Rhetoric in the Service of Reform:  
A Study of Chinese Discourse in Transition

Mei Zhang, Missouri Western State University

During the last three decades China has undergone fundamental changes and witnessed significant reforms. This essay considers Chinese rhetoric in its early transitional years by examining stories of model reformers in the most important Party newspaper, the *People’s Daily*. Relying primarily on Aristotle’s theory of rhetoric, the essay analyzes four major themes of press coverage: courage, hard work, political orientation, and relationship to others. The analysis points to a revamped presentation of Chinese values and identifies new tendencies in Chinese public discourse: from coercion to persuasion, from labels to stories, from enthymemes to examples, and from blame to praise.

During the last three decades China has undergone a fundamental change in the eyes of the West. Harding (1987) referred to this change as a “second revolution” and *Time* magazine hailed China as “a new superpower” at the “dawn of a new dynasty” (January 22, 2007). Under the leadership of Mao Zedong (1949-1976), China had portrayed itself as an egalitarian society in which individual interests were identified with the collective goals of the Party state. Since 1978, however, it has witnessed significant reforms, reforms that include decentralization, private ownership, stock markets, branch offices of foreign corporations, and access to a wide variety of Western cultural products, the very ideas and institutions that it had rigorously attacked and fiercely eliminated in the past.

This fundamental change has been the object of study by several scholars in the field of rhetoric. Some have examined specific communicative materials (e.g. official speeches, public documents, labels, slogans) and their role in bringing about changes in Chinese attitude and practice in such domains as politics, economics, and culture (Kluver, 1996; Lu & Simons, 2006). Others have explored the rhetorical dimensions of Chinese political communication texts (Heisey, 2000; Huang, 1996; Kluver & Powers, 1999; Lu, 2004). Still others have followed the lead of Oliver (1971) and sought to show the ways in which Chinese rhetoric differs from its Western counterpart (Garrett, 1993; Lee, 1998; Lee, 2004; Lu, 1998; Xiao, 1995, 1996, 2004).

This essay does not seek to establish that changes in politics, economics, or culture are a function of rhetoric. Nor does it try to show that different cultures have different rhetorics. Availing itself of the logic of the above projects, it asserts that changes have indeed taken place in China but subscribes to the claim that these changes are largely characterized by an opening to the West, which includes an opening to the ways of Western rhetoric. At the same time, it extends the existing literature on Chinese rhetoric by pointing to specific changes in Chinese rhetorical practice. In effect, this essay shows that Chinese values have received a new rhetorical treatment and identifies recent rhetorical changes that help explain China’s transformation vis-a-vis its opening to the West. Relying primarily on Aristotle’s rhetorical theory, I point to the following changes: (a) from coercion to persuasion, (b) from labels to stories, (c) from enthymemes to examples, and (d) from blame to praise.
The primary source for this essay is the most important Party newspaper, the *People’s Daily*. In what follows, I discuss newspaper stories of model reformers along four themes: courage, hard work, political orientation, and relationship to others. “Model reformers” refers to those urban entrepreneurs and peasants whose stories appeared in the official press (1979-1984) for having exhibited admirable qualities and performed extraordinary deeds, the kind that the larger citizenry should emulate. 1979 was the first year after the official declaration of economic reform, and 1984 was the first year when the Party decided to implement large-scale urban reforms following its claim of success in rural areas. The political dynamics of Chinese economic reform or the tensions within the top Party leadership is beyond the scope of this study -- scholars such as Nathan (1990) and White (1993) have addressed these topics elsewhere. Even though China has recently loosened its control of the press, the government newspaper in the early years of reform was not an official site of struggle among competing voices. Rather, it was a space for promoting citizenly reform actions.

