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INTRODUCTION

Confessions of a Minor Bureaucrat in Shandong Province

I AM NOT NOW nor at any time have ever been a member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Yet I serve as dean of a large faculty of political science in a Chinese university that trains students and provincial cadres to serve the country as Communist Party officials: It's typically a post reserved for members of the CCP, given the political sensitivity of the work. That's part of the surprise. The other part is that I'm a Canadian citizen, born and bred in Montreal, without any Chinese ancestry. On January 1, 2017, I was formally appointed dean of the School of Political Science and Public Administration at Shandong University. I was the first foreign dean of a political science faculty in mainland China's history and it was big news in China. Shandong University is the premier university in a province of more than one hundred million people, and the School of Political Science and Public Administration has more than eighty teachers and more than one thousand students. I was appointed dean not because of a commitment to China's official Marxist

ideology but rather because of my scholarly work on Confucianism. Shandong Province is home ground for Confucian culture—both Confucius and Mencius were born in (what is now) Shandong Province and Xunzi taught at the Jixia Academy in central Shandong, the Chinese equivalent of Plato's Academy.¹ Our party secretary, himself a seventy-sixth-generation descendant of Confucius, thought I might be able to help promote Confucianism while internationalizing our faculty and upgrading our academic output.

My appointment as dean is less surprising if it's viewed in the context of the transformation of higher education in China's reform period over the past four decades. There has been a strong push to internationalize China's universities by means such as integrating an international dimension into teaching and research and promoting use of the English language (especially in the sciences, engineering, and business administration). Universities compete to hire foreign-educated faculty and foreign teachers and they provide funding for research stays for Chinese teachers and study abroad programs for students. They cooperate with foreign partners and the government provides support for the establishment of campuses of foreign universities such as New York University in Shanghai. Leading universities such as Tsinghua University in Beijing try to compete with the best universities in the West and they have steadily moved up international academic rankings.² Shandong University may have been slow to internationalize but it has tried hard to catch up.³ Internationalization, however, does not necessarily mean Westernization. Over the past decade, the privileging of Western thought in knowledge production (especially in the humanities and social sciences) has been called into question. Internationalization is increasingly viewed as a two-way street that brings foreign knowledge

to China and Chinese knowledge to the world.⁴ In that context, it made sense to hire as dean at Shandong University a foreign Confucian-oriented scholar, who could both promote internationalization of the university and help bring China's own traditions to the rest of the world.

As much as I'd like to tell a happy or inspiring story of my time serving as a minor bureaucrat in Shandong Province, it's largely a tale of bungles and misunderstandings. But my post as dean has provided a unique vantage point to learn about Chinese academia and China's political system. This book is an effort to share what I've learned over the past five years serving as dean. It's written in a self-mocking and playful voice, but it's not a memoir. The aim is to share insights, via my experience, about the inner workings of Chinese academia and to draw implications for China's broader political system. The book consists of short, interconnected essays that proceed roughly in chronological order.

First, some background. I need to say something about Confucianism and its revival in China over the past three decades or so. The Confucian tradition has frequently been pronounced dead in China since the early twentieth century, but it has made a dramatic comeback. Then I'll say something about my own background: How did someone from a humble working-class background in Montreal end up as a minor bureaucrat in a relatively conservative Chinese province that's unusually resistant to change?⁵ I also need to explain the form of the book. It draws on my personal experience for the purpose of shedding light on Chinese academia and the political system, but why the frequent confessions of things gone wrong? The reader may also wonder: What is my political agenda? I need to come clean. I'll end this introduction with a brief summary of the book.

