the center's claim a superior degree of civilization, along with a commitment to raise the peripheral peoples’ civilization to the level of the center, or at least closer that level.²⁴²

The idea that a country has the means to teach to another country how to elevate itself out of the ‘savage’ status denotes a remarked asymmetry on the relationship between them, and “draws its ideological rationale from the belief that the process of domination is one of helping the dominated to attain or at least approach the superior cultural, religious, and moral qualities characteristic of the center itself.”²⁴³

According to Harrell,

looking at civilizing projects in this way, as asymmetrical dialogues between the center and the periphery, allows us to analyze the projects into two components: the ideological discourse of the center (to which the members of the peripheral peoples may subscribe or contribute in varying degree), and the ethnic discourse of the periphery.²⁴⁴

Harrell remarks that, since the process of civilization affects both the sides involved, this asymmetry also provides a basis for the Western countries to develop a more conscious and precise image of themselves, by operating a comparison with what the author defines the ‘peripheries.’ A similar idea

²⁴⁰ Among the most relevant works on this topic, see Herbert Spencer, “The Social Organism” (1860), in *Essays: Scientific, Political and Speculative*, Herbert Spencer (London: Williams & Norgate, 1868); Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (1871), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society* (1877), (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985).

²⁴¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from The Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 57.

²⁴² Stevan Harrell, “Civilizing Projects and the Reaction to Them,” in *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, ed. Stevan Harrell, (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1995), 4. “The term ‘peripheral peoples’ reinforces the important fact that the reason they are in this kind of a mess is that they are far from the centers of institutional and economic power and of dense population concentrations” (*Ibid.*, 3). The author decided to employ this term in order to avoid labels such as ‘national minorities’ or ‘indigenous peoples.’

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

is also proposed by Said, who argues that ‘the Orient’ helped shaping and building Europe by constantly representing the contrasting ‘Other’ the Western countries had to confront.²⁴⁵

Regarding the possible reactions of the peripheries towards the process of civilization they are forced to undergo, Harrell identifies two extreme and an in-between response. In the first scenario, the attitude is to resist to any attempt of civilization from the conquerors. In the second one peripheral people become complicit in the process, as they interiorize the idea that they are inferior to the civilizers, and are hence keen to abandon their heritage; the author points out that usually in this case the peripheral people’s “cultural inferiority is balanced by superiority or equality on another plane.”²⁴⁶ After describing these two possible situations, Harrell observes that in most of the cases the response to the civilizing project can be collocated in between these extremes, when

peripheral peoples are concerned with maintaining their own identity, and thus resisting any implication that all aspects of their culture, religion, or morals are unequivocally inferior to those of the civilizing center, but nevertheless participate to some degree in the project of importing some elements from the center into their own culture and society. [...] Peripheral peoples acknowledge at least some aspects of central civilization to be desirable [...].²⁴⁷

The author remarks that, in order to proceed with the civilizing project, the dominators have to provide some evidences that the population that ought to be civilized is *de facto* inferior, and that its status can be improved. Targeting and defining the objects of their civilization project serves multiple scopes; among these, providing the “imprimatur of science to what is essentially a political project.”²⁴⁸

Although the presence of Western forces in Asia fits in the debate on the legitimation of the process of civilization, over the years similar (and for some aspects identical), paths were followed by Asian countries, including China. Following Elias’ argument, while scientific notions can be explained without framing them in the social and cultural context that generated them, concepts such as ‘civilization’ are not understandable if they are being separated from the group that uses them.²⁴⁹ Hence, an inquiry on the Chinese debate on civilization is needed.

In its history China engaged in some civilizing projects as well, trying to annex territories and populations under its imperial domain. As Western countries did towards the populations they ought to civilize, the Chinese were “unanimous in regarding the inhabitants of Europe and America as

²⁴⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1977), 1.

²⁴⁶ Harrell, “Civilizing Projects,” 6.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* The author also presents the case in which “the peripheral peoples, while resenting the attempts to civilize them, nevertheless accept the general premise that they are less civilized or morally less worthy. They thus develop a ‘stigmatized identity,’ a sense of themselves as backward, uncivilized, dirty, stupid, and so forth.”

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁴⁹ Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 8.

barbarians,”²⁵⁰ implying these populations did not reach what, in their opinion, was to consider ‘civilized.’ As Jacques underlines, it was the “long-running conflict between the Chinese and the steppe nomads that shaped the Chinese sense of cultural superiority, gave rise to the distinction between ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarians,’ and largely conditioned Chinese thinking about ‘self’ and ‘the other.’”²⁵¹ The Chinese history is rich in examples of power interchanges between the center and its peripheries,²⁵² and all of these dynamics have led to the formation of what is nowadays known as ‘Chinese culture,’ or ‘Chinese civilization’ in its wider meaning, which simply designates a particular society and its characteristics.

With the metamorphosis of China from an empire into a republic, the government’s efforts switched from the pursuing of mere conquest objectives, into an “attempt to turn what had previously been rather pluralistic empires into more unified nation-states.”²⁵³ Regarding this topic, some scholars believe that “the state China is [...] has no given nation”²⁵⁴ because of its historical discontinuities, while others argue that the Chinese state is the epitome as well as the protector of the Chinese civilization. Besides, a full comprehension of the country will never be attained, as long as Western countries continue judging China by their own criteria. Belonging to the second strand of thought, Jacques states that:

China should not be seen primarily as a nation-state, even though that is how it presently describes itself and how it is seen by others. China has existed within roughly its present borders for almost two thousand years and only over the last century has it come to regard itself as a nation-state. The identity of the Chinese was formed before China assumed the status of a nation-state, unlike in the West, where the identity of people, in both Europe and the United States, is largely expressed in terms of the nation-state. The Chinese, in constantly making reference to what they describe as their 5,000-year history, are aware that what defines them is not a sense of nationhood but of civilization. In this context, China should not primarily be seen as a nation-state but rather as a civilization-state. The implications of this are far-reaching: it is simply not possible to regard China as like, or equivalent to, any other state.²⁵⁵

As Jacques argues later in his work,

when the Chinese use the term ‘China’ they are not usually referring to the country or nation so much as Chinese civilization – its history, the dynasties, Confucius, the ways of thinking, their

²⁵⁰ Durant and Durant, *Our Oriental Heritage*, chapter XXIII. See also Allen Chun, “Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity,” *boundary 2* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 111-38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/303809> (last accessed 2 May 2020).

²⁵¹ Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), chapter 8.

²⁵² See Gernet, *Chinese Civilization*, for a complete narration.

²⁵³ Harrell, “Civilizing Projects,” 7.

²⁵⁴ John Fitzgerald, “The Nationless State: The Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism,” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, no. 33 (January 1995): 76. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2950089> (last accessed 15 June 2020).

²⁵⁵ Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, A New Kind of World. Another discussion on the topic can be found in Guang Xia, “China as a ‘Civilization-State’: A Historical and Comparative Interpretation,” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 140, (2014): 43-7.

relationships and customs [...]. The Chinese regard themselves not primarily in terms of a nation-state – as Europeans do, for example – but rather as a civilization-state, where the latter is akin to a geological formation in which the nation-state represents no more than the topsoil.²⁵⁶

The author finds as an explanation for the Chinese perception of the motherland the fact that, when it comes to the relationship with the country's cultural heritage, "there are no other people in the world who are so connected to their past and for whom the past – not so much the recent past but the long-ago past – is so relevant and meaningful."²⁵⁷

It follows that, when 'the foreigners' arrived in China with the intent of creating a colony, thus labeling China as a non-civilized nation, it was a shock for the Chinese to find themselves forced to confront a mindset that was so radically different from theirs.²⁵⁸ In fact, when the idea of 'civilization' as perceived by Westerners made its appearance in China, as previously illustrated, the debate on the development of this concept had already been carried on in Western countries for some years. Driven by the curiosity for the West, and by the desire of confronting the invaders to restore the national pride, the Chinese took part in the discourse on civilization.

From the XX century on, the Chinese discussion on civilization paid less attention to the situations in which the country had undertaken the role of civilizer towards other nations, focusing instead on the relationship China had with the 'Western civilizers,' and on what could have been the country's most advantageous approach in planning its future measures and goals. The reason for this is that China began its debate on civilization while it was on the disadvantaged side of its asymmetrical relationship with the West, hence the national debate had the aim of finding the best way to win the confrontation with the new reality China had to face, rather than of justifying its colonization goals.

As mentioned before, the word *wenming* had already made its appearance in some ancient Chinese books, but the meaning the term ought to convey was different from the one it stands for from the XIX century onward. Along with *wenming*, these works also mentioned the word *wenhua* 文化, whose meaning nowadays is "culture." Their meaning and employment have been largely discussed and debated through the years, but in the early stages of Chinese literature they were used to refer to the "governance through literacy education and moral cultivation relative to *wuhua* (militarization)."²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, A Civilization-State.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.* A well-inquired analysis on the formation of Chinese national identity between the influences of Chinese and Western element can be found in Shu Chunyan, "Pride and Loathing in History. The National Character Discourse and the Chinese Search for a Cultural Identity" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2013).

²⁵⁸ For a discussion on China's approach to the West, see Ssu-yü Teng and John King Fairbank, *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

²⁵⁹ Huang, "'Civilization' and 'Culture,'" 2.

The term *bunmei* (Japanese for the word *wenming*) was coined in 1867 by Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), a Japanese scholar who in one of his works argues:

What, then, does civilization mean? I say that it refers to the attainment of both material well-being and the elevation of the human spirit. It means both abundance of daily necessities and esteem for human refinement. Is it civilization if only the former is fulfilled? The goal of life does not lie in food and clothes alone. If that were man's goal, he would be no different from an ant or a bee. This cannot be what Heaven has intended for man. [...] [T]here must be both material and spiritual aspects before one can call it civilization.²⁶⁰

By stating this, Fukuzawa seems to anticipate what would have become one of the main topics in Chinese political debate in the following years: the dualism of material and spiritual civilization. Indeed, the dichotomic nature of this concept was already being discussed in China in the late-Qing period: because of the traditional notion of *wenming*, which put more emphasis on moral ethics and its related knowledge, the “contents regarding finance, economics, and military development were generally met with extreme contempt and considered not parts of *wenming* or *wenhua*.”²⁶¹

As observed, the terms *wenming* and *wenhua* had already appeared in the Chinese language, but their traditional meaning differed from the modern one: on the one hand they could perfectly contrast those concepts such as ‘barbarity’ and ‘ignorance,’ but on the other hand they did not include a sense of accumulation of both material and spiritual accomplishments through the time, merely referring to an ‘absolute civilization.’ This idea draws its reason to be from the Chinese perception of history, which was not seen as a progressive but as a circular process: after realizing the ‘final stage’ of the civilization progress, history would change into a cyclic variation, with “present-worse-than-the-past”²⁶² periods of time. Gnoseological fractures like this led to what became one of the main reasons of conflict between the supporters of old ideology and of the new ideology.²⁶³

Belonging to the group of the supporters of new ideologies, at the beginning of the XX century²⁶⁴ the Chinese revolutionaries strongly advocated the introduction of the concept of *wenming*, as for them the revolution itself was an “act of pursuing civilization, a necessary means to move away from barbarity toward civilization.”²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ Fukuzawa Yukichi, *An Outline of the Theory of Civilization*, quoted in *Civilizing China: China Story Yearbook 2013*, eds. Geremie R. Barmé and Jeremy Goldkorn (Canberra: Australia National University, 2013), xvi-ii.

²⁶¹ Huang, “‘Civilization’ and ‘Culture,’” 3.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ A first sign of the internal rupture which characterized the Chinese socio-political scenario during the XX century can be found in the Self-strengthening Movement (1861-1895), which essentially advocated the need for China to defend itself from the impending outer forces. See Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 261-2, 282-91.

²⁶⁴ The term here refers to those whose aim was to overthrow Chinese monarchy in favor of a modern form of governance, such as a constitutional monarchy or a republic.

²⁶⁵ Huang, “‘Civilization’ and ‘Culture,’” 14.

It was in the late Qing period that the term *wenming* assumed its modern denotation and the employment of the word started to surpass the one of *wenhua* since, as Huang observes, *wenming* could be used both as an adjective and as a noun. The term *wenming* then “could be used to describe a broad-sensed ‘culture’ and also to present the higher level of development of such a broad-sensed ‘culture,’ as well as the value-laden pursuit of such ‘culture,’”²⁶⁶ in a usage of the term which denotes the same meanings it has in present times.

The influence of Chinese traditional thought has led the scholars to develop as the notion of ‘civilization’ a concept that encompassed both a material and an immaterial (or moral) facet.

The first Chinese modern scholar to mention “spiritual civilization” (*jingshen wenming* 精神文明) was Liang Qichao, who discusses a similar distinction between what were perceived to be the two major aspects of civilization as follows:

Civilization includes a material aspect and a spiritual aspect. Material civilization is easy to achieve, but spiritual civilization is difficult. Once spiritual civilization is attained, the material will follow. If the spiritual does not exist, the material has nowhere to attach itself. Therefore, the true civilization is spiritual civilization only.²⁶⁷

The influence of Chinese traditional ideology is quite noticeable in Liang’s perception of spiritual civilization as the most important and most difficult to attain; concurrently, in his surveys the influence of Fukuzawa can be noticed as well.²⁶⁸ In “On the New Citizen” (*Xinmin shuo* 新民说), a translation and commentary of Mill’s thought, Liang argues that civilization is characterized by four main features. Firstly, the importance of martial power, which is fundamental for the country to strengthen its role on an international level. Secondly, the cardinal role of the obedience to the law, which is reckoned as the fundamental rule. As a matter of fact, Liang thinks the reason why civilized people are considered honorable rather than barbarians is that civilized people self-discipline themselves abiding by the law, while barbarians do not. Thirdly, he stresses the importance for the individuals to co-operate, in order to build a civilized and productive country. Finally, Liang argues that one of the most important characteristics of civilization lies in its enterprising and adventurous spirit, which motivates the process to keep evolving.²⁶⁹

Other prominent Chinese scholars of the time engaged themselves in the debate on the nature of civilization, a debate that had been influenced by the multitude of cultural movements that took

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁶⁷ Liang Qichao, “The Spirit of Civilisation,” mentioned in Lin Qinghong, *Civilising Citizens in Post-Mao China: Understanding the Rhetoric of Suzhi*, (PhD diss., Queensland: Griffith University, 2009), 109.

²⁶⁸ A thorough analysis on Fukuzawa’s influence on Liang’s thought can be found in Quan, “Liang Qichao dui ‘wenming’ gainian,” 73-7.

²⁶⁹ Quan, “Liang Qichao dui ‘wenming’ gainian,” 72-3.

place in China at the beginning of the XX century, such as the New Culture Movement and the May 4th Movement. Among the scholars who endorsed Liang's theories, Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) considers Chinese traditional culture to have the distinctive features of what he calls an 'ancient civilization.' He regards Western modern civilizations as a progressing phenomenon supported by ideals such as 'science' and 'human rights,' and according to him these were also the goals of the Chinese reforms aimed at changing traditional Chinese culture.²⁷⁰

While many supported the dichotomy of civilization, others, like Hu Shi (1891 – 1962), contested it arguing that the civilization process could not be split into two different phenomena. In his survey Hu presents what he considers the bases for a discussion on the topic, namely: civilization is the summary of a country's achievements in dealing with its environment, 'culture' is a civilization's lifestyle, and any civilization is the product of the human mind and of the application of its intelligence to the management of the circumstances it confronts.²⁷¹ Starting from these assumptions and considering all kinds of civilization as a product of humankind, he rejects the idea of a binary concept of civilization, arguing that it is to be considered as an organic interaction between its (alleged) two components.