**Aristotle’s Theory of Rhetoric**

Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as “the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever” (Book I, chap. 1) is well-known. Since the 1960s, the scope of rhetoric has been expanded from public speaking to a variety of rhetorical artifacts including writings, visual images, music lyrics, and public monuments. The stories of role models in the Chinese press are rhetorical in that they seek to persuade the public to emulate what the protagonists of the stories have done (Munro, 1977; Pye, 1988; Sheridan, 1968; Zhang, 1999, 2000). Aristotle states that the function of rhetoric “is to deal with things about which we deliberate, but for which we have no systematic rules” (Book I, chap. 2). In this sense, despite its origin in a classical Western model, Aristotle’s theory is useful to the Chinese context because at the time under consideration there were no systematic rules to follow in order to persuade the citizens about the importance of reforms. In the absence of systematic rules, the Chinese leadership seems to have relied on the logic of two cultural traditions: loyalty to the state and the love of honor. According to this logic, the state defines what is honorable and accords honors to its citizens. For their part, the citizens perform honorable deeds, which are recognized by the state.

This logic is largely anticipated by Aristotle. According to him, epideictic rhetoric praises actions or character traits, and aims at virtue and vice, the noble and the disgraceful. He further observes that virtue consists of such components as justice, courage, self-control, and wisdom. Virtuous and noble actions are driven by unselfish motives, which seek to benefit the society, the rewards being honor rather than money. Epideictic rhetoric employs amplification to praise persons who have performed great deeds by taking initiative rather than relying on chance. A speaker can compare them to “illustrious personages or ordinary persons” to show their superiority above the rest of the group (Book I, chap. 9). Clearly, epideictic rhetoric has ideological implications as it serves to legitimize policies, promote values and ideals, and encourage group solidarity (Kennedy, 1994, pp. 61-62; Poulakos & Poulakos, 1999, p. 66). It also serves to “accomplish the progressive function of adapting our community to new times, technologies, geographies, and events” (Condit, 1985, p. 297).
Courage

The image that dominated news coverage during the years of transition was an image of bold individuals willing to engage in reform and ready to confront controversy, pressure, and undesirable consequences for their actions. This was most obvious in such news headlines as “Female Manager with Courage and Insight” (Wang, 1982), “‘Maverick’ Factory Director Chen Dechun” (Wu & Lin, 1981), and “Disturbances from Carrying Out the Contract” (Fu & Jin, 1983). Words such as “courage,” “maverick,” and ‘disturbances” clearly suggest unprecedented, non-traditional, and controversial actions.

The stories of model entrepreneurs exhibit three key components of courage. One was to introduce what the Party had traditionally regarded as a “capitalist” management style, adopting the employee contract system and using economic incentives for reward. The well-known reformer Bu Xinsheng was the director of the Haiyan Shirt Factory in Zhejiang Province. His radical reform measures won him media publicity and the Ministry of Light Industry called on all cadres and workers to learn from him (Xinhua, 1984). He used economic means to motivate workers and punish those with poor job performances or long leaves of absence. He ignored conservative pressure from his supervisors, dissatisfaction from his workers, gossip from people on the streets, and advice of caution from his family regarding his bold reform measures (Zhang, Tong, & Zhang, 1984).

Second, the featured entrepreneurs were portrayed as having had the courage to take initiative and confront difficult situations during extraordinary times. While most reformers were enterprise directors, several workers were courageous enough to assume leadership positions when factories were on the verge of bankruptcy. Li Liangmei volunteered to be the director of the Huaibei Textile Mill in Anhui Province (Chen, 1984). Such an action was totally against the traditional cadre appointment system and led to suspicion about his desire for undue power. Later there was even a rumor that he was jailed because of his reform measures. As the story put it, “Reform is struggle.” To take action in times of adverse circumstances heightened the courageous image of reformers who struggled against destructive rumors and stood up to possible consequences, including the end of their careers.

