

Secret Codes of Political Propaganda: The Unknown System of Writing Teams

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Abstract

Within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), some Party units have established a largely unknown network of writing teams which propagate the policies or perspectives of a particular unit by publishing feature articles in Party journals. These writing teams often make use of a pseudonym in the form of a person's name, leading outsiders to believe that the work is written by a journalist. In fact, the pseudonyms of the Party unit writing teams function as a form of secret code. Through this code, inner Party members can recognize which unit's views an article reflects. In order to reveal exactly which units the codes represent, we have collated the names of over 20 writing teams. In addition, we provide an introduction to the functioning of the writing teams and the manner in which articles are produced. Finally, we propose that the CCP's mechanism of "propaganda codes" is gradually undergoing the process of institutionalization.

Keywords: *People's Daily*; Ren Zhongping; propaganda; writing teams; China

Propaganda is an integral part of the CCP political system. Having inherited the national party system of the USSR, the CCP bears the same characteristics of a "propaganda state."¹ That is to say, it follows a nationally-directed propaganda system which encourages citizens to submit to and carry out set policies. Current literature puts forward varying perspectives regarding the development of the CCP's propaganda system, with many scholars believing that economic development and the rise of civil society will have an impact.² However, Brady suggests that in recent years the CCP has studied mechanisms of media management in other countries and has subsequently applied these methods to reform the Party's own propaganda system in a bid to shore up the legitimacy of the Party-state regime.³

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1 Kenez 1985.

2 Zhao 1998; Kynch 1999; Shambaugh 2007.

3 Brady 2008, 180–82.

This article posits that the CCP has strengthened its capacity to govern through reform of the propaganda system. Furthermore, in the realm of Party affairs, propaganda is understood to touch upon not only thought work (*sixiang gongzuo* 思想工作), but also organization work (*zuzhi gongzuo* 组织工作) and political and legal work (*zhengfa gongzuo* 政法工作). In Party affairs departments, such as the Central Propaganda Department (CPD), the Central Organization Department (COD), and the Political and Legislative Affairs Committee, there exists a relatively unknown propaganda system of writing teams (*xiezuozu* 写作组) deployed to publish articles in journals. These writing teams often go by a pseudonym in the form of a person's name which alludes to certain units of a department and effectively forms a "secret code," thereby enabling inner Party members to identify precisely which unit's views an article reflects.

There are two reasons why Party affairs units may choose to use pseudonyms. First, there is a culture of ambiguity and allusion in Chinese politics which pervades CCP propaganda work. Although inner Party members can recognize which unit's views an article reflects,⁴ the veiling of authors prevents outsiders from perceiving any disputes within the Party. Although clashes in interests do occur at the highest levels of the CCP's political leadership, under the key principles of collective leadership and democratic centralism, the CCP must consistently present a façade of a united, harmonious Party.⁵ This paper will demonstrate that even recently Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 may have established a writing team to criticize Wen Jiabao's 温家宝 policies. However, outsiders still have limited insight into the pseudonyms of writing teams and the political significance of this secret code.

The second reason is concerned with public reactions to propaganda. As the new generation of grassroots officials and citizens has been exposed to a more pluralized culture, they may have a negative emotional response when faced with dogmatic Party affairs propaganda, particularly when articles are published under the name of certain Party affairs departments.⁶ The roundabout method of pseudonyms is employed to reduce the potential negative response of the target audience.

This article begins with a look at the historical background of writing teams and their pseudonyms. It goes on to reveal the secret codes behind the teams, how many teams there are, and which units they represent. It also describes the modes of operation and motivations of the teams, before concluding with a discussion of the institutionalization of the propaganda system of writing teams.

4 Although the CCP has not released a table of the writing teams and their respective official units, interviews with some grassroots-level cadres revealed that they were aware of which writing team was associated with which official unit. They explained that the meaning of the writing team pseudonyms and the names of their units have an established association. In addition, CCP cadres are particularly sensitive about wording and are easily able to guess which writing team matches which unit.

5 Openness about the existence of political factions within the CCP is strictly forbidden. See Dittmer 1995, 35.

6 Interview with grassroots-level cadre, Shanghai, 15 February 2011.

The Formation and Evolution of Writing Teams

The use of writing teams to produce items of propaganda began during the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s.⁷ In 1963, the CCP established the Central Committee Anti-Revisionism Document Drafting Group which was headed by Kang Sheng 康生 and directly subordinate to the Central Politburo Standing Committee. The writing groups of this era did not make use of personified pseudonyms, but rather published articles under the name of the *People's Daily* newspaper editorial department.⁸ The process followed at that time was that after a writing team had completed a draft article, Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 would convene a meeting of writing team members and the team would re-draft the article according to any suggested revisions. Then, the article would be presented to Mao Zedong 毛泽东, Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 and Zhou Enlai 周恩来 for examination. If there were any differing opinions, the article would be returned to the writing team for further revision. Finally, Mao would call a meeting of the Politburo to discuss the revised draft and make the final decision whether to publish it or not.⁹

