Searching for Red Songs: The Politics of Revolutionary Nostalgia in Contemporary China

Shuanglong Li[*] and Fei Yan[†]

Abstract

Applying a novel approach based on online query volume data, this study provides the first large-scale portrait of revolutionary nostalgia among the Chinese, undertaking an empirical analysis of how the aggregate level of nostalgia is shaped. For each Chinese province, we use the normalized frequency of searches for red songs on Baidu, the most widely used online search engine in China, to quantify the local level of nostalgia. We find that the evolving trends of nostalgia among the provinces are similar but stratified. The results from the dynamic panel data analysis using the Generalized Method of Moments indicate that revolutionary nostalgia is significantly affected by a set of socio-economic determinants, including GDP per capita, income inequality, social development, legal development and the degree of globalization.

Keywords: red song; revolutionary nostalgia; China; big data; dynamic panel data analysis

In recent years, there has been a social trend for singing red songs (*hong ge* 红歌) among the Chinese, with communist revolution, anti-imperial struggles and the building of a prosperous and promising socialist country as the predominant themes. After nearly 40 years of reform and opening-up, this renewed enthusiasm for red songs, especially traditional revolutionary songs, reflects a typical and prevalent nostalgia for the revolutionary era in contemporary China.[1] It is a construction of the collective memory of the revolutionary past, somewhat similar to how singing Soviet anthems shows nostalgia for the old era among the Russians.[2]

While the social phenomenon of revolutionary nostalgia in the era of globalization merits close inspection, owing to data availability and measurement

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[*] Department of Sociology, School of Public Administration, Guangzhou University, China. Email: shuanglongli@gzhu.edu.cn.

[†] Department of Sociology, Tsinghua University, China. Email: feiyan@tsinghua.edu.cn (corresponding author).

1 Brown and van Nieuwenhuizen 2016.
2 Piccolo 2015.

methods, most existing studies touch on the content and function of nostalgia; very few have empirically examined its salience, correlates and determinants by analysing reliable large-scale data.[3] In the present analysis, we aim to fill this research gap by presenting the first large-scale portrait of the spectrum of revolutionary nostalgia among 31 provincial-level regions in China

Specifically, we use the normalized frequency of searches for numerous red songs on Baidu 百度 (the most widely used online search engine in China) as a proxy for the aggregate level of local revolutionary nostalgia among Chinese between 2008 and 2014. We add to the literature by showing that the trends of provincial nostalgia are similar but stratified. This is also the first empirical study regarding whether and how the level of local nostalgia is shaped by a constellation of socio-political and economic factors at the macro level.

Seeing Red, Singing Songs

The origins of the red culture movement can be traced back to the 1942 Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, which formed a major part of the Yan'an Rectification Movement (1942–1944). During this campaign, Party leader Mao Zedong 毛泽东 specifically demanded that, in assessing a work of literature or a work of art, both political and artistic criteria should be applied: "Literature and art are subordinate to politics, but in their turn exercise a great influence on politics … What we demand is a unity of politics and art, of content and form, and of the revolutionary political content and the highest possible degree of perfection in artistic form."[4] Literary and artistic productions, such as art, music and poems, were perceived as an essential instrument to signify the splendid history of the communist victory and correct views of life and values. They provided an ideological and discursive framework through which to involve the party-state in the production of Chinese national identity.

After the establishment of the new China in 1949, revolutionary songs were further used to educate the masses and to promote political campaigns and socialist ideologies and values. Factory workers, peasants, soldiers and students were also encouraged to compose their own songs.[5] A *People's Daily* editorial from 1958 encapsulated this strategy, advocating that red songs, and red culture as a whole, should permeate every public and private space:

A large number of popular new red songs are printed with beautiful colourful pictures, with four or five million copies sold in places such as Shenyang and Beijing. The capitalist songs have long been cast aside by people and turned into waste paper. The vigorous development of the socialist singing movement has brought out tens of thousands of mass singing organizations all over the country. They have established powerful red music bases in factories, villages and schools … In order to completely eliminate the influence of capitalist music among the masses, the work of criticizing capitalist music will continue to be carried out in the light of the launch of the

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3 Boym 2001; Wu 2006; Zhou et al. 2008.
4 Duke 1985, 1.
5 Ho 2006.

socialist singing movement. Lectures and concerts will be held in more grassroots units and red songs will be frequently printed and promoted in large numbers.[6]

The wide range of red songs included revolutionary songs from the Soviet Union, translated into Chinese, as well as Chinese red songs dedicated to the founding fathers of the new China, postludes, military songs for improving morale, and theme songs or interludes from revolutionary movies and opera. One of the classic Chairman Mao anthems, "The east is red" (*Dongfang hong* 东方红), took its melody from a local folk song about love in northern Shaanxi. It first gained popularity in the revolutionary base area of Yan'an in 1942. Later, during the Cultural Revolution, the song became the de facto national anthem.[7] "Three rules of discipline and eight points for attention" (*Sanda jilu baxiang zhuyi* 三大纪律八项注意), a rousing military song about the eight regulations enforced in the army, was designed to enhance morale and draw support from the masses. A classic and typical example of an interlude from a revolutionary movie or opera is "My country" (*Wo de zuguo* 我的祖国), which was the theme song of a popular Korean war film, *Shang gan ling* 上甘岭, from 1956.