Considering the later development and employment of the term 'civilization,' it is evident how the outcome of the debate has been favorable for Liang's side, as the government started employing the same distinction the scholars supporting civilization dichotomy advocated.

Chiang Kai-shek's New Life Movement (*xin shenghuo yundong* 新生活运动), launched in 1934 to counterpart the Communist consensus among the people, promoted values that seemed to be drawn on the modern concept of civilization. The movement "consisted essentially of campaigns to mobilize the population to improve public and private hygienic and behavioral standards;"²⁷² at the same time however, it aimed at reintroducing the importance of the four Confucian virtues (propriety or decorum *li* 礼, uprightness or righteousness *yi* 义, integrity or honesty *lian* 廉, the sense of shame *chi* 耻).²⁷³ Even though some scholars believe the movement "did provide something of a psychological uplift and the feeling of doing something in the face of Japanese aggression,"²⁷⁴ others argue that being the movement merely an "effort to infuse into [Chiang Kai-shek] regime the old-

²⁷⁰ Huang, "'Civilization' and 'Culture,'" 17.

²⁷¹ Hu Shi 胡适, "Women duiyu xiyang jindai wenming de taidu" 我们对于西洋近代文明的态度 (Our Attitude Towards Modern Western Civilization), in *Hu Shi wenji* (Collected Works of Hu Shi), ed. Ouyang Zhesheng 欧阳哲生 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998), vol. 4: 3.

²⁷² Arif Dirlik, "The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 34, no. 4 (August 1975), 945-6. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/2054509>.

²⁷³ Barmé and Goldkorn, *Civilizing China*, xiv.

²⁷⁴ Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 509.

time morality of Confucianism and marry it to modern fascism,”²⁷⁵ it did not gain the consensus of many supporters, and thus miserably failed.²⁷⁶

Despite being involved in a ruinous movement, the concept of *wenming* started being employed again after the affirmation of Deng Xiaoping as PRC leader in 1978. In the previous years, China had undergone a series of events, from the insurgence of the Communists with Mao to the Cultural Revolution; hence the definition of what ‘civilization’ was had to be re-discussed and re-evaluated in a socialist perspective. In an article written in 1979 Niu Hong states that

The *wenming* we are talking about is the *wenming* for the proletariat. It is the socialist *wenming*. [...] Features of the new socialist civilization include love for public property, respect for the group, for labor and for science and love for the socialist country and for the Communist Party who led us to the socialist road. [...] We must teach youngsters and children the new tendency of socialist civilization and must create a common public opinion in the society so that everyone regards barbarism as shameful and regards civilization as honorable.²⁷⁷

This idea of civilization was accepted by the governance and influenced the political rhetorical discourse in the following years.

The first time the term ‘socialist spiritual civilization’ was employed under the Communist guidance, it appeared in a speech held at the 6th Plenum of the 11th CCP Central Committee in 1979 by Ye Jianying, Chairman of the National People's Congress at the time. In the speech, Ye stated:

Simultaneous with our effort to build a high level of material civilization, we must raise the educational, scientific, and cultural levels as well as the health level of the whole nation, foster the lofty ideal of revolution, cultivate revolutionary ethics and customs, and develop a noble and colorful cultural life in an effort to build a high level of spiritual civilization.²⁷⁸

As Lin observes in her survey, “although Ye’s mention of socialist spiritual civilization did not attract much attention from the public and it was not the focal point of his speech, it was an important prelude to more specific state resolutions on spiritual civilization (*jingshen wenming*).”²⁷⁹

To develop and launch the idea of socialist spiritual civilization, the government stressed how the Cultural Revolution had undermined the Chinese morality and set of values, underlining how the attainment of *wenming* would have been the key to build a modern country; then it proceeded

²⁷⁵ R. Keith Schoppa, *Twentieth Century China. A History in Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 78.

²⁷⁶ As Dirlik observes, “The greatest responsibility for failure rested with its own implicit contradictions: it was a mass political movement that rejected popular political initiative and organized the people's conduct down to its minutest aspects; it aimed to politicize the people, but denied them any political roles whatsoever; it encouraged individual initiative, but reduced individuals to mechanical units; and finally, it was a social revolution that aimed at suppressing newly emerging social forces” (Dirlik, *The New Life Movement*, 975-6). For a further discussion on the topic, Dirlik’s survey provides a well-inquired analysis on the Movement’s development.

²⁷⁷ Niu Hong, “Yeman yu *Wenming*” 野蛮与文明 (Barbarism and Civilization), *People’s Daily*, 5 June 1979, 8, quoted in Lin, *Civilising Citizens*, 112.

²⁷⁸ Qi Zhenhai, “Propagate and Build a Spiritual Civilization,” *Chinese Education* 16, no. 1 (1983): 115. <https://doi.org/10.2753/CED1061-19321601115>.

²⁷⁹ Lin, *Civilising Citizens*, 120.

illustrating the split between socialist material civilization (*shehui zhuyi wuzhi wenming* 社会主义物质文明) and socialist spiritual civilization (*shehui zhuyi jingshen wenming* 社会主义精神文明), thus introducing the latter. Once settled these bases, it focused on the important role of socialist spiritual civilization in China's modernization reforms. Since the debate on the diachrony of 'civilization' had already been carried out at the end of XIX century and the beginning of XX century, the post-Mao discussion on the topic did not require an extended introduction.

The first official political document to mention socialist spiritual civilization is 1981's "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of the Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China," in which socialist spiritual civilization is enlisted as one of the ten objectives of the government to achieve Chinese modernization. In the document is indeed stated that "the Party's goal in the new historical moment is to gradually make of China a strong socialist country with modern agriculture, modern industry, modern national defense and modern science and technology, and a high degree of democracy and civilization."²⁸⁰

Since 1981's first appearance of the term in official political documents, the concept of *jingshen wenming* has been steadily integrated in the country's political speech, it has been mentioned countless times in different laws and regulations through the years, and it has also been included in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, in art. 24.²⁸¹ In her survey Lin provides the following table, which illustrates the most important political measures concerning *wenming* elaborated in the years from 1981 to 2002.

Year	Milestone resolutions and official documents published on <i>wenming</i> ²⁸²
25 Feb. 1981	Nine organizations including All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China, All-China Women's Federation issued A Proposal on Launching A Campaign of Civilities and Good Manners. They proposed that people of the whole nation, particularly, young people, start a campaign of civilities and good manners that is based on "five stresses and four goods" (<i>wujiang simei</i> 五讲四美): stressing civilities, good manners, hygiene, orderly conduct and morality and beautifying soul, language use, behaviors and the environment.
June 1981	The 6 th Plenum of the 11 th CCP Central Committee adopted the <i>Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of</i>

²⁸⁰ "Jianguo yilai dang de ruogan lishi wenti de jueyi" 建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议 (Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of the Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China), 27 June 1981, available at <https://www.pkulaw.com/chl/f2f287c68fa259c2bdfb.html> (last accessed 20 June 2020). See also Michael Keane, "Redefining Chinese citizenship," *Economy and Society* 30, no. 1 (February 2001): 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140020019061>.

²⁸¹ "The state advocates socialist core values and promotes civic virtues such as patriotism, love for the people, enjoyment of labor, respect for science, and devotion to socialism. The people are educated in patriotism, collectivism, internationalism, communism, dialectical and historical materialism, and are educated to oppose capitalism, feudalism, and other decadent ideas." From the Constitution Law of People's Republic of China, art. 24, 2018 Amendment. English translation available at http://www.fdi.gov.cn/1800000121_39_4866_0_7.html (last accessed 20 June 2020). Chinese original available at <https://www.pkulaw.com/chl/7c7e81f43957c58bbdfb.html> (last accessed 20 June 2020).

²⁸² Lin, *Civilising Citizens*, 117-8.

	<i>China</i> , in which the building of socialist spiritual civilization was listed as one of the ten major goals of building socialist modernization. It also, for the first time, stated that the goal of the Party was to build China into a ‘powerful, modernized, highly democratic and highly civilized socialist country.’
14 Feb. 1982	Office of the CCP Central Committee issued for the then Propaganda Ministry <i>Report on Deepening the Campaign of “Five Emphases and Four Beautifications”</i> and made March every year the “Month of Civilities and Good Manners.”
April 1982	At the Politburo meeting to discuss <i>Decision of the CCP Central Committee and the State Council on Cracking Down on Serious Crime in the Economic Sphere</i> , Deng Xiaoping made a speech entitled “Resolutely Attacking Economic Crime,” in which for the first time the building of socialist spiritual civilization was made one of “four necessary guarantees” of upholding the socialist road.
July 1982	At the State Central Military Commission meeting, Deng Xiaoping made a speech and clarified that the main task of building socialist spiritual civilization is to make people all over the nation become people with lofty ideals, moral integrity, education and discipline (<i>siyou</i> 四有).
Sept. 1982	In the <i>Report to the 12th National Party Congress</i> , President Hu Yaobang discussed socialist spiritual civilization in detail. He pointed out that socialist spiritual civilization was an important distinguishing feature of socialism and an important representation of the superiority of socialism. He said that constructing advanced socialist spiritual civilization while building material civilization was a strategic principle of the Party and the future of socialism relied on whether or not the Party can uphold this principle. He defined building socialist spiritual civilization to include two components: developing ideology and developing culture. He emphasized that developing ideology by the CCP was the pivot of building socialist spiritual civilization.
4 Dec. 1982	The 5 th Session of the 5 th National People’s Congress made the second Amendment to the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, which includes building socialist spiritual civilization for the first time.
26 Sept. 1986	The 6 th Plenum of the 12 th CCP Central Committee adopted the “Resolution of the CCP Central Committee on the Guiding Principles for Building Socialist Spiritual Civilization,” in which the strategic status, main tasks and basic guiding principles for building socialist spiritual civilization were further clarified. It states that socialist spiritual civilization guided by Marxism is an important distinguishing feature of a socialist society and an integrated part of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Building socialist spiritual civilization is a requirement for resolving main contradictions of the socialist society and realizing socialism. The basic task of building socialist spiritual civilization is to adapt to the needs of building socialist modernization to cultivate socialist citizens with lofty ideals, moral integrity, education and discipline and to raise the ideological, moral, scientific and cultural <i>suzhi</i> ²⁸³ of the whole Chinese nation. In this Plenum Deng Xiaoping made an important speech on anti-capitalist liberalism.
Jan. 1996	The CCP Central Committee decided that building socialist spiritual civilization, in particular, construction of ideology, morality and culture be the focus of the 6 th Plenum of the 14 th National Party Congress Central Committee.
Oct. 1996	The 6 th Plenum of the 14 th CCP Central Committee adopted the “Resolution of the CCP Central Committee on Some Important Questions on Strengthening the Building of

²⁸³ Along with *wenming*, *suzhi* 素质 is one of the key words in Chinese political and public discourse. While its widely accepted English translation is ‘quality,’ the term’s intrinsic meaning encompasses both a material and a spiritual dimension, and its usage has changed and developed in the years. While referring to an innate ‘quality’ of human nature, the term does not imply that this characteristic cannot be improved or attained by the individual through practices of self-betterment. A complete analysis on the evolution and employment of *suzhi* can be found in Lin, *Civilising Citizens*.

	Socialist Spiritual Civilization,” which specified the guiding ideology of socialist spiritual civilization as follows: guided by Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, upholding the basic line and basic principles of the CCP, strengthening construction of ideology and morality, developing education, science and culture, arming people with scientific theories, encouraging people with excellent works, cultivating socialist citizens with lofty ideals, moral integrity, education and discipline, raising the ideological, moral, scientific and cultural <i>suzhi</i> of the whole Chinese nation, uniting and motivating people of all ethnic groups to build the nation into a prosperous, democratic, civilized and modernized socialist country.
Nov. 2002	In the Report to the 16th National Party Congress, developing socialist democratic politics and building political civilization (<i>zhengzhi wenming</i> 政治文明) were listed as a main goal for building a “moderately prosperous society” (<i>xiaokang shehui</i> 小康社会) in an all-round way. Stipulations on building socialist political civilization were added to the new version of Party Constitution (<i>dangzhang</i> 党章) passed during the Congress. It was the first time that plans of socialist political civilization had been clearly written on official documents of a national congress. Building socialist material, spiritual and political civilizations were stated as the three basic goals of achieving socialist modernization.

In 1986, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the “Resolution of the CCP Central Committee on the Guiding Principles for Building Socialist Spiritual Civilization” was issued, stressing the importance of this goal for the government.²⁸⁴ In a speech previously held by the leader in the same year, Deng underlined how at that time “one hand was tough while the other was soft” (*yi shou ying, yi shou ruan* 一手硬, 一手软), implying that material civilization was being emphasized to the detriment of spiritual values. To fix this inequity and draw attention on spiritual civilization, in the document it is stated that

Spiritual civilization construction includes both aspects of ideological and moral construction and education, scientific and cultural construction, permeates into the center of the overall material civilization construction, and is reflected in all aspects of the economy, politics, culture and social life. Strengthening spiritual civilization construction, not only is the task of ideological, cultural and education department, but is also the task of all departments at the battle line, and is a joint, long-term task of the entire Party, the entire Army and the laborers, peasants, intellectuals and other workers and patriots of all ethnicities in the entire country.²⁸⁵

Later in the document, the importance of the Marxist foundation of the spiritual civilization is remarked, since

²⁸⁴ Ding asserts that “the Dengists added ‘socialist spiritual civilization’ to the official agenda in order to keep China’s economics and politics proceeding along two separate tracks without mutual interference.” In Xueliang Ding, *The Decline of Communism in China: Legitimacy Crisis, 1977-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 135.

²⁸⁵ Rogier Creemers, trans., “Central Committee Resolution Concerning Guiding Policies for the Construction of a Socialist Spiritual Civilization,” *China Copyright and Media*, 6 May 2012. <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/1986/09/28/central-committee-resolution-concerning-guiding-policies-for-the-construction-of-a-socialist-spiritual-civilization/> (last accessed 21 June 2020). Chinese original available at <https://www.pkulaw.com/chl/6a634316efa60e69bdfb.html> (last accessed 21 June 2020).

the Marxism that is a scientific worldview for the working classes and a great achievements of all humankind's spiritual civilization, is a theoretical basis for the Socialist cause and the Party leadership, is the most important component part of Socialist ideology, and has a major guiding function in the overall spiritual civilization construction.²⁸⁶

However, the Resolution did not mention effective measures to put into practice in order to attain socialist spiritual civilization.