The Confucian Comeback

Confucianism is an ethical tradition propagated by Confucius (c. 551–479 BCE). Confucius (*Kongzi* in Chinese) viewed himself as the transmitter of an older tradition that he tried to revitalize in his own day. He was born near present-day Qufu in Shandong Province (today, Qufu is an administrative region with about 650,000 inhabitants, among whom nearly one-fifth share the surname of Kong and trace their family ancestry to Kongzi). Confucius traveled from state to state—China had not yet been unified—aiming to persuade rulers of the need to rule with morality. He failed in his political ambitions and settled for the life of a teacher. His ideas and aphorisms were recorded for posterity by his disciples in the *Analects*. Confucius is often shown in dialogue with his students and he emerges as a wise, compassionate, humble, and even humorous human being. His most influential followers, Mencius (*Mengzi* in Chinese, c. 372–289 BCE) and Xunzi (c. 310–235 BCE), also had less-than-illustrious careers as public officials and settled for teaching careers in (what is now) Shandong Province.

Confucianism was suppressed in the short-lived Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE) by the self-proclaimed first Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang. During the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), Confucius's thoughts received official sanction and were further developed into a system known as *Rujia* in Chinese (the term “Confucianism” is a Western invention; it is misleading because Confucius was not the founder of a tradition in the sense that, say, Jesus Christ was the founder of Christianity). Confucianism was the mainstream political ideology for much of subsequent imperial Chinese history until the collapse of the imperial system in 1911. The Confucian tradition is immensely diverse and it has been constantly enriched with insights from Daoism, Legalism,

and Buddhism, and, more recently, liberalism, democracy, and feminism. But it has certain core commitments. The tradition is based on the assumption that the good life lies in nourishing harmonious social relationships, starting with the family and extending outward. The good life is a never-ending quest to improve oneself by study, rituals, and learning from other people (it's not easy: Confucius said he reached the stage when his desires conformed to what he ought to do at the age of 70, or the equivalent of about 105 years old today). The best life lies in serving the political community with wisdom and humaneness (仁 *ren*). In practice, it typically means striving to be a public official. Only a minority of exemplary persons (君子 *junzi*) can lead the best life because most people are too preoccupied with mundane concerns. The ideal political community is a unified state whose rulers succeed to power on the basis of merit rather than lineage. Public officials should aim to provide basic material well-being for the people by means such as a fair distribution of land and low taxation, and (then) try to improve them morally. They should rule with a light touch: through education, moral example, and rituals, with punishment as a last resort. Such ideas had a profound influence on the value system of public officials in Chinese imperial history; in the Ming and Qing dynasties, officials were selected by means of rigorous examinations that tested for knowledge of the Confucian classics (the Emperor was not selected by examination, but he was often educated in the Confucian classics). Once public officials assumed power, however, political reality often got in the way of humane rule and they often relied on "Legalist" harsh laws aimed at strengthening the state rather than benefiting the people.⁶

The end of imperial rule seemed to signal the end of the Confucian tradition. Intellectuals and political reformers, whatever their political stripe, blamed the tradition for China's

“backwardness” (with a few exceptions, such as the “last Confucian,” Liang Shuming).⁷ From the May 4, 1919, movement onward, the dominant tradition was anti-traditionalism. The victory of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 seemed to deliver the final blow to Confucianism. Instead of looking backward to such “feudal” traditions as Confucianism, the Chinese people were encouraged to look forward to a bright new communist future. Such anti-traditionalism took an extreme form in the Cultural Revolution, when Red Guards were encouraged to stamp out all remnants of “old society,” including ransacking Confucius’s grave in Qufu.

Today, it seems that the anti-traditionalists were on the wrong side of history. Chinese intellectuals commonly view themselves as part of a culture with a long history, with Confucianism as its core. Aspects of Marxist-Leninism that took hold in China—the prioritization of poverty alleviation and the need for a politically enlightened “avant-garde” to lead the transition to a morally superior form of social organization—resonated with older Confucian ideas about the need to select and promote public officials with superior ability and virtue who strive for the material and moral well-being of the people. To the extent that China’s experiment with communism has anything to offer to future generations, it can be seen as an effort to build on, rather than replace, older traditions. Hence, it should not be surprising that the CCP has moved closer to officially embracing Confucianism. The Confucian classics are being taught at Communist Party schools, the educational curriculum in primary and secondary schools is being modified to teach more Confucianism, and there are more references to Confucian values in speeches and policy documents. The opening ceremony of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, vetted by the Chinese Politburo, seemed to put an official imprimatur on