Third, courage meant promoting intellectuals to important research positions and caring about their lives even before they were politically rehabilitated. As the Party secretary of the Harbin Rectifier Factory, Chen Xiuyun entrusted An Zhendong, an engineer suspected of having “historically political problems,” with important research projects and worked hard to reverse the political verdict on An. When another engineer’s wife was sick, Chen used the factory car to send her to the hospital when she herself switched buses several times to take her own father to his doctor (Li, Gu, & Xiao, 1984). Chen’s courageous action made her a provincial role model when the Party Committee of Heilongjiang Province called on all cadres to learn from her (Gu, 1984). Her actions were praised for being a perfect example of what the government had in mind.

In a similar vein, model peasants’ courage consisted of taking risky initiatives, following radically new policies, starting what had been considered capitalist practices in the pre-reform era, and confronting potential criticisms from many sides. As the head of a production team, Yang Xiaoyun from Hubei Province gained the honor of becoming a delegate to the National People’s Congress for having taken the lead in starting a new rural responsibility system that
enabled peasants to keep their surplus after turning in their contracted quota, and for having ignored criticism from conservative cadres (Mao & Peng, 1983). Furthermore, model peasants had the courage to make extra money by becoming specialized households. Village Party secretary Yu Zuomin of the well-known model agricultural unit of Daqizhuang in Jinghai County, Tianjin City, ignored potential controversies when he encouraged peasants to start sideline activities such as livestock breeding for extra money (Yu & Wang, 1981). Some peasants became specialized pig-raising and chicken-raising households without producing grain, the traditionally required staple (Li, 1982; Wang, 1981).

The above stories show the government’s will to praise role models and amplify their actions. In pre-reform years, market-style practices were regarded as imitations of a capitalist bourgeois economy. With the end of the Maoist era, however, the press covered model reformers as visionaries who embraced new policies and raced ahead of their peers, unafraid of policy reversals and confident in the country’s new leadership. Because they took initiative, rose to the occasion, and stood above the general population with their pioneering actions, they were deemed worthy of public praise. In the eyes of the government, their courage embodied newly prescribed virtues, the noble and honorable actions expected of citizens in an era of reform.

The same stories also suggest that the Party press invented new meanings for Chinese values. The Party maintained the same values in wording, but treated them differently, to fit its new agenda. As Simons (2001) points out, such rhetorical production drew on existing “cultural frames and verbal repertoires” (p. 121). For example, courage in pre-reform China meant heroic action that consummated in injury or death during war time, relentless dedication to class struggle against ideological enemies, whether they be colleagues, neighbors, or even family members, and an altruistic work ethic at the expense of physical health. “Party heroes are most often depicted as more than human without any faults or individualistic feelings. They derive emotional fulfillment from their responsibility to the Party” (Wortzel, 1987, p. 55). In the experimental period of reform, courage meant adopting what had been considered Western “capitalism,” promoting intellectuals, pursuing scientific knowledge, and facing unforeseeable consequences to one’s bold actions. In a word, courage meant taking risks and being unafraid to make mistakes, all in an effort to seek material prosperity.

Governmental reform also redefined the meaning of benefits in connection to equality and money. After the Communist takeover in 1949, the government nationalized the country’s industry, agriculture, commerce, and handicrafts (Meisner, 1999; Parish, 1985; Wu, 2005). Defined in terms of collectivism in state-run enterprises and communes, equality meant equal shares of job security and equal pay for similar job classifications regardless of individual contribution. Financial incentives were hardly available, and the mere mention of money was perceived to have undesirable associations with Western bourgeois selfishness. Role models at the time uniformly shared the image of indifference to money and a commitment to the abstract ideal of “serving the people.” In the reform era, equality meant fair access to monetary bonuses for superior work. This new reality assumed an impartial judge of employee performance instead of an overseer of operations under a system of central planning. Peasants were now urged to seek equal opportunity for material prosperity without fear of public humiliation at political gatherings and the confiscation of personal possessions. The new official slogan “To get rich is glorious” associated wealth and money with personal
glory and public honor. Consequently money served as a control mechanism and a concrete reward for outstanding performances. As long as they followed the new policies without challenging the political status quo, citizens were encouraged to become rich within the new scope of a socialist government.