Aside from the classic/traditional revolutionary songs, which were composed and popularized mainly between the 1930s and the 1980s, there are "new" red songs, mostly written since the 1990s, which incorporate more diversified musical elements. Nowadays, while classic red songs are re-interpreted in contemporary social contexts, new red songs are juxtaposed with ideological meanings which extend the registers of political legitimacy to new development. For example, one of the most famous new red songs is "Being a soldier" (*Zan dangbing de ren* 咱当兵的人), which was composed in 1994 to sing the praises of the People's Liberation Army. Its lyrics celebrate the selfless commitment of soldiers to the nation's safety and their glorious missions in times of peace. Another famous song, the 1992 "Story of the spring" (*Chuntian de gushi* 春天的故事), was written in praise of Deng Xiaoping's 邓小平 far-reaching economic reform policies after 1978 and to celebrate his famous 1992 southern visit and calls for further opening-up policies.

For ordinary people living in pre-reform China, red culture was embedded in the entire cultural fabric of everyday life. To "sing red songs and go with the Party" was an internalized requirement for expressing one's allegiance to the state.[8] However, since the 1980s, with the advent of global consumerism and reform, singing revolutionary songs has become increasingly alien to everyday life, and popular music from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and the West has become more fashionable among the younger generation.

Despite this, the legacy of red political culture and mass-line governance remains potent through the periodic promotion of new red songs. For example,

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6 "Daochu chang hongse gequ, yongsu chou'e de mimizhiyin xiaosheng niji" (Singing red songs everywhere and eliminating vulgar and ugly songs). *People's Daily*, 26 April 1958.
7 Kraus 1989, 119–120.
8 "Changqi hongge gendang zou" (Sing red songs and go with the Party). *People's Daily*, 27 November 1964.

the performance of red songs as part of a campaign to celebrate the Party's achievements and to resist Western influence was particularly encouraged through local social events and public education in the first decade of the 21st century. Inculcating the values celebrated in red songs was increasingly perceived as necessary for building a harmonious and prosperous society.[9] In view of this, in 2006, Jiangxi Satellite Television Broadcast launched its *China Red Songs Singing Contest* (*Zhongguo hongge hui* 中国红歌会), which attracted more than half a million contestants.[10]

The red culture campaign reached its peak with the introduction of the Chongqing model in late 2007 when Bo Xilai 薄熙来, Chongqing's Party secretary at that time, launched an unusual political campaign calling on people to "sing red and crack the black" (*chang hong da hei* 唱红打黑) in order to popularize the collective identity of the communist legacy.[11] Shanghai and other cities including Wuhan and Changsha later sent delegations to Chongqing to learn about this red culture propaganda method.[12]

The Chongqing model was wound up following Bo Xilai's downfall in 2012. However, the party-state still continued to emphasize the importance of promoting red culture in artistic productions to serve the Party's political priorities. In October 2015, Party leader Xi Jinping 习近平 stated at the Forum on Literature and Art that art is vital in realizing Chinese dreams and he called on artists to promote Party ideology and patriotism. His full remarks were published in 2016 and were interpreted as a response to Chairman Mao's speech at Yan'an in 1942.[13] The state media began to vigorously promote a red culture revival (including in art, literature, films, songs and celebrations of revolutionary icons) as a sign of "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" and to counter the corrosive influences of contemporary commercialism and consumerism.[14]

Red Song and Revolutionary Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a yearning for a return to a former place and time.[15] It is especially aroused when people face uncertainty and identity-discontinuity during great social transformations.[16] Nostalgia is of particular scholarly interest because it is affected not only by personal traits but also by a series of macro socio-political and economic factors.[17] Nostalgia is also of policy interest because it is crucial to understanding the socio-political trends of a given society and it relates to a

9 Yang, Guobin 2017, 178.
10 Gorfinkel 2017.
11 Huang 2011; Mei 2017.
12 Wagner 2011.
13 See, e.g., "Xi's remarks to Forum on Literature and Art published." *CCTV*, 1 January 2016, http://english.cntv.cn/2016/01/01/VIDE1451578317958216.shtml. Accessed 12 October 2018.
14 See, e.g., "Xi Jinping and his era." *China Daily*, 17 November 2017, https://chinadailyasia.com/articles/101/196/166/1510910211890.html. Accessed 1 July 2018.
15 Boyer 2010.
16 Best and Nelson 1985.
17 Sullivan 2013.

variety of social/individual functions, ranging from serving as a repository of positive feelings to boosting self-esteem, enhancing social connectedness and increasing perceptions of social support.[18]

Essentially, nostalgia can be divided into three subcategories: personal nostalgia, historical nostalgia and collective nostalgia. Personal nostalgia refers to one's directly experienced past and is equivalent to so-called "true" or "real" nostalgia. Certain external stimuli are required to evoke it. By contrast, historical nostalgia happens even if the ego has not personally experienced the original events. For instance, one may feel nostalgia in museums. Collective nostalgia refers to a common yearning shared by collective units, such as specific generations, nations or cultures.[19]