the Confucianization of the party: Marx and Mao were gone, and Confucius was shown as China's face to the world. Abroad, the government has been promoting Confucianism via branches of the Confucius Institute, a Chinese language and culture center similar to France's Alliance Française and Germany's Goethe Institute. The Confucius Institutes have been controversial in Western countries, but they are often welcomed in other parts of the world and sponsor, for example, workshops that compare the relational view of the self in Confucian and Ubuntu ethics.⁸

But the revival of Confucianism is not just government-sponsored. There has been a resurgence of interest among critical intellectuals in China. Jiang Qing, mainland China's most influential Confucian-inspired political theorist, was first forced to read the Confucian classics in order to denounce them in the Cultural Revolution. The more he read, however, the more he realized that Confucianism was not as bad as advertised and he saved his intellectual curiosity for more propitious times. Today, he runs an independent Confucian Academy in remote Guizhou Province and argues for a political institution composed of Confucian scholars with veto power over policies as well as a symbolic monarch selected from the Kong family descendants.⁹ His works, not surprisingly, have been censored in mainland China but that hasn't stopped the explosion of academic research inspired by the Confucian tradition, leading to a kind of reverse brain drain from the United States back to China. Tu Weiming, the most influential exponent of Confucianism in the West, retired from his post at Harvard to lead the Institute of Advanced Humanistic Studies at Peking University. He was followed a few years later by Roger Ames, the celebrated translator and interpreter of the Confucian classics: Ames retired from the University of Hawaii to become the

Humanities Chair Professor at Peking University. The younger Confucian political theorist Bai Tongdong left a tenured job in the United States to become the Dongfang Professor of Philosophy at Fudan University.¹⁰ The cross-cultural psychologist Peng Kaiping, who carried out rigorous experiments showing that Chinese were more likely than Americans to use Confucian-style contextual and dialectical approaches to solving problems,¹¹ left a tenured post at Berkeley to become dean of Tsinghua's School of Social Sciences. Notwithstanding increased censorship, such scholars are attracted by vibrant academic debates inspired by the Confucian tradition in mainland China. Periodicals such as *Culture, History, and Philosophy* (文史哲) and *Confucius Research* (孔子研究)—both edited by Shandong University's Wang Xuedian¹²—and websites such as *Rujiawang* provide prestigious channels for the dissemination of Confucian academic works. In the twentieth century, academic Confucianism had relocated to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States. Today, the center is shifting once again, back to mainland China.

These political and academic developments are supported by economic factors. China is an economic superpower, and with economic might comes cultural pride (not to mention increased funding for the humanities and higher academic salaries). Max Weber's argument that Confucianism is not conducive to economic development has been widely questioned in view of the economic success of East Asian states with a Confucian heritage. Unlike with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, there has never been an organized Confucian resistance to economic modernization. Quite the opposite: A this-worldly outlook combined with values such as respect for education and concern for future generations may have contributed to economic growth. But modernity also has a downside: It often

leads to atomism and psychological anxiety. The competition for social status and material resources becomes fiercer and fiercer, with declining social responsibility and other-regarding outlooks. Communitarian ways of life and civility break down. Even those who make it to the top ask, “What now?” Making money, they realize, doesn’t necessarily lead to well-being. It is only a means to the good life, but what exactly is the good life? Is it just about fighting for one’s interests? Most people—in China, at least—do not want to be viewed as individualistic. The idea of focusing solely on individual well-being or happiness seems too self-centered. To feel good about ourselves, we also need to be good to others. Here’s where Confucianism comes in: The tradition emphasizes that the good life lies in social relationships and commitment to the family, expanding outward. In the Chinese context, Confucian ethics is the obvious resource to help fill the moral vacuum that often accompanies modernization.¹³