In the Cultural Revolution era, writing teams had more room for development. Mao and the Gang of Four (Jiang Qing 江青, Zhang Chunqiao 张春桥, Yao Wenyuan 姚文元 and Wang Hongwen 王洪文) used writing groups to manipulate public opinion and attack political rivals. These writing groups were made up mostly of academics and were highly secretive. The academics did not articulate their own opinions when writing but instead simply provided a service to the ruling elite.¹⁰ During the Cultural Revolution, every provincial government formed its own writing team. However, the term “writing team” did not refer to a team per se, but to an administrative system. Throughout this period, the government referred to all full-time departmental systems as teams, for example the Agriculture Team, Industry Team and Commerce Team, and writing teams were of equal importance to these other systems. That is to say, at the time of the Cultural Revolution, the term writing teams in fact referred to a writing system. However, this was a rather irregular administrative structure,¹¹ which reflected the rapid expansion of power of propaganda mechanisms at that time.¹²

It was at this time that writing teams also began to use pseudonyms. One of the best-known writing teams went by the name Liang Xiao 梁效, seemingly a person's name, which is practically homophonous with *liang xiao* 两校 (two

7 The CCP published nine articles in the *People's Daily* criticizing the Soviet Union. These articles are known collectively as the “Nine polemics” (*jiu ping*). This affair made the CCP begin to consider the necessity of cultivating revolutionary successors. See MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, 7.

8 Wu 1999, 641.

9 *Ibid.*, 638.

10 Ding 1999, 170–71.

11 Yu, Qiuyu 2004, 269.

12 Although the operations of the CPD almost completely stopped during the Cultural Revolution, the Gang of Four used other informal methods of propaganda, including writing teams, to expand the power of propaganda mechanisms.

schools). The original name of the writing team was *Beijing daxue, Qinghua daxue da pipanzu* 北京大学、清华大学大批判组 (Beijing University and Qinghua University Criticism Group), hence the “two schools” significance. The group was under the command of Mao and Jiang Qing, and was split into three smaller divisions: the Materials Team, the Writing Team and the Annotation Team.¹³ The group had its own office and was also responsible for printing ordinary administrative materials. The leaders of these units were all employed by Beijing University or Qinghua University.¹⁴ The Liang Xiao group was perhaps the most comprehensively structured of all writing teams to date.

Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four set up many more writing teams to propagate their policies and views, and all of them used personified pseudonyms. For example, Tang Xiaowen 唐晓文, which is similar in sound to *dang xiaowen* 党校文, a shortened form of *Zhongyang dangxiao xiezuozu* 中央党校写作组 (Central Party School Writing Team); Hong Guangsi 洪广思, which is a near homophone of *hong guang si* 弘光寺, a name representing the Beijing Party Committee Writing Team (*Beijing shiwei xiezuozu* 北京市委写作组);¹⁵ Luo Siding 罗思鼎, a name used by the Shanghai Party Committee Writing Team (*Shanghai shiwei xiezuozu* 上海市委写作组) is a near homophone of *luo si ding* 螺丝钉 which derives from a famous saying by Lei Feng: *Zuo yi ke yong bu shengxiu de geming luosiding* 做一颗永不生锈的革命螺丝钉 (be a revolutionary screw that never rusts); and Chu Lan 初澜, used by the Ministry of Culture Writing Team (*Wenhua bu xiezuozu* 文化部写作组), which is homophonous with *chu lan* 出蓝, a term derived from the Chinese idiom *qing chu yu lan* 青出于蓝 (the disciple outdoes the master).¹⁶

After gaining control of the State Council in 1975, Deng Xiaoping also founded a writing group in a bid to break the Gang of Four's hold over ideology. He ordered Hu Qiaomu 胡乔木 to set up an underground writing team called the Office for Political Research (*Zhengzhi yanjiushi* 政治研究室). Its purpose was to disseminate Deng's ideas and oppose the Liang Xiao group.¹⁷ The enlisted cadres all had shared backgrounds with Deng Xiaoping, and everything possible was done to ensure that it was not infiltrated by supporters of the Gang of Four. The Office of Political Research was broken down into the Domestic Team,

13 During the Cultural Revolution, many critiques of the political situation used wording from classical Chinese poetry. Thus, those tasked with writing such critical articles needed annotation teams to put classical Chinese into everyday speech. Liang Xiao member, Zhou Yiliang, recalls that Mao Zedong's speeches often made use of poetry and classical stories. Jiang Qing, not understanding these references, ordered an annotation team to provide further information. See Zhou, Yiliang 1998, 394–95.

14 Fan 1999, 19–23.

15 Hong Guang Temple is the location of the Beijing Party Committee's headquarters.

16 Ding 2005, 5; Yin 2004, 30–31.

17 Ding Dong believes that Deng Xiaoping named this writing team the Office for Political Affairs instead of giving it a pseudonym because he had specific intentions for the nature and institutionalization of writing teams. Ding 2005, 9.

International Team, Debates Team, Materials Team, and the main office.¹⁸ Deng Xiaoping also launched a new journal, *Sixiang zhanxian* 思想战线 (*Ideological Front*), for the same purpose.