Last, the value of knowledge also received a new treatment. During Mao’s tenure, knowledge was useful and important only in so far as it was ideologically attuned and served the Party’s political cause. Intellectuals were regarded as a class to be reformed; they were told to learn from the working class, the driving force of the Communist revolution. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), anything associated with “undesirable” knowledge became suspect, many intellectuals suffered all sorts of indignities, and universities admitted only those from the right political and class background (Chow, 2007; Lu, 2004). With the end of class struggle in the reform era, knowledge was divorced from politics and became a crucial part of Chinese modernization. The government redefined intellectuals as members of the working class and raised their status to a class indispensable to economic development. Promoting intellectuals and pursuing scientific knowledge to modernize China became two of the most honorable actions.

Hard Work

Model entrepreneurs reportedly should possess leadership abilities to raise workplace efficiency and to motivate workers. As the branch head of the Liaoning Power Plant, Du Chaohai was once a model cadre because he worked hard without complaining about hardships; he even lived in the factory to save commuting time. However, Liang Laixin, the new Party secretary, criticized Du for lacking the qualities of an effective cadre and for being only a good worker while ignoring the management aspects of his work and quality control of machinery (Min & Wang, 1979).

Meanwhile, model peasants worked hard to improve their lives. “Working hard to get rich” was a new official slogan in the implementation of rural reform. Li Linhuai’s family in Shanxi Province worked on contracted land and raised livestock such as horses and cattle. His wife said that they never had a good night’s sleep as they had to get up several times every night to feed the animals. Their three children all helped after school (Gao & An, 1982).

Model peasants also acquired scientific knowledge diligently. Yang Xiaoyun from Hubei not only worked hard on contracted land and tried to increase production of chickens, pigs, vegetables, and fish but also learned from technicians and elderly peasants and read books on growing rice and plants. Shu Yulan won the honor of attending the model workers’ meeting in Shenyang City because of her outstanding skills in raising pigs. Her success resulted from trial and error, hard work, perseverance, and consultation with scientific books (Li, 1982).

The above examples suggest continuing and new meanings of hard work. In the pre-reform era, the value of hard work meant endless hours of dedication by working overtime with little attention to family life and personal benefits. Hard work was often associated with manual labor and selfless sacrifice. In the reform era, hard work continued to denote perseverance, sacrifice of leisure time, and selfless dedication to work, as in the case of some model peasants. However, it had an important new dimension of leadership abilities for modern management and relentless pursuit of scientific knowledge in an attempt to raise efficiency. Political consciousness and physical labor alone proved inadequate for
modernization. Therefore, essential skills to motivate workers and to produce practical economic results became the top priority for enterprise directors instead of sole political criteria. Political attitude and hard work in the traditional sense were still necessary but not sufficient.

This new treatment of hard work reinforced the new policy of promoting intellectuals and scientific knowledge in Chinese modernization. Apparently, such press coverage reversed Mao’s efforts to efface the difference between mental and manual work. Mao had always called on cadres and intellectuals to learn from workers in factories and peasants on farms so as to get rid of what he perceived as bourgeois privileges and outlooks. The story seemed to indicate that good mental work at business administration could bring out the manual work initiative and potentials of workers. Since mental work is usually perceived to be the realm of intellectuals, this story reinforced the importance of intellectual knowledge.

**Political Orientation**

The actions of model entrepreneurs suggest a new direction of ideological pragmatism as evidenced by a decreasing emphasis on political study meetings, which had often consisted of shouting slogans, reading Party documents, and understanding government policies. Urban reformers related political ideological work, if at all, to enterprise progress and workers’ benefits. For example, as the director of the Haiyan Shirt Factory in Zhejiang Province, Bu Xinsheng associated political meetings with employees’ sense of responsibility as factory members. He created a factory song and required every new worker to memorize it. When his enterprise moved from an old shabby place to a new building, he held a recreational party for the employees at which he put forward the new production goals (Tong, 1983). In addition, urban reformers cared about employees’ working and living conditions. As the director of a township clothing factory in Liaoning Province, Li Guilian liked to hold meetings for workers and their families to keep them posted on economic development and future plans (Yu, 1984).