In short, this mix of political, academic, economic, and psychological trends helps to explain the revival of Confucianism in China. But I don’t want to overstate things. The Confucian comeback seems to have stalled of late. It’s not just elderly cadres still influenced by Maoist antipathy to tradition who condemn efforts to promote value systems outside a rigid Marxist framework: As we will see (chapter 7), the Marxist tradition has been making a strong and surprising comeback and communist ideals increasingly set the political priorities and influence academic debates. On the other side of the ideological spectrum, liberal academics in China often look askance at Confucian-inspired defenses of social hierarchy and political meritocracy and blame Confucianism for China’s authoritarian tendencies in the family and politics. Not to mention that Confucianism has yet to make a substantial impact among China’s minority

groups such as Tibetans and Uyghurs. So it's a huge mistake to equate Chinese culture with Confucianism.

That said, Confucianism's greatest impact—in terms of everyday social practices, people's self-identification, as well as political support—is strongest in Shandong Province, the home of the Confucian tradition. The license plates for the province start with the character 鲁 (*Lu*), the name of Confucius's long-defunct small state.¹⁴ Shandong Airlines has quotations from the *Analects of Confucius* above seats on its airplanes.¹⁵ Village leaders in the Shandong countryside teach Confucian classics to young children.¹⁶ The sociologist Anna Sun argues that the modern Chinese state's effort to promote Confucianism began in September 2004, during the celebration of Confucius's 2,555th birthday in Qufu.¹⁷ In imperial China, government officials were in charge of annual ceremonies to commemorate Confucius at the Confucian temple in Qufu, but the rites were discontinued after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. In September 2004, for the first time since the founding of the People's Republic, the state officially took over, with government representatives presiding over the rites, and the ceremony is now broadcast on national television. On November 26, 2013, President Xi himself visited Qufu and gave a speech that praised Confucian culture and criticized the destruction of the Cultural Revolution. He visited a Confucian academy and said that he would diligently read two books on the Confucian classics that were handed to him by the academy's director. In 2016, the government officially established the Academy for the Education of Virtuous Public Officials (政德教育学院) in Qufu, which provides education in the Confucian classics for mid-level cadres from the whole country. So it should not come as a big surprise that Shandong University hired a dean of political science and public administration largely on

account of his scholarly writings on the contemporary social and political implications of Confucianism, even though the scholar is neither Chinese nor a member of the CCP. But how did I end up as a Confucian scholar in China, the reader may wonder?

From Communitarianism to Confucianism

Like the early Confucians, I settled on the life of a teacher as a second choice. As a boy, I dreamed of being a professional hockey player for the Montreal Canadiens. But the hockey world was too competitive, so I went to Oxford to study political theory. I'm from a mixed Jewish and Catholic background and I had no prior interest in China, nor did I study Chinese philosophy at Oxford. So why go to China? It's not just me who needs to answer this sort of question. "Why did you come to China?" is the most common question asked of any foreigner living in China. In my case, I'd answer with a joke: Do you want the rational story or the true story? Of course, people want to hear the true story. Here it is. At Oxford, I fell in love with a fellow graduate student from China. We married shortly thereafter, and then I learned the language and became fascinated by Chinese culture. Since our divorce in 2020, however, I tell the rational story. Here it is. My doctoral thesis at Oxford was an attempt to present and defend contemporary "Western" communitarian theory against its liberal critics. Communitarianism is the idea that human identities are largely shaped by different kinds of constitutive communities (or social relations) and that this conception of human nature should inform our moral and political judgments as well as policies and institutions. We live most of our lives in social groups, like lions who live in prides rather than individualistic tigers who live

alone most of the time. Those communities shape, and ought to shape, our moral and political judgments, and we have a strong obligation to support and nourish the particular communities that provide meaning for our lives, without which we'd be disoriented, deeply lonely, and incapable of informed moral and political judgment.¹⁸