During the final stages of the Cultural Revolution, Liang Xiao and the Office for Political Research were used by the Gang of Four and Deng Xiaoping to criticize one another and to propagate their own opposing ideologies. After the arrest of the Gang of Four, the Liang Xiao group was disbanded and the Office for Political Research merged with the Research Office of the Central Committee Office in 1979.¹⁹ By this time, the writing team system had developed significantly, particularly in terms of personified pseudonyms, a trend which has continued to this day.

The Involvement of the *People's Daily* in Writing Teams Today

The CCP continues to use writing teams although struggles of idealism are no longer the main issue and so very few of the units' writing teams criticize each other's policies. Instead, their purpose is to publicize the policies and perspectives of the unit to which they are subordinate. The CCP's principal party newspaper, the *People's Daily*, has the finest writing teams which are used to disseminate the ideas of the Central Propaganda Department. Before discussing these teams in more depth, it is necessary to explain the commentary articles in the *People's Daily*. According to a former editor of the *People's Daily*, Zhou Ruijin 周瑞金, the newspaper's commentaries can be split into three levels. The first level is made up of editorial articles (*she lun* 社论) and commentary pieces (*pinglun yuan* 评论员) which may be written collectively by writing teams or by individual senior journalists or cadres. This level of article covers the most important topics. According to a former *People's Daily* commentary department chief, Ma Licheng 马立诚, these articles directly reflect the views of the CPD and the editorial department of the *People's Daily*, and are published as "Editorial" instead of using a pseudonym. The editorials are more generalized, whereas commentary pieces often deal with more specific topics.²⁰ Thus, articles concerning more important topics, regardless of whether they are written by individuals or not, never use an individual's name.

The second level consists of commentaries on specific issues, which are composed by the newspaper's own writing teams under personified pseudonyms. First-level articles are produced according to the direct orders of the CPD and so are often fairly short, but second-level commentaries are allowed to expound on the subjects and ideas dictated by the CPD, and so articles may be much longer. The third level of commentary articles consists of contributions by readers which the *People's Daily* publishes under headings such as "Discussion of the

18 Yu 2005, 33–38.

19 Feng 2000, 4.

20 Ma, Licheng 1996, 34.

Day” (*Jinri tan* 今日谈) and “People’s Forum” (*Renmin luntan* 人民论坛).²¹ The majority of the articles in this category are written by individuals and so do not come under the scope of this research.

On occasion, the *People’s Daily* publishes articles under a special commentator category (*teyue pinglunyuan* 特约评论员). These are even more important than the first-level commentator articles and the unit behind these articles may be of an even higher level than the CPD. This type of article began to appear in 1977 when, during the struggle against the Gang of Four, Hu Yaobang 胡耀邦 organized a writing team, which went by the pseudonym Yue Ping 岳平, to publish articles in important journals. Yue Ping is a homophone of *yue ping* 约评, a shortened form of the term *teyue pinglunyuan* 特约评论员 (special commentator).²² The CCP then abandoned this pseudonym and began to publish important articles under the special commentator category. Articles by high-level officials may also be published under the special commentator category. For example, Ye Xiaowen 叶小文, a former director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, has been a special commentator for the *People’s Daily*.²³

According to Zhou Ruijin’s breakdown of the categories of commentary articles in the *People’s Daily*, the second level of articles are all composed by writing teams using pseudonyms, important examples of which include: Ren Zhongping 任仲平, He Zhenhua 何振华, Ke Jiaoping 柯教平, Guo Jiping 国纪平 and Zhong Yan 仲言. These are explained individually below.

Ren Zhongping, under the jurisdiction of the *People’s Daily* commentary department, has in the past decade or so been the pseudonym of the newspaper’s most important writing team. The name is a homophone of *ren zhong ping* 人重评, a shortened form of *Renmin ribao zhongyao pinglun* 人民日报重要评论 (*People’s Daily* important commentary). According to Zhou Ruijin, following Deng Xiaoping’s tour of southern China in 1992, the CCP Central Committee dictated that the *People’s Daily* must write several commentaries to advocate the importance of Deng’s policies of reform and opening up. Staff members completed the drafts of these commentaries after collaborative discussion and composition. The *People’s Daily* originally planned to publish the articles under the name Ren Zhongwen 任仲文, which is a homophone of *ren zhong wen* 人重文, a shortened form of *Renmin ribao zhongyao wenzhang* 人民日报重要文章 (*People’s Daily* important article), but eventually changed this to Ren Zhongping 任仲平,²⁴ and in 1993, an article was published under that byline in support of Deng’s reform policies.²⁵

21 Yi 1994, 26.

22 “Hu Yaobang yu ‘teyue pinglunyuan’” (Hu Yaobang and “special commentator”), *Meizhou wenzhai*, 25 November 2005.

23 Ye, Xiaowen. 2008. “Kai nian ju shuo ‘wanghailou’” (New hope for the new year), *People’s Daily Overseas Press*, 16 February.