On the other hand, model peasants kept socialist principles by aspiring to join the Party and keeping correct political orientation rather than focusing on profits. Shu Yulan sold her 41 pigs to the government at a regular price when she could have made extra money by selling them to self-employed retailers. Zhao Jianxiu got rich after producing extra grain. At the Henan provincial meeting for model agricultural workers, Zhao thought not only about selling more grain to the country but also about becoming a new peasant with “socialist consciousness” by joining the Party some day (He, 1983). Indeed, Yanggu County in Shandong Province admitted nearly three hundred newly rich peasants into the Party out of over two thousand applicants (“Reqing Xishou,” 1984).

The above stories demonstrate that reform called for concrete contributions to enterprise success and economic development. Political ideological work served the practical purpose of boosting production and tapping workers’ potentials and became connected to employee benefits such as improvement of housing allocation and living conditions. Such stories reinforced the new treatment of benefits in the reform era and urged cadres to adopt creative forms of political work that focused on economic development. This radical step reaffirmed the importance of courage and initiative in leadership and administration.

The same stories indicate new conceptions of money and wealth. In the pre-reform era, poor Communist peasants were regarded as the most reliable rural force. The new meaning of
money suggests that getting rich was associated with patriotism and political honor, which seems to imply that a better material life could help peasants with correct political aspirations. This seemingly reversed way of thinking constituted a sharp contrast to previous policies of relating a lack of interest in financial benefits to correct political attitude. Shu’s indifference to extra profits served to tell cadres that getting rich would not change peasants’ correct political orientation or their love and support of the Party. Such coverage of model peasants shows not only their political aspiration but also the new requirements for Party members in the reform era. Stories like these encouraged peasants to embrace material prosperity and pursue lofty ideals, therefore reinforcing the new official slogans that associated glory and honor with wealth and hard work.

Relationship to Others

Model reformers’ relationship to others suggests a proper balance among profit-making, pursuit of consumption, and generosity toward the community. Model entrepreneurs focused on profit-making as the ultimate goal for their enterprises. For example, after managing the Friendship Restaurant in Shenzhen for three years, Zou Hong increased tax payments to the government because of the restaurant’s increasing profits (Zou & Zhang, 1983). Similarly, Bu Xinsheng in Zhejiang Province was reported as making huge profits for his shirt factory and expanding sales markets in over twenty cities across China (Tong, 1983).

On the other hand, model peasants got rich without forgetting to help others on the road to success. Yang Xiaoyun from Hubei Province organized the peasants to assist those households without enough labor force for farm work and helped to repair the house of a fire victim (Mao & Peng, 1983). Dai Tinggui from Fujian Province donated money to help neighbors set up pigsties. Dai said that he wanted to give back to his community and his country as one should “never forget the well-digger when drinking water” (Tian, 1982, p. 5). Rich villages gave aid to other rural towns. Daquzhuang in rural Tianjin City provided neighboring regions with technical assistance and donated money to a county that suffered heavy losses from snowstorms (Shi, 1984).

Meanwhile, a relevant point in the coverage of rich peasants was on their desire for consumption to live a better life. Yu Zuomin, a rural cadre from Tianjin City, said that peasants needed to learn how to engage in consumption and recreation such as wearing suits, setting up hotels, and letting youth hold dance parties, a new trend in Chinese society in the early 1980s. He wanted to turn his village into “a township with high material civilization and high spiritual civilization” (Ge, 1984, p. 2). Similarly, peasants in Fengxin County wanted to diversify their life by traveling, wearing expensive ready-made clothes, buying costly candies and snacks, and “enjoying modern spiritual civilization and cultural life” (Xinhua, 1983, p. 2). This aspect of coverage shows that the Party encouraged peasants not only to get rich and help others but also to pursue a better leisure life for themselves.