On the contrary, the 1996's "Resolution of the CCP Central Committee on Some Important Questions on Strengthening the Building of Socialist Spiritual Civilization," issued under the Jiang Zemin leadership, clearly stated that

In the next 15 years, the main objectives for our country's Socialist spiritual civilization construction are: firmly establishing a common ideal of constructing Socialism with Chinese characteristics in the entire nation, firmly establishing a firm and unwavering belief in the basic Party line; realizing a clear rise of citizens' quality with ideological and moral cultivation, scientific and educational levels and democratic and legal system concepts as the main content, realizing a clear rise in cultural life quality with vigor and health, richness and variety, and serving the people as main requirements, realizing a clear rise town and country civilization levels with social atmospheres, public order and life environment as main symbols; shaping a desirable picture of coordinated development of material civilization construction and spiritual civilization construction nationwide.²⁸⁷

The 1996's Resolution also underlined the importance of activities and campaigns aimed at sensitizing the population on the significance of the spiritual civilization process. As reported,

Mass-type spiritual civilization construction activities launched broadly by all localities nationwide, are great creations for the people to transform traditions and trends, and reform society, and benefit the organic integration of constructing both civilizations and implementing them to the grass roots. We must deeply and lastingly launch civilized households, civilized work units, joint army and civil construction efforts, joint police and civil construction efforts and other spiritual civilization construction activities, launching mass-type culture, hygiene, sports and scientific dissemination activities, proposing civilized and healthy ways of life, constructing community culture, town culture, enterprise culture and campus culture. Persisting in launching activities to support soldiers and their dependents, support the government and cherish the people and activities for ethnic unity and progress, strengthening the unity of army and politics, army and the people and the unity of the ethnicities.²⁸⁸

Once defined the practical and ideological guidelines of what socialist spiritual civilization should have accomplished and how, the government had to face the problem that these directives might be perceived as too strict, and that it might seem they did not promote the individual's freedom of

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Rogier Creemers, trans., "Central Committee Resolution concerning Some Important Questions in Strengthening Socialist Spiritual Civilization Construction," *China Copyright and Media*, 23 May 2012. <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/1996/10/10/central-committee-resolution-concerning-some-important-questions-in-strengthening-socialist-spiritual-civilization-construction/> (last accessed 21 June 2020). Chinese original available at <https://www.pkulaw.com/chl/0539b0f2ca50b24fbdfb.html> (last accessed 21 June 2020).

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

thought.²⁸⁹ It can hence be noticed that, to avoid this kind of criticism, the socialist spiritual civilization theory had been formulated as a synthesis of both ideological and non-ideological components. As observed by Feng, while the ideological components refer to the political doctrines officially endorsed by the government, the “non-ideological components are apolitical (if politics is defined narrowly), non-partisan, somewhat spatially universal (e.g., many parts of public morality and professional ethics), or they transcend history (e.g., Confucianism).”²⁹⁰ Analyzing China’s situation, in his work Feng also points out that “ideology has apparently failed to produce a collective conscience that could provide a normative basis for moral precepts and social behaviors. Non-ideological components are thus brought in to substitute for values that ideology can no longer provide,”²⁹¹ underlining how the government started emphasizing the moral validity of the behaviors it advocated, instead of their mere ideological foundation.

As explained in the table, in 2002 the concept of political civilization was officially introduced under the leadership of president Jiang Zemin.²⁹² Since its introduction, however, *zhengzhi wenming* had not been discussed as widely and thoroughly as spiritual civilization, as Lin points out in her analysis of the recurrence of the word. In her survey Lin shows and analyzes the data on the usage of the term’s *wenming* in political and academic discourse, observing that its employment experienced several increments in the years, which were followed by periods of lower interest on the topic.²⁹³ As the author underlines, the “discussions of these terms only increased in frequency when the state advocated so by issuing important resolutions.”²⁹⁴

In 2002 Hu Jintao succeeded to Jiang Zemin, and in 2004 the leader started advocating the “harmonious society” (*Hexie shehui* 和谐社会), a concept which became the main feature of Hu’s governance. According to what the leader stated, the harmonious society was needed “to balance the interests between different social groups, to avoid conflicts and to make sure people live a safe and happy life in a politically stable country,”²⁹⁵ and that it would have featured “democracy, the rule of

²⁸⁹ Qin Xiaojian 秦小建, “Jingshen wenming de xianfa xushi: guifan neihan yu xianzhi jiegou” 精神文明的宪法叙事: 规范内涵与宪制结构 (Constitutional Narration of Spiritual Civilization: Normative Connotation and Constitutional Structure), *Zhongguo Faxue* 4, (2018): 25-7.

²⁹⁰ Chen Feng, “Rebuilding the Party’s Normative Authority: China’s Socialist Spiritual Civilization Campaign,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 45, no. 6 (1998): 34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.1998.11655812>.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² “At the CCP’s Sixteenth National Congress in November 2002, however, the twenty-four-year evolution of the two-civilization duality took an altogether unexpected turn with Jiang Zemin’s introduction of a third civilization – ‘political civilization.’ Unlike its two predecessors, this third civilization was squarely focused, not on the people or their productive capacity, but on the CCP itself: on reform of the CCP and the political system that supported it.” In Nicholas Dynon, “‘Four Civilizations’ and the Evolution of Post-Mao Chinese Socialist Ideology,” *The China Journal*, no. 60 (July 2008): 85. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20647989>.

²⁹³ Lin, *Civilising Citizens*, 121-4.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁹⁵ “Building Harmonious Society CPC’s Top Task,” *Xinhua*, 20 February 2005. https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-02/20/content_417718.htm (last accessed 23 June 2020).

law, equity, justice, sincerity, amity and vitality.”²⁹⁶ According to some scholars “the new-found stress on harmony had grown out of a ‘neo-Confucianist’ strain of thinking within the Hu-Wen leadership.”²⁹⁷ The choice of employing the term ‘harmonious’ in politics echoed concepts and ideas whose formulation date far back in Chinese thought history. As Chen remarks

the value preferences of Chinese civilization are interconnected with its cosmological views. The philosophy and cosmology of ancient Chinese civilization emphasized ideas of continuity, dynamism, connection, relation, and totality. They did not advocate a self-centered philosophy prioritizing the static, independence, reality, and subject-object distinction. Beginning from this organic holism, all of the cosmos is interconnected and existentially interdependent. Everything manifests its existence and value within connection with others. Therefore, relationships of symbiosis and harmony ought to be established between people, between cultures, and between humans and nature.²⁹⁸

The use of terms linked to Chinese traditional thought has been a widely employed practice since the end of the Cultural Revolution, when it was restored from the criticism it had received during that decade.²⁹⁹ It is a means that has the aim of conveying the idea of a continuous and organic Chinese civilization, as well as having the goal of demonstrating the ongoing validity of traditional thought.³⁰⁰

Along with the harmonious society, Hu contextually introduced the ‘fourth civilization:’ the society civilization (*shehui wenming* 社会文明).³⁰¹ As Dynon observes,

while the harmonizing function of the original civilization construct had responded to a largely theoretical disjuncture, the harmonizing function of a ‘social civilization’ appears to constitute a rhetorical response to existent conflict, competition and anomie within a society transformed by a generation of state-led reform.³⁰²

The employment of the term ‘civilization’ in relation to the harmonious society concept “appears to reinforce the idea of harmonious society, or social civilization, as constituting a concept of greater sweep (and possibly greater importance) than the pre-existing ‘civilizations.’”³⁰³ The social civilization attributes included “transferring and utilizing the populace’s ideational capabilities, coordinating beneficial relations between people and managing interpersonal contradictions,

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Willy Wo-lap Lam, “Socialism with a Harmonious Face: Hu Jintao’s Plan for Reform,” *China Brief* 4, no. 20 (14 October 2004). <https://jamestown.org/program/socialism-with-a-harmonious-face-hu-jintaos-plan-for-reform/>.

²⁹⁸ Chen, *The Core Values of Chinese Civilization*, 35-6.

²⁹⁹ Maurizio Scarpari, *Ritorno a Confucio. La Cina di Oggi fra Tradizione e Mercato* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015), 102.

³⁰⁰ Chen underlines that “the value preferences of Chinese civilization are also connected with the historical path of Chinese civilization,” and that “this is the historical basis on which Chinese civilization became a ‘civilization of continuity.’” In Chen, *The Core Values of Chinese Civilization*, 36.

³⁰¹ Dynon, “Four Civilizations,” 104.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 106.

maintaining social stability, and adhering to the mass line and engaging in public relations.”³⁰⁴ These attributes fall in a similar domain as the one covered by the harmonious society concept.

In the same years, before the launch of *shehui wenming*, another concept made its appearance in the academic and political discourse: the ecological civilization (*shengtai wenming* 生态文明). The development of a discussion on this kind of civilization was the result and the official recognition of China’s awareness on the multiple ecological issues the country was facing.³⁰⁵ Eventually, *shengtai wenming* did not become the fourth civilization under Hu’s presidency, but it later became one of the focuses of Xi Jinping’s governance.³⁰⁶

It was under Hu’s presidency that the country started stressing the importance of spreading the norms of civilization through the different social levels. In 2003 the Spiritual Civilization Commission issued a set of standards and selection procedures at all levels of government administration, and in 2005 the campaign “National Civilized City” (*quanguo wenming chengshi* 全国文明城市) was officially launched in the country.³⁰⁷ At present the campaign is still being carried on by the government, who invests a lot of effort in it and keeps evaluating the cities that apply for the title.³⁰⁸

Chinese cities are divided into sub-categories according to their administrative rank,³⁰⁹ and are compared to other cities belonging to the same sub-category and then judged. This campaign differs from others launched by the governance because “unlike schemes targeting one particular goal, the National Civilized City model involves a set of goals, criteria and indices of measurement designed to regularize urban governance and promote its standards nationwide,”³¹⁰ thus working towards more than one goal at a time. The cities need to apply for the campaign and wait for the judges to complete their evaluation. The members of the evaluation team are sent to cities where they have no personal or business involvement (sometimes without even knowing their destination until

³⁰⁴ Li Fuquan, “Goujian shehuizhuyi hexie shehui jiushi jianshe shehui wenming ” 构建社会主义和谐社会就是建设社会文明 (Building Socialist Harmonious Society is the Building of Social Civilization), quoted in Dynon, “Four Civilizations,” 105.

³⁰⁵ Yu Keping, *Democracy is A Good Thing. Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 140-6.

³⁰⁶ See Maurizio Marinelli, “How to Build a ‘Beautiful China’ in the Anthropocene. The Political Discourse and the Intellectual Debate on Ecological Civilization,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23, (2018): 365–86. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-9538-7>.

³⁰⁷ Carolyn Cartier, “Building Civilized Cities,” in *Civilizing China*, eds. Barmé and Goldkorn, 270.

³⁰⁸ The evaluation has been effectuated in 2005, 2009, 2011, 2015 and 2017, and the results are available at <http://www.wenming.cn/wmcs/> (last accessed 23 June 2020).

³⁰⁹ The categorization goes “from provincial-level city (*zhixia shi* 直辖市) to prefecture-level city (*diji shi* 地级市) and county-level city (*xianjishi* 县级市).” In Barmé and Goldkorn, *Civilizing Cities*, 278.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 265.

the moment they leave), and proceed with their undercover work.³¹¹ In order to pass the evaluation and obtain the ‘civilized city’ honorary title, there are many parameters that a city must abide by, for instance the protection of the rights of minors and senior citizens (*weichengnianren, laonianren quanyibaohu* 未成年人, 老年人权益保护), public safety and security (*gonggong anquan baozhang* 公共安全保障), urban and rural social assistance system (*chengxiang shehui jiuzhu tixi* 城乡社会救助体系), and energy conservation and emissions reduction (*jienerg jianpai* 节能减排).³¹²

As mentioned above, the *shengtai wenming* had been taken into consideration before the official launch of social civilization under Hu’s presidency, but the concept was not formally employed in political speech until president Xi became the country’s new leader in 2012.

Xi’s leadership focuses on the Chinese Dream and on the importance of achieving an ecological civilization since its beginning. The new presidency officially introduced the Chinese Dream in 2013, and, like the harmonious society, the idea was not a new concept for the country; as Lavagnino remarks, “the ‘dream’ is still the ancient one: a dream of a country that is ‘rich and strong’, a dream which has now become part of everyday life.”³¹³ As Zhou points out in his survey the concept of the Dream encompasses more than just one aspect of the Chinese social, economic, and political environment; the Dream stretches through all of these domains and, most importantly, has been rooted into the ‘Chinese spirit’ for a long time.³¹⁴ Taking a closer look at the implications of the label and considering the sub-categories that constitute it, it proves how the bigger picture, the Chinese Dream, is composed of a number of different aspirations, for instance the dream of good living and work, the dream of social security, and the dream of public services.³¹⁵ In his research for the roots of the Chinese Dream concept Zhou observes that it is the “rehabilitation of the Chinese civilization with an enlightened idea, method, and image.”³¹⁶ The reason why it is a rehabilitation (or better, a *rejuvenation*) is that, since the XX century, China has fought against outer forces to establish and defend its position in the international scene, thus nurturing a national spirit of self-pride and self-improvement. This spirit, Zhou believes, “is rooted in several hundred million people’s dream of

³¹¹ Li Bin 李斌, “Zhongyang *wenmingwei* gongshi quanguo shou pi wenming chengshi mingdan” 中央文明委公示全国首批文明城市名单 (List of the first array of ‘civilized cities’ issued by the Central Commission of Civilization), *Sina Web*, 11 September 2005. <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2005-09-11/16586916345s.shtml> (last accessed 23 June 2020).

³¹² For the complete list of party-designated standards see Cartier, “Building Civilized Cities,” 268-9.

³¹³ Lavagnino, “Chinese Political Discourse Today,” 284.

³¹⁴ See Stefan Landsberger, “Dreaming the Chinese Dream. How the People’s Republic of China Moved from Revolutionary Goals to Global Ambitions,” *International Journal for History, Culture, and Modernity* 2, no. 3 (2014). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1557/HCM2014.3.LAND>.

³¹⁵ Zhou Tianyong, *The China Dream and the China Path* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 2013), 1-28.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.

independence, state's foundation, economic prosperity, and greater power.”³¹⁷ The idea that the Chinese Dream is a concept deeply rooted in the national spirit gains reliability if the main assumption of the Dream is considered: the Chinese Dream is collective-oriented.³¹⁸ In socialist China the individual's well-being comes second after the society's (hence the nation's) welfare, and this is why the ideological campaign is presented as a national dream and not as an individual's dream.

The employment of the term 'rejuvenation' (*fuxing* 复兴) in the political speech implies that China does not have to achieve something it never possessed before, but that the country has to re-appropriate the vigor it used to have.³¹⁹ The idea that the country needs to go back to its past splendors, and that the Dream is not tailored on a single individual's existence but it refers to the society as a whole, in a holistic perception of the country and its needs, recall the components of Chinese traditional thought already mentioned in this chapter: the circular perception of time, and the organic relationship between the individual and its group.

It can thus be observed how traditional thought still permeates the political scene of the country, and consequently the social one, in a practice which blends traditional elements with modern concepts: a rush to the future which does not forget the roots of the country nor the development of its civilization.

The Chinese Dream is a wide-ranging project that encompasses many different domains, aiming at extending its influence on every social level from central power to each citizen. In 2018 President Xi's term-limit was removed to give the leader more time (and, figuratively, space) to guide the country towards the Dream. In his closing speech at the 13th National People's Congress first session, Xi stressed the achievements the country had accomplished through the years in many fields (such as philosophy, science, music, architecture), underlining that with its innovations China had largely contributed to the development of human civilization. In the same speech the leader remarks the will of the government to build an ecological civilization in order to tackle the country's ecological-related issues, thus underlining how important this theme is to the present governance.³²⁰

As previously stated, the ecological civilization is a key feature of Xi's leadership. The program was announced during the 18th National Congress of CPC in 2012, and it has gained increasing attention since then. By placing its focus on an internationally debated theme as ecological

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

³¹⁸ Scarpari, *Ritorno a Confucio*, 52.