24 Yi 1994, 27.

25 Ren, Zhongping. 1993. “Cong shiyijie sanzong quan hui dao shisijie sanzong quan hui” (From the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee to the Third Plenary Session of the 14th Central Committee), *People’s Daily*, 22 December.

The pseudonym continues to be used today. When big incidents occur, the CCP publishes articles by Ren Zhongping to boost public morale, and so many high-level officials pay close attention to articles appearing under this name. Deputy chief of the *People's Daily* commentary department and a member of the Ren Zhongping writing team, Lu Xinning 卢新宁, recalls that during the SARS outbreak, articles condemning SARS were published under the name Ren Zhongping. After examining the articles personally, Hu Jintao issued a statement saying that Ren Zhongping's articles demonstrated the pre-eminence of the political commentaries in the *People's Daily*. In the hope of continued persistent effort, the Ren Zhongping "brand" was given full reign to enlarge its scope.²⁶ In general, the topic range of Ren Zhongping's articles is fairly broad, with no obvious theme orientation. *People's Daily* head of press, Zhang Yannong 张研农, divides the development of Ren Zhongping into two stages, stating that before 2003, Ren Zhongping represented individually written works, but after 2003, the name represented collaborative pieces. Those who are responsible for the writing, aside from the few permanent members making up the backbone of the team, also comprise some team members who are called upon when required, working in small groups to address different topic areas.²⁷

The *People's Daily* editorial department also directs writing teams which go by the pseudonyms He Zhenhua and Ke Jiaoping. According to *People's Daily* journalist, Fan Zhengwei 范正伟, He Zhenhua is a shortened form of the phrase *ruhe zhenxing zhonghua* 如何振兴中华 (how to invigorate China).²⁸ Articles by this writing group are largely directed at opposing separatism.²⁹ For example, on 18th April 2008, an article by He Zhenhua appeared in the *People's Daily* criticizing the Tibetan Youth Congress (*Zang qing hui* 藏青会) for using force approaching the levels of terrorism.³⁰ Ke Jiaoping is homophonous with *ke jiao ping* 科教评, meaning *keji jiaoyu pinglun* 科技教育评论 (commentaries on technological education). It follows that articles by Ke Jiaoping are related to issues of technological education. For example, a Ke Jiaoping article has stated that China must lay emphasis on technological education in order to encourage national rejuvenation.³¹ Unlike articles by Ren Zhongping, articles appearing under these two pseudonyms have a clear thematic direction.

Other departments of the *People's Daily* also employ writing teams. The international department's writing team goes by the name Guo Jiping, and the art and literature department uses the name Zhong Yan. Guo Jiping is a homophone of

26 "Renmin ribao gongzuo renyuan changtan Hu Jintao zongshuji kaocha Renmin ribao she" (*People's Daily* workers chat happily to General Secretary Hu Jintao during observation of *People's Daily* Press), *People's Daily*, 22 June 2008.

27 Liu, Guangniu 2009, 21.

28 People.com.cn. 2008.

29 Interview with Chinese regional Party journal journalist, Hong Kong, 28 November 2010.

30 He, Zhenhua. 2008. "Zang Qing Hui cong baoli zou xiang kongbu" (The Tibetan Youth Congress: from force to terrorism), *People's Daily*, 18 April.

31 Ke, Jiaoping. 2009. "Kexue jingshen tuoqi minzu fuxing de xiwang" (Spirit of science supports hopes for national rejuvenation), *People's Daily*, 30 April.

guoji ping 国际评, which refers to *guoji wenti zhongyao pinglun* 国际问题重要评论 (important commentaries on international issues). Guo Jiping articles cover China's viewpoint on international concerns and have in the past, for example, asserted that it is unreasonable of the West to believe that China is eschewing its responsibilities by not complying with Western countries' standardized conduct.³² Zhong Yan may be a homophone of *zhong yan* 重言, meaning *zhongshi yanlun* 重视言论 (emphasize expression). This writing team was set up in 2001 to guide the way for art and literary creativity.³³

Writing Teams of Other Official Units and Representation of their Interests

The writing teams mentioned in the previous section are all under the command of the *People's Daily*. However, other departments of the CCP also employ writing teams, and although articles by these teams may be published in the *People's Daily*, they reflect the viewpoints of their respective departments and not the ideas of the *People's Daily*. These writing teams also use personified pseudonyms, for example: Zhong Zuwen 仲祖文, Zhong Zuxuan 仲组轩, Zhong Zhengxuan 钟政轩, Zhong Xuanli 钟轩理 and Qiu Shi 秋石. In addition, there are also some temporary writing teams which are set up to target a specific issue and, once their objective has been achieved, are then disbanded. Figure 1 provides a guide to the secret propaganda codes used by the Party system.