I moved to Singapore for my first academic job, and my colleagues tended to argue about “Asian values.” Although I wasn’t persuaded of the utility of such a nebulous term, I became interested when the debate focused on Confucian values. I learned that Confucianism has a lot in common with communitarian themes such as the relational idea of the self and the importance of culture and history for moral and political reasoning, but I came to view Confucianism as a deeper and richer tradition, with thousands of years of history, unlike communitarianism, which is a more recent offshoot of liberalism. Plus, some themes in the Confucian tradition—filial piety, the importance of ritual, diversity in harmony, and political meritocracy—are absent from communitarian debates and worth exploring in academic works. So I shifted my research interests to Confucianism. And with the revival of the Confucian tradition in China, it made sense to move to China to learn about those debates. Eventually, I ended up in Shandong Province, the home of Confucian culture.

“When do you plan to go home?” is the second most common question asked of foreigners living in China. There is an assumption that we will not stay here forever because of the different culture and the supposedly “evil” political system, not to mention that life is usually more comfortable in wealthier, pollution-free, and less crowded Western countries. People no longer ask me that question. There is an assumption, which will probably turn out to be correct, that I will stay here forever, or,

to be more precise, until I die. The first reason, known to my friends, is that I recently married a younger scholar deeply steeped in Chinese culture who plans to develop her career in Chinese academia. The second reason is that I've become a minor bureaucrat in the Chinese political system: Since January 2017, I've been dean of the School of Political Science and Public Administration at Shandong University. This kind of job wouldn't be offered to an academic tourist, and there's an assumption that I will stay in my adopted homeland for the rest of my days. I've been offered a difficult-to-obtain Chinese "green card" (永久居留证), which grants permanent residency in China, and I've stayed here throughout the Covid crisis. The next step, which I may try to realize one day, is to apply for Chinese citizenship.

A Political Agenda?

The reader may be left with lingering doubts about my political agenda. I may not be a Communist Party member, but I'm still a servant of the Chinese state. Does it follow that I won't criticize that state or that I've become an apologist for the political system? Let me try to respond. I do have an agenda and I should come clean about normative commitments. I worry about the demonization of China and especially of its political system. I think much thinking and policy making in Western countries is based on crude stereotypes about China's political system, such as the view that the CCP exercises total control over intellectual discourse and there is no room for independent thinking. The reality is much more complex, as I hope to show.

I most certainly do not want to deny that increased demonization is related to worrisome developments in Chinese politics over the past decade or so. The CCP—to a certain extent—has

become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. The end of presidential term limits for China's top leader leaves open the possibility of a return to Maoist-style personal dictatorship. Increased censorship demoralizes academics, journalists, and artists. The mass incarceration of Uyghurs in Xinjiang seems like a gross overreaction to the threat of terrorism and religious extremism. Hong Kong's National Security Law has seriously eroded the rule of law and freedom of speech in the territory, if not the one country, two systems model as a whole. China's refusal to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine makes a mockery of its commitment to respect for territorial boundaries and state sovereignty. When I look at some of the things I wrote in the past, I realize that I was much too naïve in thinking that China would move toward a more humane political system, informed first and foremost by Confucian values and with more tolerance for social and political dissent. That might happen someday in the future, but it looks as though we will have to wait a long time, just as Confucius had to wait five centuries to see his political ideals (partly) realized in the Han Dynasty. Not to mention that the Legalist tradition and its modern Leninist incarnation, with its totalitarian-like aspirations to control every aspect of society by means of fear and harsh punishment, often informs the decisions of political leaders, especially in times of social crisis.