³¹⁹ Beatrice Gallelli, "Metafore di una metafora. La retorica del 'sogno cinese,'" in *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie Orientale* 52, (June 2016): 209. <http://doi.org/10.14277/2385-3042/AnnOr-52-16-9> (last accessed 24 June 2020). See also Zheng Wang, "Not Rising, But Rejuvenating: The 'Chinese Dream,'" *The Diplomat*, 5 February 2013. <https://thediplomat.com/2013/02/chinese-dream-draft/> (last accessed 24 June 2020).

³²⁰ Xi Jinping, "Speech delivered by President Xi at the NPC closing meeting," *China Daily*, 22 March 2018. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hkedition/2018-03/22/content_35894512.htm (last accessed 25 June 2020).

and sustainable development, China remarks it acknowledges the country's environmental issues and it is ready to take the measures required to solve them. As Hu underlines, the decision of focusing on *shengtai wenming* shows that, firstly, "it marks China 'takes the lead' to enter the ecological civilization time in the world;"³²¹ secondly, the stress on ecological civilization "represents that China holds the banner of green development high in the world,"³²² which implies that the country has surpassed the sustainable development phase; and thirdly this stress represents the "historical significance and world significance of the ecological civilization manifesto proposed by the Chinese Communist Party."³²³ In his survey Hu remarks that the government, while currently investing a lot of effort in the *shengtai wenming* program, contextually works to integrate it with the other four civilizations promoted by the previous governances, merging all these different aspects of civilization in the path to accomplish the Chinese Dream.³²⁴

The Chinese Dream ideology has been widely analyzed and discussed by scholars since the concept was officially launched in 2013; in this thesis there will not be an attempt to a complete analysis of the topic, which has been introduced to underline its involvement with public service advertising campaigns.

Since the Chinese Dream concept has been introduced in the political discourse, its presence in the cities daily life has progressively increased, as it has begun being integrated in the Civilized City program both at national and local levels. Since the civilization process is a key feature of the Chinese Dream, the campaigns issued by the government largely employ the term *wenming* in all its different facets, thus closely following the political discourse.

Among the various forms of public service advertising, one of the most widespread and noticeable in Chinese cities are the posters, which are displayed in public places. The employment of this practice seems to recall the Maoist era mass-mobilization campaigns,³²⁵ since, as Cartier notices,

even the style in which a civilizing campaign (*chuangzao wenming chengshi* 创造文明城市, *chuangwen* 创文 for short) is launched — floral displays and colorful potted plants lining the roadsides, red banners flying overhead, streets suddenly swept clear of vendors and buzzing with

³²¹ Angang Hu, *China's Road and China's Dream. An Analysis of the Chinese Political Decision-Making Process Through the National Party Congress* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd., 2018), 146.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ For a well-inquired analysis on the ecological civilization program development and application before and under Xi presidency, see Hu, *China's Road and China's Dream*, 127-68; an English translation of the leader's speeches on the topic can be found in Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China* (Shanghai: Shanghai Book Traders, 2015), chapter VIII.

³²⁵ "A mass mobilization campaign in China is a movement, often conceived at the top of the power structure, which encourages and promotes active participation by the masses in collective action, for the purpose of supporting a particular leader, policy or program." In Wen-hui Tsai, "Mass Mobilization Campaigns in Mao's China," *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 6, no. 1 (April 1999): 23. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44288599>.

red-jacketed volunteers — recalls the aesthetic style of mid-twentieth century communism and mass mobilization campaigns.³²⁶

The author proceeds observing that while on the one hand this system advocates a new and more dynamical relationship between the individual and the State, on the other hand such a promotion of volunteerism seems to recall that “Maoist era tradition of ‘mobilizing the grassroots’ — the masses — to carry out unpaid social and productive work.”³²⁷ The influence of Chinese past in its present use of this practice is also evident in the use of means such as “propaganda slogans in large colorful Chinese characters printed on all kinds of conspicuous billboards and other kinds of signs.”³²⁸ Cartier also argues that “this kind of Mao-era ‘red’ practice might seem out of step with the contemporary urban environment, but it is a central, and highly visible, feature of party-led socialist modernization.”³²⁹

The dualism between China’s will of becoming a modern globalized nation and the will to remember and uplift its past is one of the defining features of the country’s approach to political and social policies. This practice marks the will of the country to balance its traditional features and its need for modernization in a unique formula that will grant China a prosperous development in the international scenario, without letting the globalization process erase the country’s identity.³³⁰

As Johnson notices, there is a difference between the employment of posters during the early Communist era and their employment nowadays. According to the scholar, “the difference is that while the old posters touted Communist values, the new ones largely replace them with pre-Communist Chinese traditions — drawing on traditional folk art like paper cutouts, woodblock prints, and clay figurines to illustrate their message.”³³¹ Johnson proceeds observing that “this is a redefinition of the state’s vision from a Marxist utopia to a Confucian, family-centric nation, defined by a quiet life of respecting the elderly and saving for the future;”³³² a redefinition that closely follows (or is induced by) the evolution of Chinese political discourse and ideology.

The same argument on the political discourse and ideology evolution is supported by Callahan, who states:

Xi’s China Dream is not part of a transition from communism to nationalism as many conclude. Rather it appeals to a combination of traditional China and socialist modernity: especially the

³²⁶ Cartier, “Building Civilized Cities,” 280.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 266.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ See Stefan Landsberger, “Dreaming the Chinese Dream.”

³³¹ Ian Johnson, “Old Dreams for a New China,” *The New York Review of Books*, 15 October 2013. <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2013/10/15/china-dream-posters/> (last accessed 26 June 2020).

³³² *Ibid.*

China model of development and Confucian civilization. The role of political values in official China Dream discourse is manifest in the current propaganda poster campaign that celebrates the China Dream as a combination of traditional Chinese values like filial piety and thrift, and “core socialist values.”³³³

As Callahan underlines, this will to balance traditional and modern elements is detectable in the China Dream propaganda poster campaign.

The concept of civilization has been integrated in the abovementioned process of synthesis between traditional and modern values, resulting in an employment of the term that is linked to both. In his speeches Xi Jinping alternatively employs the three connotations of the term *wenming* (described at the beginning of the sub-chapter), emphasizing the holistic validity of this word and the key role of this concept in his policies.³³⁴

Kaufman observes that the stress drawn upon civilization campaigns nowadays on the one hand underlines the conviction that “China is uniquely positioned to create a new kind of future — not just new for China, but for all humankind;”³³⁵ on the other hand, however, this continuous launching of campaigns that stress the need for Chinese population to become even more civilized than it already is, “suggests that [the government] believes China still falls short in ways that are critical to its ability to step into this role.”³³⁶

From a certain point of view this use of the *wenming* concept has not been introduced with Xi’s governance, since, as Dynon underlines, also under the previous presidencies the concept had a prominent role in Chinese political discourse. As the author observes,

the civilization narrative's changeability, made possible by its inherently broad scope, has made it subservient to the ideological focus of the day, but also reflects its power as a durable discursive framework in which ‘civilization’ has become arguably the most important genetic thread between the distinct political platforms of reform era leaders and between these platforms and pre-existing Maoist ideology. It thus fills the need of a transformative state for a unifying narrative, locating what are otherwise quite distinct sets of ideas as linked milestones along the ideological timeline of post-Mao China, a timeline that has as its stated end-point the attainment of “civilization”. In this sense, civilization may be seen as the keystone of the CCP's progressive ideological adaptation to the historical conditions of the reform era.³³⁷

Dynon also points out that the *wenming* concept had already been employed in the governmental propaganda, and remarks that

³³³ William A. Callahan, “China Dream – 1,” *The Asan Forum*, 8 December 2014. <http://www.theasanforum.org/what-can-the-china-dream-do-in-the-prc/> (last accessed 26 June 2020).

³³⁴ Alison Kaufman, “China’s Discourse of ‘Civilization:’ Visions of Past, Present, and Future,” *The Asan Forum*, 19 February 2018. <http://www.theasanforum.org/chinas-discourse-of-civilization-visions-of-past-present-and-future/#a26> (last accessed 27 June 2020).

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ Dynon, “‘Four Civilizations,’” 108.

Civilization discourse found within party publications and elsewhere in the political sphere manifests itself most commonly and most visibly in the ubiquitous banners, posters and street-level promotional media located in any Chinese city, urging commuters, workers and residents to be or to become ‘civilized.’ Whatever the average commuter makes of the civilization juggernaut, the fact is that it is all over the streetscape, sharing advertising space with the latest products and cultural commodities, and grabbing a level of exposure that would be the envy of any marketeer.³³⁸

It is then clear that the present employment of ‘civilization’ in the political discourse (as well as in the public service advertising domain) is not a new practice in the country, but rather an unsurprising result of the long developmental process this concept went through in Chinese modern and contemporary history.³³⁹

Looking at the consecutive employment of *wenming* and at the evolution of its connotation through the years, in their work Barmé and Goldkorn observe that,

since the 1980s, Chinese officialdom has used the word ‘civilization’/*wenming* in a variety of political contexts, ranging from rhetorical statements about Marxism to campaigns to create ‘civilized cities’ (*wenming chengshi* 文明城市被) in which everything from littering and spitting in public to all forms of anti-social behavior are policed and outlawed.³⁴⁰

The importance of the concept of *wenming* has thus been applied to many different aspects of the PRC’s political and social environment, in order to stress the fundamental role of civilization in the process of building a modern socialist country. Since its first appearance in the Chinese political scene in 1979, *wenming* has been employed by every leader of the country to emphasize the rightfulness of their policies, and lately the concept of civilization has been included in the set of means needed to accomplish the Chinese Dream.

The current connotations of the term *wenming*, while still drawing upon the debates that have been held in the country since the very first re-appearance of the word in the XX century, also suggest that the evolutionary path of this concept is an ongoing process, whose features will always belong both to China’s ancient roots and to its approaching future.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ See Gungwu Wang, *China Reconnects. Joining a Deep-Rooted Past to a New World Order* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd., 2019).

³⁴⁰ Geremie R. Barmé and Jeremy Goldkorn, eds., *Red Rising, Red Eclipse: The China Story Yearbook 2012* (Canberra: Australia National University, 2012), 41.

4 Case Studies: Ningbo and Deyang

4.1 Corpus and Methodology

Drawing on the previously presented overview of the background and the main features of Chinese PSA, the following analysis serves the scope of providing some practical examples of the involvement of the concept of civilization in Chinese *gongyi guanggao*.

The campaigns taken into consideration were launched between the end of 2019 and the early 2020, and the messages they convey are thus embedded in the Xi presidency agenda. Following the discussion held in the third chapter of this work, it can be observed how the concept of *wenming* refers to and is employed in many different aspects of China's developmental path. As Boutonnet states, “*wenming* shapes a way of life, cornering every of its aspect, from political to social appearance, including interpersonal relations, work, family, education and ethics,”³⁴¹ and its involvement in all these domains becomes evident in public service advertising.

The two selected campaigns, which comprehend 10 ads each, can be found in the *wenming* dedicated websites of the two cities that launched them: Ningbo, in Zhejiang province, and Deyang, in Sichuan province. The PSAs taken into analysis are all included in the websites' 'print media' (*pingmian* 平面) advertisements sub-category.³⁴² It is to be noticed that both the campaigns are closely related to the “Spread civilization, cultivate new customs” (*Jiang wenming shu xinfeng* 讲文明树新风) national campaign, a recurrent theme in the country since 2008's Olympics, that nowadays presents close resemblances with Xi's governance guidelines.³⁴³ As Feng points out, the form of advertising related to this national movement, being so closely related to the country's governmental policies, tends to blend propaganda elements and PSA features.³⁴⁴ In fact, these campaigns present a substantial use of slogans (*kouhao* 口号 or *biaoyu* 标语), a means that had been widely used by Maoist propaganda.

In order to improve their status, in recent years many Chinese cities have decided to set up a *Wenming* website that provides information on current campaigns, notifies the improvements of the 'civilization level' reached by the city, and points out the weaknesses that need to be addressed by

³⁴¹ Thomas Boutonnet, “From Local Control to Globalised Citizenship: The Civilising Concept of *Wenming* in Official Chinese Rhetoric,” in *Global Fences: Literatures, Limits, Borders*, eds. Corrado Neri and Florent Villard (Lyon: Université Jean Moulin, 2011), 90.

³⁴² Puppini, “La Pubblicità Sociale in Cina,” 34. It is probable that the two cities' *Wenming* websites include by *pingmian* all the forms of advertising not supported by audio or video. Given the characteristics of the PSAs taken into analysis, it is most likely they belong to the 'outdoor' (*huwai* 户外) sub-category.

³⁴³ Dezheng Feng, “Analyzing Multimodal Chinese Discourse Integrating Social Semiotic and Conceptual Metaphor Theories,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Chinese Discourse Analysis*, ed. Chris Shei (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 66.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

both the government and the citizens. These local level websites look up to the national one, *Wenming*,³⁴⁵ which is daily updated with all the relevant news and the campaigns from all over the country.

As explained in section 2.2, several *wenming* websites are provided with a ‘public service advertising database’ (*zuopinku* 作品库) section, in which individuals and advertising companies can upload the contents they created for a certain campaign. The user does not have access to all the uploaded or submitted contents: the ones that are posted on the *zuopinku* are those that have been selected and approved by the city’s governmental commission.

The databases are organized into categories of campaigns³⁴⁶ and include different kind of contents: there are PSA which develop horizontally or vertically, with a ‘poster’ layout or created for smartphones.

The advertisements displayed on these platforms can also be seen in the billboards or appear in newspapers; however, the websites rarely provide information on when or where these ads will be employed offline. It can thus be inferred that there is a high chance for the PSA that were selected for this analysis to appear in the cities of Deyang and Ningbo, but, whether or not these ads will be employed offline, their validity and coherence with the governmental guidelines is ensured by their publication on the governmental official websites.

The concept of *Wenming* in all its implications has been largely employed in PSA since the introduction of the term in the Chinese political discourse in the 1980s.³⁴⁷ Because of its particular ideological characteristics, its usage always implied a certain political involvement.

The present analysis will be conducted on two levels, namely the discursive level and the semiotic level.³⁴⁸ For the discourse analysis (DA), the approaches applied will be the political discourse analysis (PDA) and the critical discourse analysis (CDA), both considered in relation to the advertising discourse that appears in PSA. The reason why PDA proves to be useful is that SAIC and WMB, at both national and local level, periodically release documents containing the guidelines PSA must abide by, and the slogans that are supposed to be employed. It becomes clear how, to proceed to an analysis of *gongyi guanggao*, a brief preliminary discussion on contemporary Chinese political

³⁴⁵ <http://www.wenming.cn/>.

³⁴⁶ Among these, the most popular campaigns are “Love the country, love the Party” (*Ai dang ai guo* 爱党爱国), “China Dream” (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦), and “Safeguard the environment” (*Huanjing baohu* 环境保护).

³⁴⁷ See for instance Stefan Landsberger, *Chinese Propaganda Posters - From Revolution to Modernization* (Amsterdam: Pepin Press, 1996), 92.