One COD writing team uses the pseudonym Zhong Zuwen to publish articles promoting its views in the *People's Daily* or the Party periodical, *Qiushi* 求是. This pseudonym is homophonous with *zhong zu wen* 中组文, an abbreviated term for *zhongyang zuzhibu wenzhang* 中央组织部文章 (COD article). Articles by Zhong Zuwen regularly remind every level of government to be prudent when selecting cadres.³⁴ Another COD writing team goes by the name Zhong Zuxuan,³⁵ which is a near homophone of *zhong zu xuan* 中组宣, a short form of *zhongyang zuzhi bu xuanbu* 中央组织部宣布 (COD declaration). Articles by this team are not printed in the *People's Daily*, but in official journals such as the *Zhongguo renshi bao* 中国人事报 (*China Personnel Bulletin*). Zhong Zhengxuan is the pseudonym of the Political and Legislative Affairs Committee's writing team. Articles produced by Zhong Zhengxuan are usually published in the committee's own paper, *Fazhi ribao* 法制日报 (*Legal Daily*), and emphasize that political and legal departments must eliminate social conflict.³⁶

32 Guo, Jiping. 2010. "Bu fu zeren de Zhongguo jingji zeren lun" (Irresponsibility of China's economic responsibility debate), *People's Daily*, 26 July.

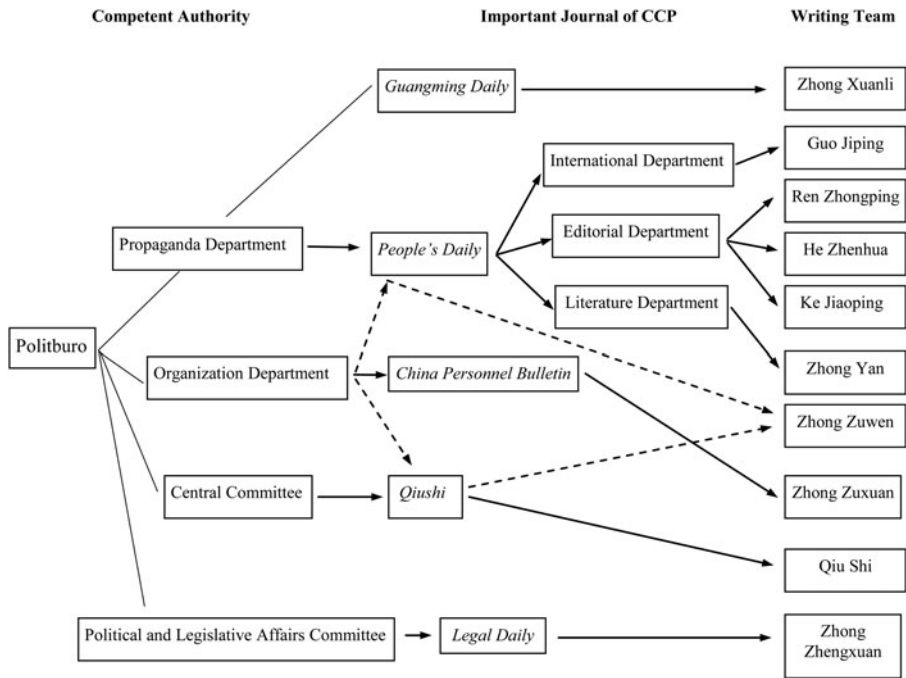
33 Interview with Chinese regional Party publication journalist, Hangzhou, 3 February 2011.

34 Interview with grassroots-level cadre.

35 Ma, Changbo 2008.

36 Interview with Chinese regional Party publication journalist.

Figure 1: **The Secret Propaganda Codes of the Party System**



Note:

Black lines show that a unit's writing team publishes work in the journal directly led by that unit itself. For example, the Central Propaganda Department uses the method of appointing nomenklatura to decide the leadership of the *People's Daily* and the *Guangming Daily*. Dotted lines demonstrate that although a journal is not directly led by the writing team's unit, the writing team still publishes articles in that journal. For more information on the relationship between the CPD and the Party press, see Brady 2008, 16–17.

The CPD Bureau of Theory uses the pseudonym Zhong Xuanli for its writing team. This is a homophone of *zhong xuan li* 中宣理, which is short for *zhongyang xuanchuan bu lilun ju* 中央宣传部理论局 (CPD Bureau of Theory). Articles by Zhong Xuanli mostly appear in the *Guangming Daily* 光明日报, a newspaper edited by the Bureau of Theory, but are also published in the *People's Daily*. These articles are usually concerned with official ideology.

The Central Committee also has its own writing team. The name Qiu Shi 秋石 regularly appears in *Qiushi* 求是 (*Seeking Truth*), the periodical directed by the Central Committee. It is commonly believed that Qiu Shi is a homophone for the periodical's name, and thus reflects the viewpoints of the periodical's editorial department. Articles by Qiu Shi are often very conservative: for example, articles stating that China's democracy is completely distinct from Western democracy have appeared on numerous occasions.³⁷

37 Ibid.

Apart from the central-level Party affairs departments, there are also a small number of governmental departments and units which make use of writing teams. For example, the Department of Health and Sanitation's writing team goes by the pseudonym Wei Minkang 卫民康, which is short for *baowei renmin jiankang* 保卫人民健康 (safeguard the people's health). In the *17th National Congress Report Textbook*, an article appeared under this byline detailing intended improvements to the Chinese medical and sanitary system.³⁸ Certain regional units also have writing teams: for example, in June 2006, Henan Provincial Committee's propaganda department established a writing team under the name Ning Ju 宁炬, a near homophone of *ning ju* 凝聚 meaning *ningju renxin* 凝聚人心 (consolidate the people's hearts).³⁹ However, there are at present very few writing teams on a governmental or regional level.