Still, I think the demonization of the CCP needs to be countered. For one thing, the demonization reinforces repressive trends in China and benefits security-obsessed hard-liners in China's political system.¹⁹ China's leaders are not about to take serious political risks and promote democratic experimentation when they feel that the whole political establishment of the world's most powerful country seems united in its fight against them.²⁰ Chinese leaders may be paranoid, but their paranoia is

well-founded.²¹ So both sides are locked in a vicious political cycle, with the United States and its Western allies growing more antagonistic and warlike, and China reinforcing its walls and repressing alternative political voices. Second, it's worth asking if the worrisome political developments in China of the past few years really do threaten the West. China has neither the intention nor the ability to export its political system abroad. And how can China pose a greater existential threat to the United States than the former Soviet Union, which threatened to annihilate the United States in a nuclear war? China hasn't gone to war with anybody since 1979, and even the most hawkish voices in the Chinese military establishment do not threaten war against the United States.²² The idea that China would seek to go to war against the United States anywhere near its territory is crazy (on the other hand, China is surrounded by U.S. military bases, and it's not absurd for Chinese policy makers to worry that the United States and its allies might launch a war against China).²³ Still, the "China threat" is used as an excuse by the Pentagon for huge new budgets, even as the United States has ended real wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁴

It's also worth asking why the CCP has so much support at home if it's as evil as advertised.²⁵ Cynics will say that it's because the Chinese people are brainwashed by media propaganda and an educational system that praises the government and stifles critical thinking. But that can't be the whole, or even the main, story. Similar views are held by sophisticated intellectuals in China who have good knowledge of alternative viewpoints, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of Chinese students in the United States and the 130 million Chinese tourists who went abroad every year before the pandemic. The main reason for support is that the CCP has presided over the most spectacular economic growth story in global history, with more

than eight hundred million people lifted out of poverty. The spread of literacy and university education under the CCP, not to mention extended life expectancy, is an extraordinary achievement. More recent developments have only reinforced growing support for the political system. The anti-corruption drive, however imperfect, has proven hugely popular with ordinary citizens burning with anger at public officials who thrived on bribery and special benefits for themselves. After the initial debacle in Wuhan, the central government largely brought Covid under control. People in China had two years of relative freedom to lead their lives without constraints experienced in the rest of the world, though the highly contagious Omicron variant casts doubt on old methods.²⁶ The anti-pollution measures that led to blue skies in Beijing and other cities make people happier. Again, there are tons of problems, and things can take a turn for the worse in the future, but a more balanced picture of the CCP is necessary to counter demonization of China's political system.

It's worth keeping in mind that the ninety-six-million-strong CCP includes tens of millions of farmers, workers, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals who have nothing to do with high-level policy making in Beijing. As one might expect of any large organization, some members of the CCP are good people, some are bad, with most in between. In my own experience, most CCP members are talented, hard-working, and sincerely committed to improving the lives of Chinese citizens. Many of my dearest friends are members of the CCP. As far as I'm concerned, demonization of the CCP is patently absurd. I'm employed as dean at a large Chinese university, and most of the senior scholars and administrators are members of the CCP who work hard for the good of our students and teachers. "Evil" is the last word I'd use to describe my friends and colleagues.

So, yes, I do have a political agenda. I aim to de-demonize China's political system. I hope that readers can temporarily set aside preconceptions and judgments about "the" Chinese Communist Party. As a minor bureaucrat in the university system where most leaders are members of the CCP, I see a bafflingly complex organization composed mainly of extremely hard-working public officials with a mixture of motives and diverse perspectives, who argue endlessly about how to put out fires and, when time allows, plan for the long-term good. In this book, I embed my experience as a minor bureaucrat in the broader political system and try to draw implications for that system. Admittedly, my sample size is small and university-based but it comes from prolonged exposure. I try to shed light on a world that is both very important and very hard to understand. I do my best to be truthful. I write about what works and what doesn't. I share my experience in a frank, if not reckless, way, with gentle criticism of others and fierce self-criticism. These stories try to humanize China's political system: to show how things are experienced at the local level, warts and all.²⁷ I'm a critic of the CCP, but I also see positive things to build on and I do not favor overthrowing the whole system.