These stories reinforced the new meaning of benefits in the reform era as profits and wealth became associated with glory and honor. The main responsibility of an enterprise director became one of keeping a company self-sufficient and profitable, thus contributing to the country’s overall economic development. Therefore, political judgment ceased to be the dominant criterion to evaluate cadres and a new style of management assumed an important role in measuring success. The image of model reformers indicates a new relationship among
employees, enterprises, and the nation. A profitable enterprise could benefit employees by providing extra income and better living conditions and could contribute to the country by increasing tax payment and enabling citizens to live a better life.

A comparison of the stories of model entrepreneurs and model peasants indicates the competing treatments of money in the reform era. While the former rigorously sought profits, the latter focused on helping others. Model peasants’ donation of their time and money suggests that economic reform did not change the socialist nature of the country because the Party urged the rich to assist the poor. Such stories show the noble ideals of model peasants, who were always ready to give back to their community. In light of the letters-to-the-editor by newly rich peasants complaining of the pressure for monetary donation from all sides, the stories not only indicated the correct political consciousness of model rich peasants but also told the public to be more understanding and have more compassion. Furthermore, the stories prescribed ideal behavior for peasants and urged them never to forget the community after their success.

Meanwhile, the stories of peasants who sought a better leisure life suggest that a good material life was related to a better quality of spiritual life via consumption, recreation, and better understanding of the country and its culture through traveling. Hence, while the main focus was on helping others to get rich, the Party endorsed increasing consumption. The economic reform era encouraged more diversity in model behavior. Model rich peasants were urged to help others, but they also had the right to a better life for themselves. Such images also told cadres to promote reform policies by embracing the new criteria to evaluate rich peasants.

Changes in Chinese Rhetoric

The stories of model reformers indicate significant changes in Chinese rhetoric during the transitional period. First, public discourse changed from coercion to persuasion, from propaganda that forced action to persuasion that encouraged participation. As the mouthpiece of the Party, the press provided the Chinese not only with information but more importantly with political direction. As Schell (1988) has noted, “It is not out of simple curiosity or a sense of civic duty that Chinese maintain their vigilance over the political climate, but out of a sense of self-preservation” (p. 247). During Mao’s rule, the news in China worked to build a forced consensus, the basis of Communist rule and legitimacy (Chang, Wang, & Chen, 1994, p. 66). The government nationalized the economy under central planning and forced the citizens to forfeit their private businesses and land and to work for state enterprises and rural communes. Political campaigns and class struggles reached their peak during the chaotic years of the Cultural Revolution. Political rituals such as self-criticism and denunciation rallies together with political slogans, wall posters, revolutionary songs, and model opera deified Mao, forced mass participation in the movement, and left a lasting impact on Chinese thought and culture (Lu, 2004). The top-down vertical form of ideological propaganda provided citizens with political idioms and slogans. Horizontal forms of group meetings and mass rallies forced the citizens to worship Mao and attack class enemies. “Horizontal communication strategies forced people into group situations and often put them on public display, thus pressuring them to conform to ritualistic norms and rules” (Lu, 2004, p. 150).
In the post-Mao reform era, the stories of model reformers differed in the nature of persuasion, though they continued to help the government to promote new policies and prescribe ideal citizen behavior. Driven by a new ideological pragmatism, Chinese rhetoric changed from seeking public conformity to encouraging citizen engagement, from what life should be as expected by the Party to what life could be with the possibilities of material prosperity brought about by economic reform. The new policies opened doors to private businesses and a Western-style market economy. The stories of model reformers served to dispel the fear of policy reversals and suggested to the citizens that pursuing a new direction was a glorious and worthy undertaking.