Finally, this research uncovered some writing teams established temporarily for special purposes. After their task is complete, these teams are likely to be disbanded. Four examples are provided below.

The CCP put together a writing group in order to publish a book in 2006 entitled *Weile shijie geng meihao – Jiang Zemin chufang jishi* 为了世界更美好 – 江泽民出访纪实 (*Making the World a Better Place: Reports on Jiang Zemin's Overseas Visits*). This eulogizes the foreign policy of the third generation of CCP leadership, of which Jiang Zemin 江泽民 was at the core. The writing team was in existence from about June to December 2005, and was made up of a few dozen senior ambassadors and foreign service officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, each composing a section relevant to their experience. The group went by the pseudonym Zhong Zhicheng 钟之成. According to former Chinese consul general to New York, Zhang Hongxi 张宏喜, Zhong Zhicheng is the name of a collective writing group, homophonous with *zhong zhi cheng* 众志成城, which likely derives from the Chinese idiom *zhong zhi cheng cheng* 众志成城 (unity is strength).⁴⁰ Zhong Zhicheng was temporarily created to fulfil the specific publishing needs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time.

The second example came about in 1995 when cross-Strait relations with Taiwan were particularly strained. Xinhua published several articles under the name Hua Jianbin 华建斌 accusing Taiwan's government of damaging cross-Strait relations.⁴¹ Hua Jianbin is not the name of an individual journalist, but in fact a name composed from the names of three journalists.⁴² After the 1995 cross-Strait crisis had passed, no more articles appeared under that name.

38 Cpc.people.com.cn. 2008. "Shiqi da baogao fudao duben mulu" (17th National Congress reports guide reader catalogue), 13 February, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/BIG5/64162/82819/114926/6876274.html>. Accessed 26 December 2010.

39 "Hunan xuanchuan sixiang gongzuo de chuanguan shijian" (Pioneering implementation of Hunan ideological propaganda work), *People's Daily*, 10 January 2008.

40 Su 2006.

41 Hua 1995.

42 Interview with Chinese regional Party publication journalist.

The final two examples, assumed to have been set up by Deng Xiaoping and Hu Jintao respectively, demonstrate that even the highest officials organize their own temporary specialized writing teams for specific purposes. The first example is that of Huang Fuping 皇甫平. It has a dual significance: first, Huang Fuping is a near homonym of *huang pu ping* 黄浦评, which means *Huangpu jiang pinglun* 黄浦江评论 (*Huangpu River Review*); second, the *fuping* 甫平 of Huang Fuping is a homonym of *fu ping* 辅平, which means *fuzhu Deng Xiaoping* 辅助邓小平 (assist Deng Xiaoping). Before Deng Xiaoping's southern tour, articles under the name Huang Fuping appeared in the *Jiefang ribao* newspaper.⁴³ This pseudonym was used by a writing team comprising Zhou Ruijin, the then *People's Daily* deputy editor; Shi Zhihong 施芝鸿, a member of the Shanghai Municipal Committee Policy Research Office; and Ling He 凌河 of the *Jiefang ribao*'s commentary department. In 1991, four articles by Huang Fuping praising reforms sparked debate between conservative and reform factions. This created a beneficial atmosphere in which to implement reforms, enabling Deng Xiaoping to carry out his related 1992 southern tour speeches.⁴⁴

The second example is Zheng Qingyuan 郑青原, a name which began to appear after October 2010. Zheng Qingyuan is a homophone of *zheng qing yuan* 正清源, which derives from the Chinese idiom *zheng ben qing yuan* 正本清源 (look at the root of a problem to find the solution). Articles under this name are extremely conservative and strongly oppose any political reforms in the Chinese system that bring it closer to Western democracy.⁴⁵ In October 2010, the *People's Daily* published four consecutive articles under this byline. It is generally believed that the conservative political faction is behind this pseudonym and that it was created to oppose Wen Jiabao's proposals for political reform.⁴⁶ The viewpoint espoused by Zheng Qingyuan may reflect the ideas of some of the Politburo. A Chinese scholar from a government think tank informed this research that Zheng Qingyuan is a writing team organized by Hu Jintao.⁴⁷ Owing to the Party's emphasis on a political culture of harmonious unity, Hu was unable to vent his unhappiness with Wen's repeated calls for political reform openly, and so used Zheng Qingyuan to criticize his policies. This demonstrates conflicts of interest within the political body and that the CCP cannot be looked upon simply as a monolith.

Many scholars have pointed out that pluralized interests exist within the CCP structure. For example, Skilling has conjectured that different factions inside the communist system could be seen as interest groups.⁴⁸ According to Kenneth

43 Zhou, Ruijin 2009, 96.

44 "Huang Fuping huimou 13 nian qian da zhenglun" (Huang Fuping: looking back at the great debate of 13 years ago), *Wenhui bao*, 22 August 2004.