³⁴⁸ ‘Semiotics’ is the scholarship that studies the process of ‘semiosis.’ This process, according to Peirce, is “an action, or influence, which is, or involves, an operation of *three* subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into an action between pairs.” Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), vol. V: 484, quoted in Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Hampshire/London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1984), 1.

discourse (CCPD) is necessary. The need for a semiotic framework lies in the visual component of advertising, which carries as many meanings as the textual component. The analysis will be carried out on the grounds of some studies conducted by prominent scholars in these domains.

Considered one of the pioneers in the discourse analysis domain, in his work Foucault considers the relationship between power and discourse, and states that discourse is

an inexhaustible treasure from which one can always draw new, and always unpredictable riches; a providence that has always spoken in advance, and which enables one to hear, when one knows how to listen, retrospective oracles: [...] an asset that consequently, from the moment of its existence (and not only in its ‘practical applications’), poses the question of power; an asset that is, by nature, the object of a struggle, a political struggle.³⁴⁹

Following the outcomes of Foucault’s surveys, scholars started applying the means of discourse analysis to different forms of communication.

Fairclough elaborated what has then been called critical discourse analysis. The reason why a CDA proves to be effective on advertising, and especially on PSA, is that, as Fairclough and Wodak state, “CDA sees discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of ‘social practice,’”³⁵⁰ and the authors describe discourse as “socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned [...]. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it.”³⁵¹ An analogy can be identified between this denotation of discourse and the two roles of advertising, which acts as both a mirror and a shaper of its social context. Thus, being PSA primarily aimed at influencing people’s behaviors towards certain topics, an evaluation conducted using CDA approach proves to be effective. Moreover, in his work Fairclough argues that “language can be seen as a form of action,”³⁵² thus providing the basis for a further analysis on the employment of language in the political discourse not just as a neutral means of communication, but as a useful tool to be employed to shape the social environment. Later in his survey the author emphasizes that “language connects with the social through being the primary domain of ideology, and through being both a site of, and a stake in, struggles for power,”³⁵³ and that “language is part of the society, and not somehow external to it.”³⁵⁴

The PDA field of study has Euro-American roots, as the first scholars to draw attention on the ideology underpinned in such a discourse were mainly interested in the Western practice. Major

³⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2002), 136.

³⁵⁰ Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” in *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, ed. Teun van Dijk (London: Sage, 1997), vol. 2: 258.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London/New York: Longman, 1989), 9.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

contributions to the field in the years had come from scholars such as Fairclough, Landtsheer, Schäffner, and Chilton, who provided well inquired analyses of the topic.

As remarked by Schäffner and Chilton, “the language is closely bound up in practice with culture, and [...] culture is in turn closely bound up with the practice of politics in a particular society.”³⁵⁵ Hence, an analysis on the political discourse should also take into consideration the cultural and historical context where such discourse finds application.

The analysis of contemporary Chinese political language and discourse, as Magagnin points out, is a relatively recent field of research, especially if compared to the analysis of classical Chinese rhetoric.³⁵⁶ Contributions to the scholarship came from the pioneering work of Tian, and subsequently from Hodge, Louie, Cao and Link.

In their survey Cao, Tian, and Chilton examine the characteristics of Chinese language use in politics and mass media, underlining its pivotal function in shaping the society. As the authors underline,

as an authoritarian society, China is characterized by a largely top-down pattern of political communication. The political elites govern on the one hand with an administrative apparatus with penal power; and on the other, though with increasing difficulties and challenges, with sustained discursive campaigns conditioning the country to uniform thinking.³⁵⁷

The authors proceed by inferring that in the Chinese scene “ideology as a general set of beliefs is promoted by the political elites to construct fresh socio-political truths,”³⁵⁸ remarking that, in contrast to Mao’s Marxist orthodoxy, “post-reform ideologies are goal-oriented and policy-driven.”³⁵⁹ Among these considerations they state that, in the years, the interpretation and employment of Chinese classics has constituted one of the fundamentals for the legitimacy of a discursive power. As remarked, “textual authority confers moral power that can be translated into political entitlement and command.”³⁶⁰ It is also underlined how the CCPD through the years has been characterized by three defining features, that still exist nowadays (and can also be spot in PSA),

³⁵⁵ Christina Schäffner and Paul Chilton eds., *Politics as Text and Talk: Analytic Approaches to Political Discourse* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), 8.

³⁵⁶ Paolo Magagnin, “The Evolution of Metaphorical Language in Contemporary Chinese Political Discourse Preliminary Evidence from the 12th and 18th CPC Congresses,” in *Simica venetiana* 3, eds. Tiziana Lippiello, Chen Yuehong 陈跃红, and Maddalena Barengi (Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Digital Publishing, 2016), 346. <https://phaidra.cab.unipd.it/o:432217> (last accessed 5 July 2020).

³⁵⁷ Qing Cao, Hailong Tian, and Paul Chilton, eds., *Discourse, Politics and Media in Contemporary China* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2014), 9.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

namely: “consensus building (*gongshi* 共识), a drive for unity (*tuanjie* 团结) and a focus on education (*jiaoyu* 教育).”³⁶¹

Although having explained that the main political discourse is operated on a top-down direction, the authors also point out that in the latest years larger space has been dedicated to bottom-up discourse, through communication channels which encourage public participation. A particularly important role in this process has been overtaken by the Internet, which has arisen as the preferred platform of social debate in the country, involving an increasingly high number of people.³⁶²

It is to be remarked that, according to the survey of Hodge and Louie on the relationship between discourse and power (which draws from the previous works of Hodge and Kress),³⁶³ the regime discourse is sub-divided into two dominant forms: a close form, that is usually employed in official media and resorts to slogans and editorials, and an open form, which is employed in artistic production and leaves space for multiple interpretation.³⁶⁴ In their work Hodge and Louie elaborate the idea that power discourse (intended in its wider meaning) serves two contradictory functions: “to express the power of the powerful, their difference from the non-powerful; and to assure the solidarity of the non-powerful, their identity of interests with the powerful.”³⁶⁵ The authors define these two functions ‘P-ideology’ and ‘S-ideology,’ explaining, “P-ideology largely expresses itself through binary oppositions constructing difference; while the S-ideology acts to blur or mask those differences.”³⁶⁶ In their survey Hodge and Louie lead a well inquired analysis on the semiotic implications of the political discourse; their analysis constitutes a significant contribution to the semiotic evaluations in the present work.

Taking a closer look at the dynamics that underlie the process of building political discourse, the work of Shei provides a complete overlook on Chinese discourse analysis; in fact, it is a framework that can be applied to all forms of communication, including political speech. For instance, as reported in Shei’s analysis, applying such a methodology to CCPD can demonstrate how the political discourse makes large use of *modality* through modal verbs.³⁶⁷ This approach allows a deeper

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁶³ See Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, *Language as Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); *Idem.*, *Social Semiotics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988). These works have also been taken into account in the formulation of this analysis.

³⁶⁴ Bob Hodge and Kam Louie, *Politics of Chinese Language and Culture: The Art of Reading Dragons* (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), 19-20.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁶⁷ “Modality, encompassing the interpersonal meanings of a speaker’s expression, is a device for indicating a speaker’s attitudes concerning the validity, possibility, necessity, predictability, desirability, inclination, volition, obligation, permission and evaluation of an event.” In Maria Chen, “The Use of Modal Verbs in Political Debates,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Chinese Discourse Analysis*, ed. Chris Shei (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 176.

comprehension of the discourse means employed by the leadership, which for example employs modality with the aim of influencing the society to make it abide by governmental policies and guidelines. This approach provided a useful background for this analysis.

Feng's social semiotic analysis of metaphors in the Chinese Dream PSA can be found in Shei's work, presenting a helpful insight on the semiotic and linguistic processes that underlie the construction of an effective *gongyi guanggao*. The framework Feng employs in his survey and the outcomes of his analysis proved to be useful in the present work.

Substantial contributions to the methodological approach came from of Wang's work, in which he also employs Fairclough's approach to CDA to deconstruct and analyze the ideology underneath Chinese advertising. Underlining the close relationship between advertisements and ideology, Wang remarks how such a relationship has an important impact on the visuals of advertising. As the author states, "while we argue that language is ideological, we must also admit that much meaning is conveyed by visual images, and images offer views of the world; they render the world in visual terms,"³⁶⁸ thus pointing out that equal attention must be given to advertising verbal and visual discourses.

For the semiotic analysis of visual contents in the selected campaigns, the work of Barthes, with his pioneering study on advertising visual semiotic,³⁶⁹ has constituted a valid starting point. In addition, an important contribution has come from Bianchi's work, that includes an overview on the development of the field, and in which she provides a valid methodology blueprint for advertising analysis.³⁷⁰ For the analysis of the visual content, the studies of Cook³⁷¹ and of Kress³⁷² also influence the present work.

The abovementioned study of Hodge and Louie also provide a valid perspective on the semiotic approach to the use of Chinese language, and mainly on the semiotic validity of grammar in the Chinese language.

³⁶⁸ Chong Wang, *Critical Discourse Analysis of Chinese Advertisement. Case Studies of Household Appliance Advertisements from 1981 to 1996* (Singapore: Springer, 2017), 58.

³⁶⁹ Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1997).

³⁷⁰ Cinzia Bianchi, "Semiotic Approaches to Advertising Texts and Strategies: Narrative, Passion, Marketing," *Semiotica* 183, no. 1/4 (17 March 2011): 243-71. <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.2011.012>.

³⁷¹ Guy Cook, *The Discourse of Advertising*, 2nd ed. (London/New York: Routledge, 2001).

³⁷² Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design*, 2nd ed., (London/New York: Routledge, 2006); Gunther Kress, *Multimodality. A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication* (London/New York: Routledge, 2009).

On the basis of Cheng and Chan semiotic analysis of *gongyi guanggao*,³⁷³ Williamson's framework has also provided a valid background for a preliminary evaluation of the two campaigns.³⁷⁴

Given the main topic the two campaigns focus on, significant contributions also come from Chen's survey on Chinese public discourse, especially from the insight regarding the (un)-civilized discourse in contemporary China, as his evaluations can be applied to the *wenming* discourse found in PSA.³⁷⁵

Drawing from the presented methodology framework, the present analysis will be conducted starting from the visual level, which is the first aspect of *gongyi guanggao* the eye focuses on; then, the attention will shift to the linguistic component of the advertising. Finally, some considerations on the use of both visual and linguistic metaphors will be presented. The present study does not pursue the goal of conducting a complete analysis of the two campaigns; rather, it aims to highlight some of their features, in order to foreground the political implications underneath these *gongyi guanggao*.

4.2 The Ningbo Campaign

The propagandistic-PSA campaign issued by the local Civilization Office of Ningbo, in Zhejiang, was launched in March 2020, and published online 23 March 2020.³⁷⁶

In an article published by the *Ningbo Civilization Net* (*Ningbo wenming wang* 宁波文明网) on 26 March 2020, the general guidelines for the campaign and its goals are explained to the public.³⁷⁷ The article clarifies that the campaign 'Good habits of civilization' (*Wenming hao xiguan* 文明好习惯) is firstly aimed at promoting and enhancing the citizens' civilization, exhorting them to abide by the encouraged behaviors featured in the campaign. The advocacy of these behaviors aims at changing them into 'habits:' the ultimate goal of raising the people's awareness on certain topics of public interest is pursued through an attempt to change the citizens' daily life, on an individual as well as a collective level.

The campaign has been issued by the municipal Civilization Office of Ningbo following the authorities' stress on the advocacy of the 'Guidelines for the use of common chopsticks and common

³⁷³ Cheng and Chan, "Public Service Advertising: Social Marketing in the Making;" Hong Cheng and Kara Chan, "Public Service Advertising in China: A Semiotic Analysis." in *Advertising and Chinese Society: Impacts and Issues*, eds. Hong Cheng and Kara Chan (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 2009), 203-21.

³⁷⁴ Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978).

³⁷⁵ Xinren Chen, *Critical Pragmatic Studies on Chinese Public Discourse* (London/New York: Routledge, 2020).

³⁷⁶ The campaign is available at <http://chinazdsl.cn/gygg/index.aspx>.

³⁷⁷ Zhou Song 周松, ed., "Zhejiang Ningbo: fazhan shi zhong wenming hao xiguan yangcheng xingdong" 浙江宁波: 开展十种文明好习惯养成行动 (Ningbo, Zhejiang: development of the movement for the cultivation of ten positive habits), *Ningbo Wenming Wang*, 26 March 2020. http://nb.wenming.cn/wmjj/202003/t20200326_6374492.shtml.

spoon' (*Gong kuai gong shao shiyong daoze* 公筷公勺使用导则). These guidelines were issued by the city's governance as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis that took place in China (and subsequently in the world), and were aimed at spreading information about prevention measures against the illness. From March on the city has started advocating the use of a common pair of chopsticks in the restaurants and the canteens, in order to prevent the diffusion of the virus among the city's population.³⁷⁸

As explained in the article, in 2020 "Ningbo will focus on ten specific aspects of civilization with regards to the citizens' daily life, and will keep on promoting the importance of civilized behaviors, including the good habit of using public chopsticks."³⁷⁹ Following this consideration, it is stated that, in order to ensure a positive outcome for the campaign, "all parts of the city will display and explain the activities the citizens should participate in, in order to arouse citizens to actively take part in the practice of cultivating good habits."³⁸⁰

At a first glance it is evident that the ads all belong to the same campaign: the layout and the colors employed are the same, and the linguistic choices are organized in a recurrent structure. The ads present a central image whose technical execution recalls the old practice of paper-cutting (*jianzhi* 剪纸), that is deeply rooted in Zhejiang province tradition, and has been included in the China Intangible Cultural Heritage.³⁸¹ Similarly to a campaign recently analyzed by Puppini, the presence of this artistic means represents the 'Chinese element' in the ads, whose comprehension of the central message is strictly related to.³⁸² As Wu's survey explains, the practice of paper-cutting has been restored and re-evaluated in the years, until its presence in nowadays' *gongyi guanggao* has assumed a relevant meaning. The employment of *jianzhi* in modern communication means, as Wu underlines, is one of the ways through which the government emphasizes the concept of 'Chinese civilization.'³⁸³ Using a traditional form of art in rural China to express and illustrate the modern concepts of 'civilization' is one of the recurrent techniques the government employs to mediate between global

³⁷⁸ The symbol of this campaign is a pair of blue chopsticks, which started being featured in most of the city's PSA campaigns on different kind of media, and that most restaurants in the city started providing to their customers. Since the color of the chopsticks, the term 'Ningbo blue' (*Ningbo lan* 宁波蓝) started being employed to refer to the campaign. See Zheng Haoyue 郑皓月, "Ningbo fabu gong kuai gong shao shiyong daoze" 宁波发布公筷公勺使用导则 (Ningbo issues the 'Guidelines for the use of common chopsticks and common spoon'), *Yangguang Net*, 9 April 2020. http://news.cnr.cn/native/city/20200409/t20200409_525047728.shtml.

³⁷⁹ Zhou, "Wenming hao xiguan."

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁸¹ Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage, <https://www.culturalheritagechina.org/>; "Chinese paper-cut," *China Daily*, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/m/dehong/2010-07/27/content_11055083.htm.

³⁸² Giovanna Puppini, "Environmental Public Service Advertising (PSA) 'with Chinese Elements': A Visual Semiotic Analysis of Localized WWF Print Campaigns in Mainland China," *China Media Research* 16, no. 3 (April 2020): 26-48.