Second, Chinese discourse changed from negative labels to positive stories, from what should not be done to what could be done, in an attempt to improve people's lives and to perpetuate Communist legitimacy and control. During Mao's political movements and class struggles, labels put people into different classes. Kluver (1996), Lu (2004), and Van de Ven (1995) have pointed out the essential function of political texts in Chinese communication. Commenting on the role of verbal attacks in mobilizing the public, Pye (1981) states that "the application of labels in the unmasking of opponents is a demonstration of the Chinese belief in the destructive power of words and not proof of objective sociological realities." Therefore, "the labels employed by the Chinese media have shattering powers" (Pye, 1981, p. 235). Labels were often connected with class designations and a person with "historical problems" could call forth various negative political connotations (Kraus, 1981, pp. 59-60). Indeed, Schoenhals (1992) argues that formalized language and political terminologies constitute an essential means of political control in China. The negative terms that categorized different classes in society automatically put them into positions deprived of opportunities in life. The stories of model reformers suggest that the reform era used no negative labels to describe or attack those who were reluctant to follow the Party's new policies. The few new slogans such as "To get rich is glorious" and "Work hard to get rich" and the new term "million-yuan household" were all positive words that describe pioneers who had the courage to seek material prosperity. The new "enemy," if any, was the invisible public fear of policy reversals and opposition based on Maoist ways of thinking. The stories of model reformers illustrated the possibilities brought about by the new policies.

Third, Chinese discourse changed from enthymemes to the increasing use of positive examples to persuade the public to engage in economic reform. Garrett (1991) states that the Chinese have used argument from authority, from consequences, by chains of incomplete syllogism, and by comparison throughout history. An enthymeme is a rhetorical syllogism and an example is rhetorical induction (Aristotle, Book I, chap. 2). While enthymemes proceed deductively from general propositions to a specific conclusion, examples work inductively from specific cases to a general conclusion. Unlike a syllogism, the enthymeme usually is missing one or two of its premises and leads to a likely conclusion, assuming that the audience already knows what the premises are. During Mao's era, public argument was largely characterized by reliance on his teachings, the most authoritative source for political reasoning. Contrary to Western rhetoric that deals with probability, Mao's works served as indisputable premises and deduction from them reportedly pointed to absolute truth that all citizens were expected to internalize. Maoist ideology became "a set of immutable precepts" and "brooked neither opposition nor qualification" (White, 1993, p. 151). Therefore, reality was rhetorically created and politically constructed via such a deductive way of argument. For
example, Pye (1981) states that the bourgeois class was a rhetorical creation as China did not have a middle class under Mao’s tenure (p. 235). Based on its political ideology, the Party’s teachings worked deductively in addition to the use of examples of role models.

With the end of Mao worship in the reform era, there was a shift to an increasing use of examples. “Examples are persuasive because they illustrate and support arguments and because they resonate with the experience of popular audiences” (Poulakos & Poulakos, 1999, p. 116). Outstanding individuals’ performances embodied the new ideal attitudes, values, and behavior and epitomized the best engagement efforts called forth by the new reform policies. Their stories served as ideological tools, pushing for economic reform while perpetuating the hegemony of the Party government. The *People’s Daily* complemented the official documents and paved the way to reform by attempting to convince the public of the new policy directions via the stories of everyday Chinese who dared to engage in reform and live a better life, the most honorable and glorious actions in the new era.

Fourth, Chinese discourse changed from blame to praise during the transition years of economic reform. Throughout the Chinese Communist history, negative role models were often used to support winning factions within the top Party leadership and subsequent political and economic campaigns. For example, purged leaders such as Liu Shaoqi (head of state before his downfall) and Lin Biao (Mao’s successor before his failed coup) were attacked publicly to support political movements. During the Great Leap Forward and the Anti-Rightist Movement, especially during the Cultural Revolution, some officials and citizens were singled out for criticism, self-criticism, and public humiliation in the media as negative role models. Such efforts were designed to unite the people against a common enemy and blame the enemy for all Party mistakes and policy failures. In Burke’s (1961/1970) term, it was a process of purification and symbolic killing to find a perfect scapegoat through victimage.