45 The reason for using the pseudonym Zheng Qingyuan may be to criticize the policies of the reform faction as being too inclined towards a Western-style political system and for overlooking the fact that China and the West are fundamentally different.

46 "CNN zhuanfang yinfa de taolun" (CNN special feature sparks debate), *Dagong bao*, 4 November 2010.

47 Interview with Chinese Scholar, Taipei, 25 May 2011.

48 Skilling 1966, 435–451.

Lieberthal, contending interests between different internal departments have brought about the manifestation of fragmented authoritarianism.⁴⁹ If different Party affairs units can be seen as interest groups, then writing teams are their masked spokespeople. Through the mechanism of writing teams, Party affairs units can promote their own interests whilst maintaining an outwards illusion of harmonious unity. The CCP's units and leaders will not directly or openly criticize each others' policies in the media, but through the use of the deputy-based speech mechanism of writing teams, they are able to disseminate their most important messages.

The Working Environment and Operation of Writing Teams

Materials on the working environment and operation of writing teams are extremely hard to come by, and so this article takes into account a lengthy period of time – from Mao Zedong's era to today – in an attempt to create a complete picture.

During the Cultural Revolution, life both in and out of work was strictly regimented. For example, all the Liang Xiao writing team members, apart from the high-ranking cadres, lived together in a dormitory and were not allowed to take unplanned time off, nor were they allowed to disclose any work information to their families.⁵⁰ Nowadays, the working life of writing teams is still particularly busy. For example, the Ren Zhongping writing team is often only granted a weekend to revise and amend a draft.⁵¹ During the Cultural Revolution, university professors were chosen for writing team work as they required little training. Nowadays, the majority of writing team members are journalists by profession.⁵² Journalists are favoured as, through their work in Party publications, they have already undergone meticulous political training and are thus able to compose the articles required by the Party leadership.

Topics for writing teams are decided upon by the Party Central Committee. During Mao Zedong's era, *People's Daily* head of press, Wu Lengxi 吴冷西, would regularly observe the meetings of the Politburo to understand better the intentions of the Central Committee.⁵³ After the reform period, it became the responsibility of the Central Propaganda Department to communicate the decisions of the Politburo. At the beginning of each year, the leaders of the *People's Daily* make plans for the writing teams based on the Central Committee's recommendations. If any notable incidents occur, these leaders, under the temporary guidance of the Central Committee, will order the writing teams to produce relevant articles. For example, after the 2008 Wenshan 汶川 earthquake in Sichuan, the Central Propaganda Department chief, Liu

49 Lieberthal 1992.

50 Zhou, Yiliang 1998, 394.

51 Liu, Guangniu 2009, 21.

52 Ibid., 22.

53 Cheng 2010.

Yunshan 刘云山, requested that the Ren Zhongping team write articles to boost public morale.⁵⁴

The format of the articles written by writing teams is very precise and careful. Normally there are three sections: raising an issue, analysing the issue, and solving the issue.⁵⁵ Writing teams during the Cultural Revolution would follow two special procedures to compose an article: *waibu diaocha* 外部调查 (external investigation) and *du wenjian* 读文件 (reading documentation). External investigation referred to members of the writing team being dispatched to locate and collate relevant external materials. For example, members of Liang Xiao were sent to the house of Lin Biao 林彪 to examine whether he had written any notes in books as anything he had written could be used to criticize him.⁵⁶ For the second procedure, reading documentation, the writing team leaders would hold meetings to discuss the draft articles and highlight the guidelines for the article. Reading documentation was a collective learning activity for the writing team. Despite the name, the actual reading of documents was not the key feature of this procedure; more importantly, the leaders used this method to lay down directives for the article. For example, during the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping regularly used the reading documentation procedure to impart his ideas to the Office for Political Research writing team.⁵⁷

Today, articles by writing teams are not produced for the purpose of political struggle but instead to pass on the viewpoints of a writing team's unit. Each and every article must undergo repeated discussion and amendment by higher ranks before it can be published. According to former Shenzhen 深圳 propaganda department chief, Yang Guanghui 杨广慧, articles must go through six specific stages before being published: discussion of the outline; individual writing tasks; first editing by the team leader; standing committee review; collective amendment; standing committee approval, signing, and publication.⁵⁸ In order to ensure the quality of articles, the *People's Daily* even uses the method of *kua xiezuozu* 跨写作组 (writing team crossover). For example, an article in commemoration of the liberation of Tibet, originally written by Guo Jiping, was considered by the commentary department to fall under the scope of domestic politics and was transferred to Ren Zhongping for amendment.⁵⁹

The procedure for editing and amendment of articles is incredibly elaborate and tedious. An article which won the Chinese News Prize took two years to write and was edited 14 times before it was considered fit for publication.

54 Liu, Guangniu 2009, 21.

55 Ma, Licheng 1996, 34.

56 Zhou, Yiliang 1998, 395.

57 Yu, Guangyuan 2005, 19–25.

58 Yang, Guanghui. 2008. "Shenzhen xinwen shi shang nongmo zhongcai de yizhang" (A rich and colourful article in the history of Shenzhen news reporting), *Shenzhen tequ bao*, 6 May.