³⁸³ Ka-ming Wu, "Paper-cuts in Modern China: The Search for Modernity, Cultural Tradition, and Women's Liberation," *Modern China* 41, no. 1 (2015): 90-127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700414526133>. As the author states, "the production of paper-cuts is no simple folk cultural practice, but rather engages heavily with and is constituted by different state-engineered discourses, political campaigns, economic motivations, modernization debates, and a plurality of actors" (*Ibid.*, 116).

and national values, and thus between the importance of both global and national civilization in the country.

Furthermore, the choice of placing the images at the center of the ads denotes what is considered to be a particular Asian practice: as inferred by Kress and van Leeuwen it is probably linked to the importance of the ‘center’ in the Confucian tradition, as it places great emphasis on hierarchy, harmony and continuity.³⁸⁴

The central composition is delimited by a circular frame, whose lattice pattern strongly recalls the paper-cutting practice; this composition gives the impression the ads reproduce a typical sight in Chinese traditional gardens.³⁸⁵ The color used for the background, which is light, contrasts with the red latticework and with the colors used for the images, that are quite vivid and dark; this contrast helps the public focus on the images and on the text, that are the two elements highlighted in the ads.

The images are presented in a front angle, a choice that enhances the viewers’ impression of being participants of the scene,³⁸⁶ and mostly represent human beings in the act of carrying out daily activities, such as dining or interacting with other people. The drawing technique, using bold black lines, emphasizes the figures within the frame. These figures are mainly represented on two levels, with the ones performing the important action being foregrounded, while secondary figures are represented while carrying out activities that are only partially related to the behavior the advertisement advocates. For example, in fig. 2 a man is asking for some information to a couple of volunteers, while a woman in the back seems lost, but is not asking anyone for help and, at the same time, she is not being helped by the person sitting on the left: such a representation is to emphasize the behavior deemed righteous by comparing it to the one considered ‘not civilized.’ At the same time though, in fig. 6 and 7 all the represented persons have similar behaviors, abiding by governmental directions while crossing the street or contributing to environmental safeguard by picking up litter and recycling. On the contrary, in fig. 1, the persons represented in the background do not seem to be involved in the action taking place between the two main characters.

Inside every image appears a banner with a sentence that provides a deeper explanation of the issue the advertisement is aimed at. Being a unicum in the campaign, fig. 4 features a small image within the main one, whose goal is to provide a further explanation of the topic, namely promoting the use of common chopsticks while eating (which also happens to be the city’s main issue at the moment). In the smaller picture, two hands are depicted while approaching a bowl that has the word

³⁸⁴ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 195.

³⁸⁵ Bianca Maria Rinaldi, *The Chinese Garden: Garden Types for Contemporary Landscape Architecture* (Basel: Birkhäuser Architecture, 2011), 66-7.

³⁸⁶ Feng, “Analyzing Multimodal Chinese Discourse,” 67.

‘soup’ (*tang* 汤) written on. The two hands belong to different persons, and this synecdoche is marked by the characters written on the sleeves: ‘private, personal’ (*si* 私) and ‘common, public’ (*gong* 公). The characters do not refer to the person themselves, but through a metonymy they refer to the chopsticks these persons are using. The bowl of soup here is personified as it has two arms: with one hand it blocks the ‘private’ pair of chopsticks, while with the other it allows the ‘common’ chopsticks to get closer. This particular means employed in the ad aims to reinforce the idea that the use of personal chopsticks while eating from the same plate as other people should be abandoned.

The personification of inanimate objects occurs three times in the main images of the campaign, namely in fig. 5, 6 and 7, that feature a bus, some cars and some recycling garbage bins which are all represented smiling.

Looking at the linguistic choices, the campaign makes use of the expression ‘Advocating the cultivation of [...] good habit’ (*changdao yangcheng [...] hao xiguan* 倡导养成 [...] 好习惯), that appears in all the ads, implemented by four characters that explain the ‘good habit’ the single advertisement focuses on. The decision of using a structure of four characters is by no means an innovation in the Chinese language: in fact, it recalls the *chengyu* 成语, a four-character fixed structure that usually derives its meaning from well-known Chinese myths or stories.³⁸⁷ Although in this campaign there are no *chengyu*, recalling this idiomatic expression through the employment of the four characters structure in the ads still provides a sort of cultural backing for the contents advocated in the text.

The word *wenming* recurs six times in the display copy³⁸⁸ of the ads (Fig. 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10), and it always serves as determinant for the noun or verb that follows it, thus specifying that the behavior to consider righteous is the ‘civilized’ one. The text in the banners located inside the pictures serves the scope to further illustrate the meaning of the scene and to validate the role of the advertisement in promoting a certain habit. The word *wenming* appears three times in the banners (Fig. 3, 5, 9); this text is formed by two juxtaposed series of four characters that, if read together, hold a significant rhythmic value.³⁸⁹

The ads present the logo of the ‘Good habits of civilization’ campaign on the top left corner; under the text of the display copy, the body copy features the name of the offices that launched the

³⁸⁷ See Meng Ji, “What is the Starting Point? In Search of a Working Definition of Chinese Idioms,” *African and Asian Studies* 6, (2007): 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156921007X180569>.

³⁸⁸ “The contents of advertisements consist of two major copy elements: display copy and body copy (or text). The display copy includes the elements that readers view first, such as headlines, subheads, callouts, taglines, and slogans, designed in larger sizes than the body copy to get the viewer’s attention. The body copy includes the text of the advertisement’s message and captions designed to be read and absorbed.” In Wang, *Critical Discourse Analysis of Chinese Advertising*, 81.

³⁸⁹ For considerations on rhythm in Chinese language, see Perry Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese. Rhythm, Metaphor, Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 21-112.

campaign, namely the Ningbo City Civilization Office, and the Xiangshan County Civilization Office. The presence of these logos can be considered the result of an *embrayage* process,³⁹⁰ which reduces the distance between the addresser and the addressee of the advertisement.

The text does not make use of any personal pronoun, thus assuming a peremptory tone: in this way it seems to underline its top-down communicative nature, and the self-proving truthfulness of the behaviors it advocates. The textual component of the ads also serves the function of anchoring³⁹¹ the visual component to the exact meaning the addresser wants to convey, highlighting or reinforcing the kind of habits the campaign promotes.

The use of metaphors in this campaign is mostly connected to the personification of inanimate objects (bus, cars, garbage bins). Since the objects that are being personified are not capable of performing ‘civilized’ behaviors on their own, using the referent system³⁹² that humans operate inanimate objects, the message implies that national civilization will be possible only if people make a civilized use of these devices.

Apart from the interrelation with the ‘Common chopstick and common spoon’ movement previously mentioned, the ‘Good habits of civilization’ campaign of Ningbo also features other themes particularly close and relevant to the government, such as the importance of eco-civilization,³⁹³ of ‘civilized travelling,’³⁹⁴ and of a civilized behavior when surfing the Internet.³⁹⁵

4.3 The Deyang Campaign

The campaign of Deyang city, in Sichuan, was published online on 26 November 2019.³⁹⁶ While nine out of the ten ads were simultaneously posted on the *Deyang zuopinku* 德阳作品库, the last advertisement (Fig. 10) has been posthumously published on 4 of June 2020. Despite appearing on the website a few months later than the rest of the ads, its layout, visual impact, and discursive choices underline its belonging to the 26 November campaign.

³⁹⁰ Bianchi, “Semiotic Approaches to Advertising,” 265.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 247.

³⁹² Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*, 99.

³⁹³ For an accurate analysis of eco-civilization-related PSA campaigns see Puppini, “Environmental Public Service Advertising;” and Giovanna Puppini, “Natura Sublime, Natura Tossica. Un Caso Studio Sulla Campagna di Pubblicità Sociale per la Tutela Ambientale shanshui pian 山水篇,” *Sinosfere* 7 (Costellazioni: Natura), (1 October 2019). <http://sinofere.com/2019/10/01/giovanna-puppini-natura-sublime-natura-tossica/>.

³⁹⁴ This topic has been recurrent in the country since 2013, when a Chinese tourist deturpated an archaeological site in Egypt, as Barmé explains in *Civilizing China*, xi-xii.

³⁹⁵ See Jeremy Goldkorn, “China’s Internet – a Civilising Process,” in *Civilizing China*, eds. Barmé and Goldkorn, 320-79; Gabriele De Seta, “Wenming Bu Wenming: The Socialization of Incivility in Postdigital China,” *International Journal of Communication* 12, (2018): 2010–30.

³⁹⁶ The posters are available at <http://ad.scdyvtv.com/%E5%B8%82?pagenumber=2>.

In a notice released on 14 of August 2017 by the Deyang Division of the China Banking Regulatory Commission (*Zhongguo yinhangye jiandu guanli weiyuanhui Deyang jiandu fenju* 中国银行业监督管理委员会德阳监管分局) and the Financial Office of Deyang City (*Deyang shi renmin zhengfu jinrong bangongshi* 德阳市人民政府金融办公室), the general guidelines for the production of *gongyi guanggao* in the city are illustrated. The document also includes a list of 39 slogans (*biaoyu* 标语) the ads should feature. Many of the slogans that appear in the document have been employed in the present campaign.

As stated in the 2017 notice and remarked by the logos in the PSA, the campaign belongs to the previously mentioned “Spread civilization, cultivate new customs” (*Jiang wenming shu xinfeng* 讲文明树新风) national movement, which has been launched accordingly with Xi’s presidency goals.

The campaign uses for its illustrations the ‘New Year Painting’ (*nianhua* 年画) works of art. The practice of this particular artistic means is deeply rooted in the country’s history: its origin can be traced back to ancient times, when they were mainly used in the rituals for the Gods.³⁹⁷ However, the development of New Year paintings as they are known nowadays is agreed to have started during the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127 a. D.), when the invention of papermaking and the introduction of woodblock contributed to the diffusion of the practice among the people.³⁹⁸ Under the Qing dynasty, among the various production of New Year prints all over the country, Mianzhu (a county under the jurisdiction of Deyang)³⁹⁹ woodblock *nianhua* became famous and increasingly gained interest. New Year paintings started being employed for propagandistic purposes by the CCP during the stay in Yan’an (1939), when prints were used both as a means to ideologically fight the enemy and as gifts for soldiers’ families.⁴⁰⁰ The CCP decision of making use of such a form of art for political and propagandistic purposes was drawn from the function New Year paintings had while being employed as protest print to fight the country’s invaders at the beginning of the XX century. However, the *nianhua* increasingly gained attention as they were employed for propagandistic purposes during the early years of the communist leadership.⁴⁰¹ Given the nature of these prints, it can be observed how the New Year paintings were “permeated by behavioral indications, thus consolidating the Confucian values of the educated, urban elite among the illiterate peasant population.”⁴⁰²

³⁹⁷ Lu Keqin, *China in New Year Paintings* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2010), 3.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

³⁹⁹ See <http://www.deyang.gov.cn/dyywb/visitors/scenicspots/889175.htm> (last accessed 10 July 2020).

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁰¹ Stefan Landsberger, “Realising The Chinese Dream: Three Visions of Making China Great Again,” in *Art, Global Maoism and the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, eds. Jacopo Galimberti, Noemi de Haro García and Victoria H. F. Scott (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019). <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526117472.00006>.

⁴⁰² Landsberger, *Chinese Propaganda Posters*, 22-3.

In 2014 Mianzhu New Year paintings became part of the China Intangible Cultural Heritage,⁴⁰³ and their use in *gongyi guanggao* has been strongly advocated by the authorities since then.⁴⁰⁴

The employment of Mianzhu *nianhua* prints, that serve the scope of creating a continuum between China's traditional past and its present (and future) can be considered the 'Chinese element' in this campaign.

The PSAs are horizontal; on a visual level, the ads are eye-catching, and the use of vivid, bright colors calls for the attention of the public. The New Year paintings, the campaign's tagline and two of the logos are placed on the left-hand side of the ads, a choice that accordingly to Kress and van Leeuwen has the aim to propose the image as a 'given' element, while the elements on the right-hand are perceived as 'new' by the public.⁴⁰⁵ This layout is coherent with the general message conveyed by the advertisement, that poses on the left-hand side the 'old' component, represented by the *nianhua* prints, and on the right-hand side the 'new' element, represented by the message the ads deliver.

While most of the campaigns make use of images with a New Year paintings taste, fig. 13 represents a unicum, as its illustrations and text do not abide by the same rules as other ads. In fact, the images are child-like drawings of children, one being the main character in the ad, while the other three characters are depicted in a considerably smaller size beneath it.

As stated, the images in the campaign have a *nianhua* taste; however, while the traditional element is still noticeable in the composition, in three of them (Fig. 12, 14, 17) there are some modern-era elements (namely cars, garbage bins, and a present-time luggage). In one of the ads (Fig. 16) appears Lei Feng (1940-1962), a Mao-era soldier whose life is deemed exemplary by the government, as he devoted his existence to Mao Zedong and the communist cause,⁴⁰⁶ and who was featured in many propagandistic ads since then.⁴⁰⁷

The scenes (except for Fig. 13) are represented following the Mianzhu New Year painting criteria: bright colors are predominant, and the characters are depicted in a rather lively manner. This particular artistic style on the one hand is recognized by the Chinese spectator as a reference to the

⁴⁰³ See <https://www.culturalheritagechina.org/> (last accessed 10 July 2020).

⁴⁰⁴ Fu Chao 符超, "Mianzhu nianhua gongyi guanggao ruxian Zhongguo wenming wang" 绵竹年画公益广告入选中国文明网 (Gongyi guanggao featuring Mianzhu New Year paintings posted in the national *Wenming* website), *Sichuan News Network*, 14 May 2014. <http://scnews.newssc.org/system/20140514/000381910.html> (last accessed 10 July 2020).

⁴⁰⁵ Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 181.

⁴⁰⁶ See Wendy Larson, *From Ah Q to Lei Feng. Freud and the Revolutionary Spirit in 20th Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Elaine Jeffreys, "Understanding the Lei Feng Revival: Evidence from a Survey of Chinese Students," *China Media Research* 13, no. 2 (2017): 54-66; Stefan Landsberger, "Learning by What Example? Educational Propaganda in Twenty-first-Century China," *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 4 (2001): 541-71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/146727101760107424>.

⁴⁰⁷ Some of the posters are available at <https://chineseposters.net/themes/leifeng.php>.

tradition, while on the other it contributes to tighten the gap between the print and the public by blending it with real life dynamicity.

A recurrent element in the campaign are the flowers, which appear in every advertisement either in the New Year prints or in the background, or in both.

On a textual level, except for fig. 13, all the *biaoyu* in the ads respect couplets or parallelism⁴⁰⁸ in their sentences. Only in fig. 15 a personal pronoun is used ('me, I,' *wo* 我); however, in the sentence the pronoun serves as determinant in the word 'China' (*woguo* 我国), a choice that stresses the belonging of all individuals to the nation, thus implying that is everyone's responsibility to contribute to the formation of a 'civilized China.'

Particularly interesting is the employment of the quotation from Confucius' *Analects* (*Lunyu* 论语) in fig. 19. Instead of reformulating the sentence, it was decided to directly quote the philosopher, without using quotation marks. Drawing from Hodge and Louie's studies, the choice of using quotation marks influences the authority and reliability of an utterance: in fact, quotation marks underline a sort of judgement and detachment from the referred contents.⁴⁰⁹ Hence, the choice not to employ quotation marks for a quote might stress the inclusion of the Confucian values in the set of values promoted by the government.