With the official declaration of the end of class struggle, comparable large-scale national political purging did not take place during the early years of economic reform. The Chinese regime changed from totalitarianism to authoritarianism (Nathan, 1997). Even though reform was incremental with triumphs, setbacks, and political factionism (Nathan, 1990), the press coverage did not identify negative role models who were afraid to engage in reform. There was no nation-wide mobilization or public criticism of those who were strongly opposed to reform. The praises of positive role models were designed to convince the public that the citizens would be not punished for practicing certain “elements of capitalism,” instead of blaming those who did not dare to do so. The Chinese style of persuasion focused increasingly on inspiring positive role models; those individuals exhibiting panoramic qualities and deeds became national role models to receive public honors and media coverage across the country.

**Conclusion**

This essay has analyzed the stories of model reformers along four themes -- courage, hard work, political orientation, and relationship to others -- in the *People’s Daily* during the early years of economic reform in China. Model workers possessed the courage to engage in Western-style entrepreneurship, management, and profit-making. Model peasants had the boldness to get rich while keeping socialist principles and helping others. The image
convergence and divergence suggest the Party’s identification strategies with different groups of Chinese society and the incremental nature of economic reform, as new ideas competed with and replaced old ones in the Chinese political culture. The Party government used epideictic rhetoric to sing the praises of model reformers. The official press, as the location for special public address ceremonies, constantly paid tribute to the role models and amplified their actions in connection to such ideals as honor, virtue, nobility, and glory. The mere fact that they were covered by the newspaper indicated their honorable status and the significance of their actions in the overall spectrum of China’s strategic map for economic development. Persuasion by role models served essential functions in Chinese political discourse at a time of historic transition. The transitional rhetoric attempted to promote new policies, prescribe new ideal behavior, and convince Chinese citizens of the long-term stability and continuity of the post-Mao reform era.

The reform rhetoric embodied values of market economy as reflected in the new rhetorical treatment of existing values of socialism, indicating to citizens what was virtuous, honorable, and noble. Courage meant initiative in adopting a Western management style and seeking wealth and profits. Honest money from hard work took on new positive connotations associated with a better future for individuals, their companies, and the Chinese nation. Equality meant equal opportunity in a new system that promoted competition and efficiency. Scientific knowledge became depoliticized and began to replace Mao’s teachings as the basis for modernization. Hard work was closely connected to efficiency, practical results, and pursuit of technology. Socialist principles including dedication to the Party, desire to join the Party, and generosity toward others became constantly associated with practical results of economic development and a better quality of life. Meanwhile, altruism and indifference to inappropriate income were still used to describe some role models. New conceptions of Chinese values redefined the highest noble ideals such as honor, virtue, and glory. Multiple levels of meanings of some values illustrated the multi-faceted approach to relate to various groups of the Chinese population. Role models were more like ordinary human beings with eagerness and skills to seek material prosperity instead of exhibiting only qualities of hard work, altruism, and devotion to the Party.

Chinese discourse changed from coercion to persuasion, from labels to stories, from enthymemes to examples, and from blame to praise. Coercive propaganda using deductive argument from Mao’s teachings, negative labels, and blame on class enemies gave way to a new type of persuasion that encouraged citizen participation in economic reform via the stories of admirable role models and praises of their actions. Meanwhile, it is important to remember that Chinese reform took place in stages in a vast country with the world’s largest population and huge regional differences. During the post-Mao transitional period, Chinese political rhetoric did not change overnight; new discourses gradually complemented and replaced existing ones. As the Chinese adapted to a Western style market economy, Chinese rhetoric began to open up to certain ways of Western persuasion with its ideological pragmatism and pursuit of persuasion to replace coercion. The new Chinese rhetoric opened the doors of possibilities for the citizens, rather than presenting a range of consequences for failure to conform to a forced consent. As China deepens its economic reform, the Chinese rhetorical experience offers new opportunities for researching the country’s converging values and modes of persuasion with the West while retaining its distinctive cultural heritage.
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