59 Liu, Guangniu 2009, 21.

During the editing process, if there is a differing of opinion about which wording to use, the writing team members put it to a vote.⁶⁰ Before an article is published, high-ranking leaders have the opportunity to order any deletions or amendments so that the article better reflects their opinions. Ma Licheng has described how in 1991 Jiang Zemin ordered Central Propaganda Department chief Wang Renzhi 王忍之 to delete a particular sentence from a *People's Daily* editorial article. This sentence read: *zai gaige kaifang zhong, women yao wen xing she xing zi* 在改革开放中, 我们要问姓社姓资 (during the opening up and reforms, we must ask whether one follows socialism or capitalism).⁶¹

Motivation for the Continued Use of Writing Team Pseudonyms

The system of writing teams began during the Sino-Soviet Split, was further developed during the Cultural Revolution, and continues to this day. The original purpose behind the establishment of the writing team system was to relay the CCP's viewpoint regarding the USSR, but this institution has since been imitated by the CCP's own inner departments. Furthermore, the operation and form of these writing teams reveal a set of secret codes that the CCP has become accustomed to using. But why does the CCP need to operate behind the cover of these secret codes when it comes to certain political topics?

In modern China, Party propaganda is an important yet sensitive task. A Shanghai municipal government official informed this research that grassroots cadres are manifesting increasingly negative reactions towards propaganda tasks issued in the name of the Party affairs departments.⁶² Thus, Party affairs departments use the veiled and oblique system of secret political codes to carry out thought, organization, political and legal work in order to reduce the negative emotional response of the target audience. The writing team system operates to formulate political propaganda and publish articles in Party periodicals avoiding the direct use of the departments' names.

Another function of this system of secret codes – which is often only understood by Party members – is to present inner Party political interests and conflicts in an ambiguous manner. As the CCP lays great emphasis on a harmonious, unified political culture, any intra-department policy conflict or political struggle will be conducted covertly. Liu Shaoqi's 1941 work, *On Inner-Party Struggle* (*Lun dangnei douzheng* 论党内斗争), states that when conflicts occur within the Party, they must be carefully restricted and not laid out in the open.⁶³ The Party has consistently upheld this principle and has prevented different Party units and departments from breaking up into true interest groups. Instead, the

60 People.com.cn. 2008.

61 Ma, Licheng 2008, 150–51.

62 Interview with Chinese regional Party publication journalist, Hangzhou, 15 February 2011.

63 Liu, Shaoqi 1941.

pseudonyms of writing units set up by different departments (or leaders) have in practice become a secret code, which allows inner Party members to recognize conflicts or struggles without this information being made public.

The CCP's reluctance to allow inner-Party struggles to be publicly aired may have its roots in traditional Chinese culture. The Confucian saying, "harmony is most precious" (*yihe weigui* 以和为贵), implies that there is great honour in preserving collective harmony and that the open promotion of personal interests is shameful. Since ancient times, China's politicians have only been able to put forward a few abstract ideas, and all policies have been drawn up and propagated by groups of hired writers or scholars working for higher level officials (*yu yong wen ren* 御用文人). The CCP is accustomed to referring to the writing team members as *xiu cai* 秀才,⁶⁴ which carries the same basic significance as *yu yong wen ren*. Furthermore, the Chinese show a preference for metaphorical language in particular when discussing sensitive topics such as politics. The CCP's use of sophisticated personified pseudonyms may reflect the Chinese love for literary rhetoric and metaphor.

Conclusion: The Institutionalization of the CCP's Writing Team System

Although this system of secret political codes may be seen as a leftover of the Mao era, it has begun to show signs of institutionalization. For example, some units have continuously employed writing teams up to this day, most particularly the central Party departments. This demonstrates that within the domains of propaganda, organization, and suchlike, the CCP unequivocally continues to maintain a writing team structure. Furthermore, some writing teams have been in existence for a considerable period of time, such as Ren Zhongping, Zhong Yan, Zhong Zuwen and Zhong Xuanli. This is in contrast to the Cultural Revolution period when the lifespan of each writing team was very short. As the CCP continues to reject an open information flow within the Party, this Mao-era system and its regulations remain useful.

Although the operation of writing teams may be undergoing the process of institutionalization, it is undeniably an unusual institutionalization. Important information is disseminated through a system of secret political codes understood only by a few insiders. In order to mitigate the negative reaction of target audiences to propaganda, whilst also maintaining an emphasis on the principle of inner Party harmony, politicians or Party institutions are keen to use writing teams to give insiders an insight into the ideas of the political elite or related organizations. The system wears a cloak of secrecy: the exact writer of a piece is obscured, although it will be clear which organization they belong to. Furthermore, outsiders will be unaware of the hidden significance of the writing team pseudonyms. The CCP's secret codes of political propaganda therefore

64 A scholar who passed the imperial examination at county level during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

form an unusual institution which has as yet received little attention from the academic world.

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