In fig. 12 the couplet "To give way is one small step for a man, one giant leap for civilization" (*lirang yi xiao bu, wenming yi da bu* 礼让一小步, 文明一大步) has been molded on Neil Armstrong's famous quote, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind" (in Chinese *zhe shi ge ren de yi xiaobu, que shi renlei yi dabu* 这是个人的一小步, 却是人类的一大步) thus making use of a Western reference to emphasize the idea that even daily actions can lead to something big.

The body copy of each advertisement presents the twelve socialist core values, graphically divided into their three main categories: individual virtues, that include 'patriotism' (*aiguo* 爱国), 'dedication' (*jingye* 敬业), 'integrity' (*chengxin* 诚信), and 'friendship' (*youshan* 友善); social virtues, namely 'freedom' (*ziyou* 自由), 'equality' (*pingdeng* 平等), 'justice' (*gongzheng* 公正) and 'rule of law' (*fazhi* 法治); and national values, that involve 'prosperity' (*fuqiang* 富强), 'democracy' (*minzhu* 民主), 'civility' (*wenming* 文明) and 'harmony' (*hexie* 和谐).⁴¹⁰ Being a unicum, in its body copy Fig. 13 also features a list of eight good manners (*li* 礼) parents should teach their children.

⁴⁰⁸ Yan Jiang, "Chinese Rhetoric," in *The Routledge Handbook of Chinese Applied Linguistics*, eds. Chu-Ren Huang, Zhuo Jing-Schmidt, Barbara Meisterernst (London/New York: Routledge, 2019), 727-46.

⁴⁰⁹ Hodge and Louie, *Politics of Chinese Language and Culture*, 103.

⁴¹⁰ Magagnin, "Putting into Practice 'Core Confucian Values,'" 231.

In the body copy of every PSA four logos are displayed: in the upper-left corner are placed the Deyang city and the Civilized Deyang city logo; in the lower-left corner there is the “Spread civilization, cultivate new customs” logo; and in the lower-right corner appears the name of the office that issued the campaign, the Deyang City Headquarter Office for the Creation of a National-Level Civilized City (*Deyang shi chuangjian quanguo wenming chengshi zhihuibu bangongshi* 德阳市创建全国文明城市指挥部办公室). The lower logos are inserted in the yellow frame that delimits the ad, while the upper ones are placed in the background. The presence of these logos can be considered the result of an *embayage* process.

Both the *biaoyu* in the display copy and the characters appearing inside the New Year paintings in some ads have the function of anchoring the meaning of the images. In the written text of fig. 18’s appears a pair of elders and a child interacting with them. Above their heads is written the character ‘family’ (*jia* 家), which indicates that the persons are relatives. To explicit what kind of household it is, in the tools the man and the child are holding, the characters which form the word ‘harmonious’ (*hemei* 和美) are separately written. The message is reinforced by the sentence written on the left of the scene, ‘harmonious household’ (*hemei jiating* 和美家庭).

In the written text of fig. 19, behind the two characters chatting and the cauldron, appears the character ‘trust’ (*xin* 信), which reinforces the message of the display copy by inferring that in human relationships ‘trust’ is an essential value that should not be betrayed.

In fig. 20 the character ‘virtue’ (*de* 德) is being sewed by a woman, while her child (and two chicks) attentively looks at her. As in the previous ads, the character inside the written text reinforces the message conveyed by the sentence in the display copy.

The campaign’s ads advocate a balanced relationship between traditional elements and modernization, providing a consistent number of features that are closely linked to both worlds. Notably relevant for this aspect is the representation of the *nianhua* characters interacting with modern elements, such as a present time busy street or garbage bins. In fig. 12 the persons driving the cars are drawn in a more modern style, while the main characters of the image, the foregrounded family of three, are drawn according to Mianzhu New Year painting style. This expedient gives the spectator the impression that modernity and technology have stopped to give way to the three; here the importance and the traditional value of the family are highlighted, to the detriment of the typical rush of modern life, that may lead to careless behaviors in the streets. It is to be noted that the woman in the image has some wrinkles on her face, a detail that suggests she is the grandmother of the two children. The choice of representing an old woman taking care of the youngsters shows the will to depict a situation many citizens’ can identify with: the need for a parent to look after their children

since they are busy working. Adding such a detail to the advertisement is an attempt to reproduce a daily occurrence in many persons' lives, thus hoping to raise their awareness on the traffic safety issue.

Many elements in the campaign belong to the citizens' referent system for Chinese traditional symbolism, such as the pumpkin (*hulu* 葫芦) in fig. 15, which symbolizes good luck and protection; the lotus and the hens in fig. 18, that are respectively associated with purity and family; and the orange and the peach in fig. 19, that carry the meaning of good luck and immortality.⁴¹¹

Particularly interesting is the use of the metaphors in fig. 1, 16 and 20. In fig. 1 a couple of doves is represented flying over the Forbidden City: this detail holds the Western metaphorical meaning of 'peace,' that, associated with China's most famous imperial palace, transmits the perception of the country as peaceful. However, a Chinese person might acknowledge that the image recalls the famous painting 'Auspicious Cranes' (*Rui he tu* 瑞鹤图), by emperor Huizong 徽宗 of the Song Dynasty (960–1279). The emperor's painting illustrated an event he witnessed: a group of twenty cranes, considered auspicious animals and a sign of longevity,⁴¹² flying over the Forbidden City.⁴¹³ The two implications of these doves, then, convey the idea of a prosperous, pacific era for China.

In fig. 16 the bust of Lei Feng, surrounded by what resemble *qi* 气 clouds,⁴¹⁴ is represented in the sky, above two children happily dancing: positioning what is considered a national exemplary model to follow in the place where the sun would usually be, implies that the soldier himself is the sun. This metaphorical device has the aim to convey the idea that the population should look up to Lei Feng and grow under his positive influence.

In fig. 20, as previously described, a woman is embroidering the character for virtue while her son and two chicks (that are partially cropped out of the scene) are attentively looking at her, and probably listening to what she is saying. The metaphorical meaning of this action is closely related to the text in the display copy, which advocates a constant betterment of the individuals through the study of righteous models. Like sewing, the practice of self-improvement is a process that requires time, patience, and dedication, but eventually leads to great results. Hence, the woman embroidering the character for 'virtue' can be seen as a metaphor for the practice of spiritual development.

⁴¹¹ See Wolfram Eberhard, *Dictionary of Chinese Symbols: Hidden Symbols in Chinese Life and Thought*, trans. G. L. Campbell (London/New York: Routledge, 1983).

⁴¹² Eberhard, *Dictionary of Chinese Symbols*, 86.

⁴¹³ Peter C. Sturman, "Cranes above Kaifeng: The Auspicious Image at the Court of Huizong," *Ars Orientalis* 20 (1990): 33. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4629400>.

⁴¹⁴ Sabrina Rastelli, *L'Arte Cinese. Dalle Origini alla Dinastia Tang (6000 a.C. - X secolo d.C.)* (Torino: Einaudi Editore, 2016), 126.

It is to be noticed that the ads which involve a more practical form of guidance on a daily basis are those in which the New Year painting characters are spotted interacting with modernity: fig. 12, concerned with the traffic safety issue, fig. 14, advocating the importance of recycling, and fig. 17, which calls for a civilized behavior while travelling.

The Ningbo Campaign - Figures

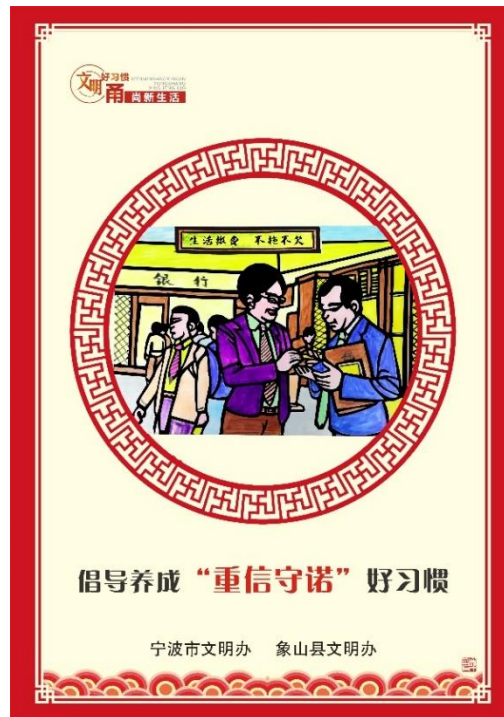


Fig. 1. Advocate the good habit of not delaying payments.

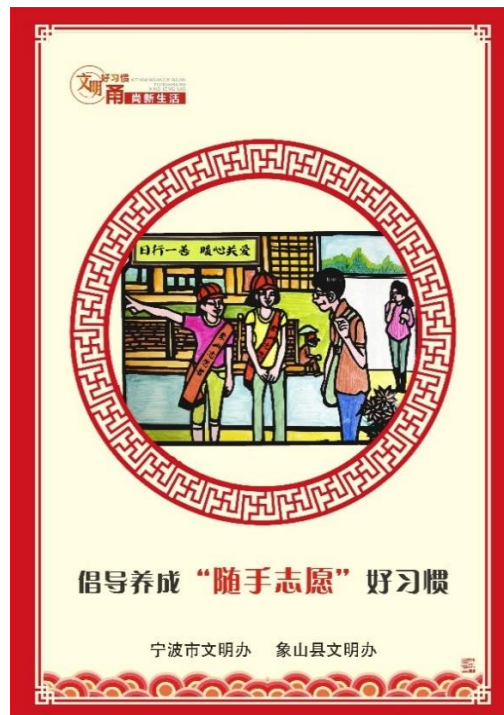


Fig. 2. Advocate the good habit of volunteering.

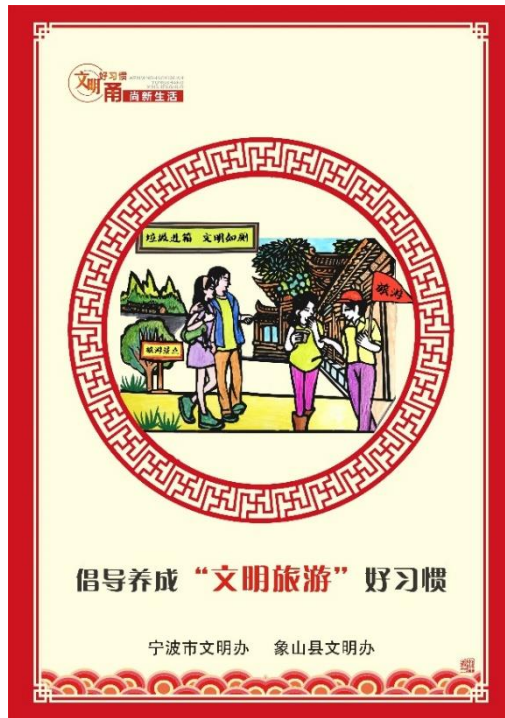


Fig. 3. Advocate the good habit of civilized travelling.

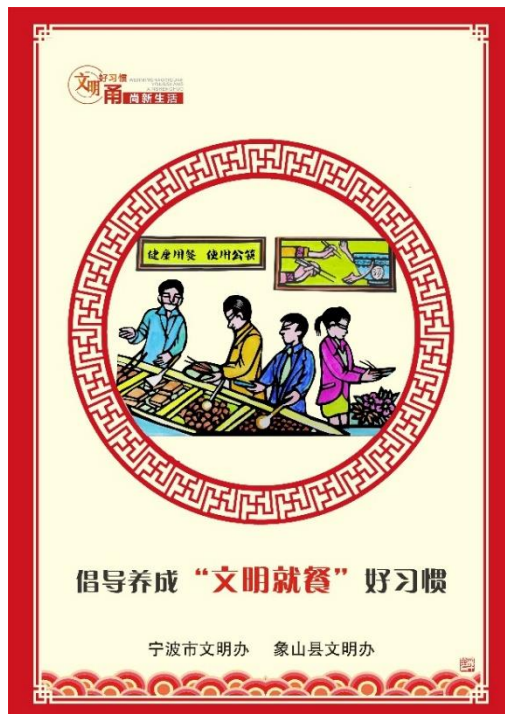


Fig. 4. Advocate the good habit of civilized dining.

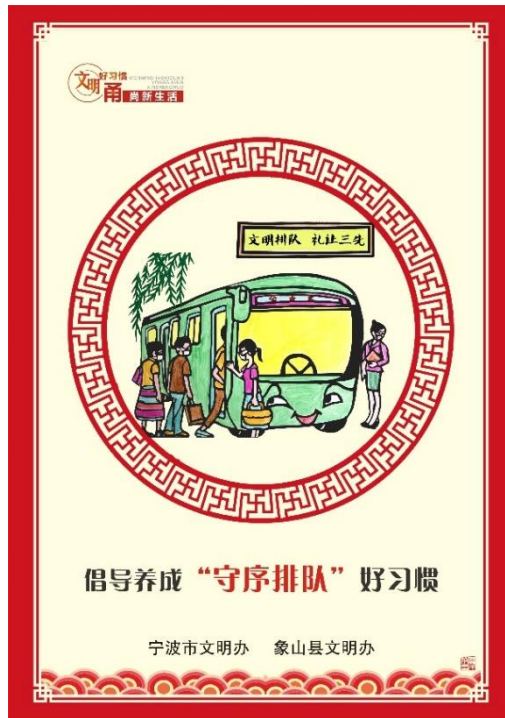


Fig. 5. Advocate the good habit of respecting the queues.

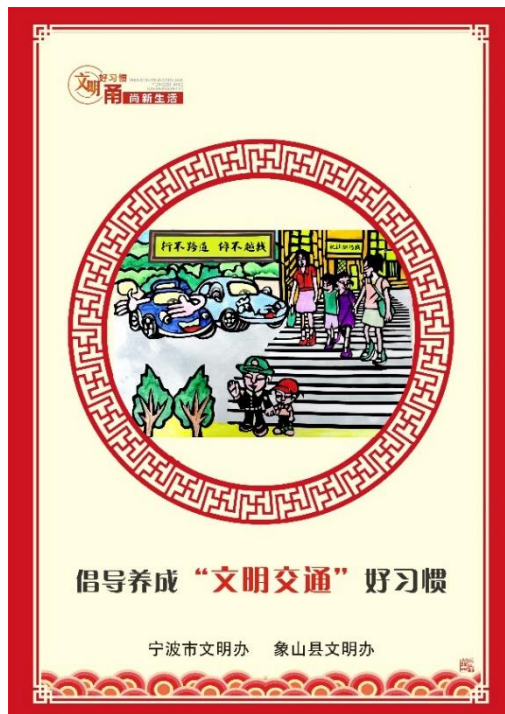


Fig. 6. Advocate the good habit of civilized traffic.