A Note on the Form

This book draws on my personal experience for the purpose of shedding light on Chinese academia and the political system, but why the frequent confessions of things gone wrong? My academic excuse is that I've tried writing books in other forms—my first two books were in dialogue form, then I wrote conventional academic books, then a book of short essays, then a book (with Avner de-Shalit) that mixes personal experience with theorizing about different cities, then more books in

standard academic form (including one co-authored with Wang Pei)—and I needed a new intellectual challenge. The truth is that it's some mixture of Jewish guilt, Catholic sin, and Confucian shame, and I'd need years of therapy to make sense of the muck. That said, it's worth distinguishing between two types of confessional books. One type is to confess for the sake of exposing errors from the perspective of a newly discovered moral truth. Augustine's *Confessions* is written in that vein (he found God) and so is *From Emperor to Citizen*, the autobiography of China's last Emperor, Pu Yi (he found Communism).²⁸ The second type is to confess errors for the sake of truth, and to express regret that a simpler life with fewer desires and less ambition might have led to fewer errors. It's not a story of moral progress and may be a story of moral regress. Rousseau's *Confessions* is the first and still the best book written in that genre. My book is of the second type. I try to follow Rousseau's self-mocking tone, though without the self-pity. In contrast with Rousseau, however, my book is *not* a memoir: The truth I seek is not self-understanding but understanding of China. I invoke my personal experience only if it sheds light on social and political life in contemporary China, with its contradictions, diversity, and charm. Confessional frankness is meant to generate understanding and sympathy not for myself, but for other people I encountered during my misadventures.

Outline of the Book

It's best to read this short book in chronological order and it can be read in one sitting. It's written with a light touch but I'll try to make it intellectually worthwhile. For the really busy readers

out there, the summary will help you to choose parts of the book that seem to be of greater interest.

1. **Dye and Dynamism.** I show why hair color matters so much for public officials in the Chinese political system, from the very top leaders in Beijing to university administrators in remote provinces. It sounds silly, but it's not.
2. **The Harmony Secretary.** I discuss the role of the party secretary in the university system. Although I'm not crazy about what they do *qua* ideological overseers, I admire their work helping to maintain and promote social harmony in the university.
3. **On Collective Leadership.** I evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of collective leadership in contemporary Chinese politics and show how we have similar mechanisms at the faculty level at Shandong University.
4. **What's Wrong with Corruption?** I recount my experience of being caught up in the early days of modern China's most systematic anti-corruption campaign. Counterintuitively, perhaps, I'm rooting for a bit more tolerance of potentially corrupt behavior.
5. **Drinking without Limits.** I discuss Shandong's drinking culture and how it affects my work as dean. Meals with teachers and students are almost always fortified with endless toasts, yet few people drive drunk. This essay explains why, drawing on my own unhappy experience.
6. **Teaching Confucianism in China.** I describe the challenges of teaching Confucianism (in English) to foreign students and (in Chinese) to Chinese students in China. It requires different strategies beyond bookish learning.

7. **The Communist Comeback.** In 2008, I pronounced that Marxism was dead in China. To my surprise, it has made a dramatic comeback and I show its impact on university life. I argue that China's political future is likely to be shaped by both Confucianism and Communism.
8. **Censorship, Formal and Informal.** I discuss my experience with censorship in China. Not surprisingly, the heavy hand of the state constrains what can be published in China, but I try to show that informal constraints in the West also curtail what can be published about Chinese politics in mainstream media outlets.
9. **Academic Meritocracy, Chinese-Style.** Notwithstanding increased censorship and political constraints, there is intense competition among Chinese universities to improve academically. I show how our faculty has been mobilized to that effect, with some unintended consequences, such as penalizing Chinese academics who do not write well in English.
10. **A Critique of Cuteness.** I discuss the political relevance of the culture of cuteness in China. "Playing cute" can have politically disastrous consequences, and it helps to explain my own failures as a minor bureaucrat.
11. **The Case for Symbolic Leadership.** I draw on my own experience as a symbolic leader at the end of my term as dean to argue that symbolic monarchy is appropriate for modern societies.

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