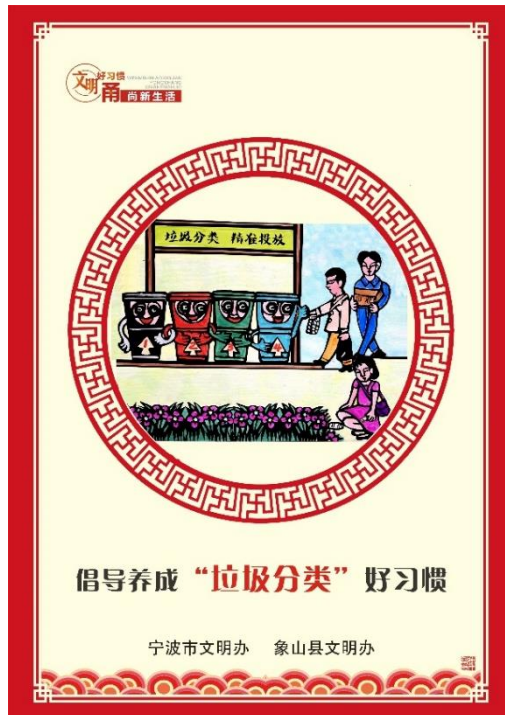


Fig. 7. Advocate the good habit of recycling.

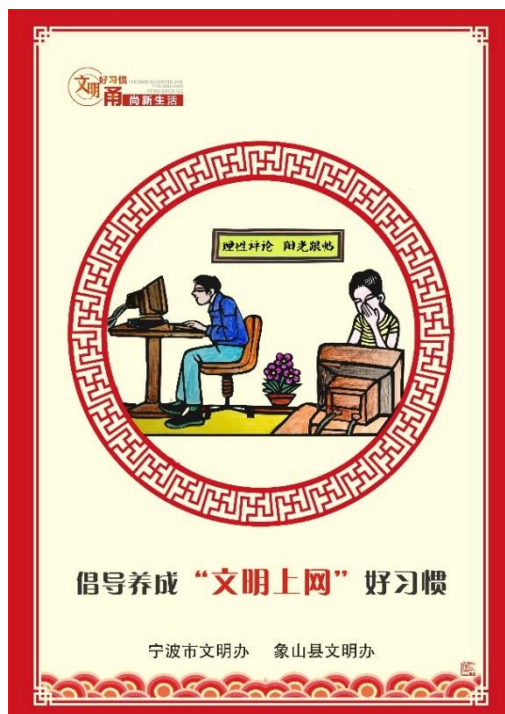


Fig. 8. Advocate the good habit of a civilized online behavior.

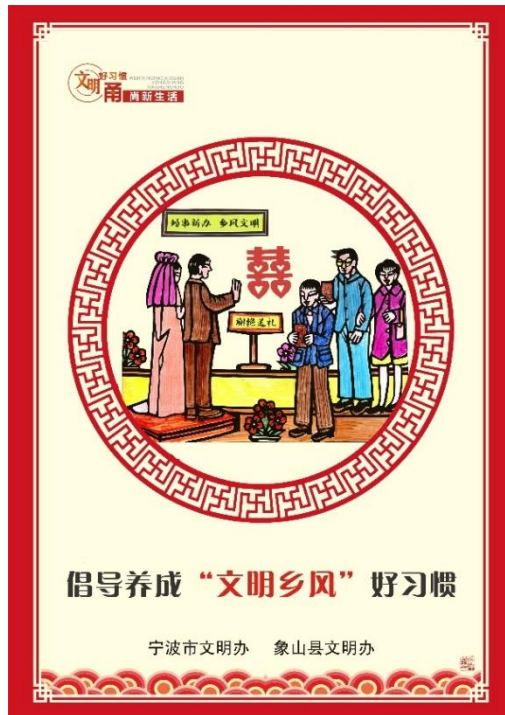


Fig. 9. Advocate the good habit of civilized traditions.

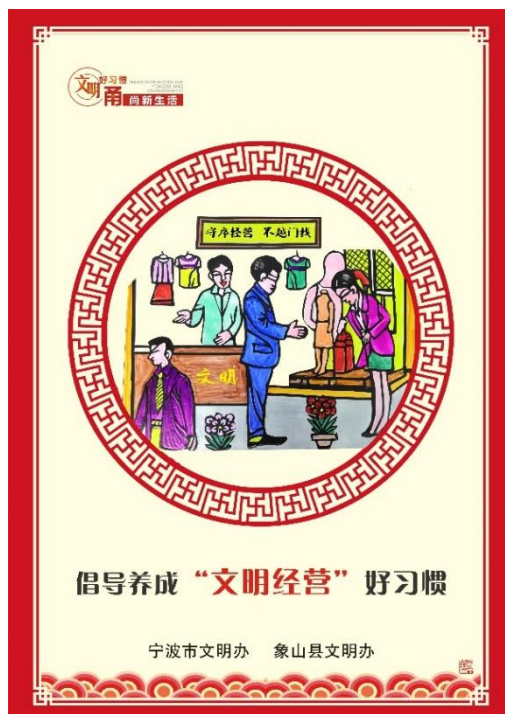


Fig. 10. Advocate the good habit of a civilized trading practice.

The Deyang Campaign - Figures



Fig. 11. The people have faith, the country has strength, the nation has hope.



Fig. 12. To give way is one small step for a man, one giant leap for civilization.



Fig. 13. To care for children is to care for the country's future.



Fig. 14. Let recycling become the new trend.



Fig. 15. The beautiful Deyang is my home; its improvement relies on us all.



Fig. 16. Devotion, fraternal love, reciprocal help, progress.



Fig. 17. Civilized behaviors and travelling belong together, with harmony and peace is a victory forever.



Fig. 18. Harmony secures long generations to those who industriously run a household.



Fig. 19. To keep a friend, keep your words true.



Fig. 20. Study the models, know the good from evil, predicate righteousness, cultivate new practices.

Conclusions

This work pursued the goal to highlight the connections between the concept of *wenming* in Chinese public service advertising and in the political agenda of the country. By providing an overview on the evolution of the term in Chinese political speech, it has been underlined how the concept developed from a foreign introduction in the country to become one of the key features of different governances in the Chinese modern history.

Considering the role *wenming* has assumed in both political speech and in *gongyi guanggao*, it is safe to reckon it has been integrated in the *soft power* practice of the country. Soft power, as described by Cao, is “a set of values that a given community articulates and practices as its own foundational principles which might, at times, exert some form of appeal to members outside that particular community.”⁴¹⁵ Hence, the presence of China’s soft power discourse is not just to be found in an outward direction, with the aim to influence other nations’ behavior towards the country, but also on a domestic level, since the first goal of such discourse is to change and re-define national priorities and practices, in an attempt to mold the country’s society on the basis of the principles advocated by the ruling class.

The media are indeed the most suitable means the ruling class makes use of to spread its discourse, thus, the values and the ideology it considers necessary for the country’s future development. According to Cao, since discourse functions as a starting point for the social changes that take place in a country, using the media as a form of communication to promulgate and illustrate the transformations that ought to occur proves to be effective, as it allows a wider public to take part in the national debate on the key issues China is facing through the enhancement of bottom-up communication. The government’s choice to encourage the development of a bottom-up interchange can also be spotted in the decision to allow the population to upload *gongyi guanggao* on the *Wenming* websites; a means, this, that echoes the old practice of *dazibao*, which largely depended on a consistent dialogue between top-down and bottom-up communications.

Considering the present international scenario, China finds itself amidst a great number of countries that are developing following a globalization-oriented path. The country, then, has to constantly mediate between the outer forces that compel it to speed up its process to become ‘modern,’ and its traditional past, in order to find a balance that will not compromise neither its modern future nor its peculiar, traditional past. Hence, as Cao remarks, the soft power discourse is “both socially shaped and shaping, and therefore generated within a specific socio-political and historical

⁴¹⁵ Cao, “China’s Soft Power: Formulations, Contestations and Communication,” in *Discourse, Politics and Media in Contemporary China*, 173.

context,”⁴¹⁶ a feature that partially recalls the *mirror* and *shaper* function of advertising in relation to the society and the context it generates from.

It is then evident how PSA undertake a pivotal role in the process of building social consensus. The choice to implement elements of the Chinese tradition in such a means of communication is a strong signal that the country’s ideological discourse is being deeply integrated in the production of public service campaigns, both on a linguistic and on a visual level, thus underlining how the new ideology is to be regarded as a substantial holistic concept that encompasses and integrates tradition and modernity.

Since the establishment of the Xi presidency, propagandistic PSA flourished in Chinese cities⁴¹⁷ and in Chinese media, providing a valid communication channel for governmental policies.

As Stockmann, Esarey and Jie remark, “via mass media public officials aim to create ‘a favorable environment’ for the implementation of government policies by raising awareness as well as changing people’s attitudes and behavior.”⁴¹⁸ Following this consideration, the authors underline that “public service advertising constitutes one means for government officials to communicate their political agenda to citizens and gain popular support to legitimize their policies.”⁴¹⁹ While the authors then proceed arguing that Chinese PSA has assumed different connotations from old-style propaganda, for example in the Mao-era, it is to be noted that the two case studies taken into account for this work, both present considerable analogies with propagandistic posters.

At the same time, while still presenting typical propagandistic features, such as the employment of rather political slogans, it can be noticed how these components have been re-elaborated and adapted to a country that is no longer the same as during the Cultural Revolution. As Stockmann explains, even the word used to refer to a movement changed, as it switched from ‘movement’ (*yundong* 运动), to ‘activity’ (*huodong* 活动), a choice that “emphasizes positive incentives to foster voluntary involvement in a campaign as opposed to the social pressure and coercion relied on during the Mao years.”⁴²⁰ Drawing from Stockmann’s considerations, it is agreeable that one of the main features of PSA nowadays is its strong connection with the country’s political agenda, since

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ See Meiqin Wang, “Advertising the Chinese Dream: Urban Billboards and Ni Weihua’s Documentary Photography,” *China Information* 29, no. 2 (2015): 176-201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X15582023>.

⁴¹⁸ Daniela Stockmann, Ashley Esarey and Zhang Jie, “Advertising Chinese Politics: The Effects of Public Service Announcements in Urban China,” *SSRN* (30 August 2010): 7. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1673073>.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁰ Daniela Stockmann, “Greasing the Reels: Advertising as a Means of Campaigning on Chinese Television,” *The China Quarterly* 208 (2011): 853. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741011001032>.

central-level policy makers believe that it is a fast and effective means to [...] shape people's values and behavior, not only because of the attractiveness of these commercials to Chinese media audiences but also because of their apparent success in counterbalancing the corrosion of socialist ideology in the Chinese media, advertising industry and businesses.⁴²¹

Considering the involvement of governmental offices in the process of both launching the campaigns and producing them, it is to be highlighted how the central authority does not actively take part in issuing all the campaigns that take place in the country, but, through organs such as the SAIC, it provides general guidelines to which local authorities look up to when a new PSA campaign is to be issued.

This process leads to the consideration that, while being obliged to abide by national directions and CCP political agenda, the local offices in charge for the creation of *gongyi guanggao* are left enough freedom to elaborate campaigns that can also feature a substantial regional specificity. This factor has led to the choice of focusing on campaigns issued at a local level, in order to underline how the use of PSA as a means of spreading information about governmental policies, and as an attempt to influence the citizens' behavior, is carried out not only by national movements but also by smaller realities. Local features of *gongyi guanggao* can be spotted in both campaigns: the ads employ particular artistic forms that are closely linked to the cities' history, and that have been integrated in the China Intangible Cultural Heritage. This choice enhances the importance of keeping these practices alive, while also reinforcing the local sense of pride and underlining the continuum between the cities' past and their present (and future).

Being part of the China's past revival process discussed by Landsberger,⁴²² the use of these Chinese elements in the PSA is nothing but a means to further promote patriotism, strengthening the sense of belonging to the nation through the reinforcement of the sense of belonging to and identifying with a local reality. As Landsberger points out, "the political element of patriotism has by and large replaced the political and class struggle content that dominated government propaganda in the pre-reform era."⁴²³

The Xi's presidency choice to recur to Chinese traditional elements, according to Landsberger, highly contrasts with the previous governances' habit to feature the leader's bust in the posters. According to the author, this change is the result of the leadership's acknowledgment that "posters

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

⁴²² Landsberger, "Learning By What Example?," 559.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 558.

showing reassuring and comforting images drawing on traditional symbols crowd the urban gaze,”⁴²⁴ as they present elements familiar to the public.

Although the analyzed campaigns have been issued on a local level, it is to be remembered that the cities of Ningbo and Deyang are an urban-evolved environment, where the nature of the ads is less practical and more aimed at spiritual improvement if compared to rural areas campaigns, which have more of an educational nature, and mainly focus on providing information and knowledge to benefit the people.⁴²⁵

The two campaigns have been launched in two cities (and provinces) whose historical and cultural background shows great differences: Ningbo, being a coastal city and thus more open to trading and cultural exchanges, has had a different development than Deyang, that belongs to the Sichuan province. The differences between two cities’ are also displayed in the layout of the PSA they created: while the Ningbo campaign has a tidy, minimal aspect, the Deyang campaign seems to be more related to old-style propaganda, featuring classical rhetoric figures in its slogans and having a more direct approach to its public, relying on the viewers’ knowledge of Chinese traditional symbols or of the Confucius figure. On a more subtle level, the larger presence of texts in the ads of the Deyang campaign can be seen as an attempt to demonstrate the city’s ability to eradicate illiteracy among its citizens;⁴²⁶ a goal that is considered already achieved in many urban realities.

The use of metaphors in both campaigns is a rather common feature in the China Dream propagandistic PSA,⁴²⁷ and it serves the scope to reinforce the ‘new’ message the Xi presidency wants to convey, combing it with elements of the Chinese tradition, in order to further legitimize the principles or behaviors that are being advocated.

On a linguistic level, both the campaigns abide by what has been defined by Chen as ‘Civilized public discourse’ (CPD). According to the author,

by CPDs, we refer to those instances of public discourse that are positive and helpful to the construction of spiritual civilization, the improvement of an individual’s quality and the cultivation of an honorable view of life and value. They usually convey positive emotions like attention and care to others, a sense of humanity, delight, and beauty.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁴ Stefan Landsberger, “China Dreaming. Representing the Perfect Present, Anticipating the Rosy Future,” in *Visual Arts, Representations and Interventions in Contemporary China: Urbanized Interface*, eds. Minna Valjakka and Meiqin Wang (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 166.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁴²⁷ Feng, “Analyzing Multimodal Chinese Discourse.”

⁴²⁸ Chen, *Chinese Public Discourse*, 99.

The linguistic choices of the two campaigns seem to carefully observe such a discourse, in an attempt to provide what could be considered a valuable example for the daily practice of such a way to communicate.

Following the outcomes of this study, the concept of *wenming* shows to have developed as more than just an abstract idea to recur to in the political speech, but as a tangible objective China has decided to pursue through the education of its population to such a living standard. At the same time, it is to notice how the government is struggling to keep alive what it considers the pivotal feature of its ideological and practical policies: the Chinese characteristics. The result of such a merging is the present intent of the authorities to build what can be called a ‘civilization with Chinese characteristics.’

It has thus been underlined how the Chinese concept of *wenming* has become a key feature of the country’s domestic and international policies, and how the sensitization campaigns on this topic largely rely on the transmission of this subject through the media, and particularly through the use of public service advertising in all its different forms and platforms.

From the years when *wenming* was deemed a rather negative concept, as it was inextricably linked to the term’s Western roots and implications, to its present denotation (and connotation), the development of the meaning ‘civilization’ has assumed, and of the contexts in which it has been employed, proves that the concept will still be a focal feature of the country’s political and social discourse and policies for many years to come.

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