Several triggers facilitate the emergence and pervasiveness of nostalgia, including music, lyrics, odours and negative mood states including loneliness and being scared.[20] Among these, music is of crucial importance in evoking a sense of nostalgia about one's past.[21] This is because of "the idiosyncratic associations that people have formed between particular songs and events in the past."[22] On the one hand, listening to an old song can arouse dust-laden memories of the past and provoke various emotions in individuals. On the other, music can also become nostalgia itself, and music-evoked nostalgia may be reinforced in a group setting.[23] Since the formation of self-identity also takes place most rapidly and most frequently during one's adolescence and early adulthood, the music of one's youth will have an enduring impact throughout the remainder of one's life.[24]

In post-communist Russia, singing the Soviet-era anthem with new lyrics has been documented to reflect nostalgia for the relative security of the era of Joseph Stalin.[25] This trend for revolutionary nostalgia reflects the deep loss and dissatisfaction felt by ordinary people towards state building and political reform in Russia.[26] As scholars observe:

> The rise in nostalgia is most easily understood as a rise in frustration. There's nothing like rampant crime and corruption to make people long for the old police state; there is nothing like going without a paycheck for months or losing a job to make a subsistence wage seem like a security blanket … Even those who have modestly improved their living standard, purchasing new VCRs and better food, often feel poorer because they see how much they are missing out on.[27]

Similarly, in China, singing red songs evokes popular nostalgia for the revolutionary past as "the golden age of Chinese socialism equipped with its own

18 Wildschut et al. 2006; Sedikides et al. 2008; Wildschut, Sedikides and Cordaro 2011; Zhou et al. 2008.
19 Batcho 2007; Baker and Kennedy 1994.
20 Wildschut, Sedikides and Cordaro 2011.
21 Janata, Tomic and Rakowski 2007.
22 Barrett et al. 2010.
23 Batcho 2007.
24 Rathbone, Moulin and Conway 2008.
25 "Attitudes to Soviet past reflect nostalgia, pragmatism." *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 23 August 2003, http://www.ukrweekly.com/old/archive/2003/340304.shtml. Accessed 29 July 2018.
26 Kozachenko 2019.
27 Nagorski 1996, 44.

humane and spontaneous everyday culture."[28] Since the launch of the opening-up policy in the 1980s, China has made great economic progress and generally maintained political stability. However, drastic changes in economic and social life have led to anxiety and uncertainty. The masses are increasingly anxious about their social status[29] and the social problems caused by the single-minded pursuit of GDP[30] and increasing penetration of materialism, for example cadre corruption, income inequality, unemployment and money-driven values.[31] Altogether, these factors have given rise to nostalgia for the old days – a yearning for "a sense of solidarity, camaraderie, and simplicity."[32] Rather than desiring "to recreate or rebuild the past," people regard the Mao era as a society with "simple emotions and plain living."[33] Singing red songs thus gives them some sense of comfort and stability.[34] One student, quoted in *The Washington Post*, embraced the ethos of the red culture campaign: "When I sing red songs, I find a kind of spirit I never felt when singing modern songs … To surround yourself with material stuff is just a waste of time."[35]

To summarize, we find that previous studies have focused primarily on how nostalgia is influenced by aggregate socio-economic factors, such as the unafford-ability of day-to-day living, fragmented state welfare and other economic frustrations in the present time. However, given the limited data availability and methods of measurements, current scholarship on nostalgia remains mostly theoretical and there has been scant effort to empirically examine the exact *degree* of influence of those socio-economic variables. Moreover, in the Chinese context, the nostalgia felt by the populace can also be affected by official ideologies and political campaigns.[36] Themes such as communist revolution, liberation, collectivism, patriotism and anti-imperial struggles are invoked from time to time to confirm the political legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as needed.[37] Nostalgia among the Chinese can, therefore, be seen as a hybrid of personal attachment to the past and an ideological propensity that is exploited and directed by the party-state. In this regard, "red" songs evoking nostalgia are very likely to be profoundly determined by socio-political factors and agendas. Building on the theorizations above, the present analysis will perform a systemic examination of the determinants of revolutionary nostalgia in contemporary China. In the following section, we clarify the methods and main variables that were used in order to collect and analyse data.

28 Zhang, Xudong 2003, 633.
29 Chen and Williams 2016.
30 Yan 2013.
31 Faure 2008.
32 Bryant 2005, 163.
33 Barmé 1999, 323–24.
34 Dai 1997.
35 "Southwestern Chinese city leading red revival." *Washington Post*, 27 June 2011, https://www. washingtonpost.com/world/southwestern-chinese-city-leading-red-revival/2011/06/25/AGkh8JnH_story. html?utm_term=.2c04f3c7e88e. Accessed 29 July 2018.
36 Zeng 2009; Zhao 2016.
37 Qian 2018, 125.

Measuring Revolutionary Nostalgia in China

Constructing the index of nostalgia

The local level of nostalgia is key to the present study. We developed a novel approach for constructing an index of revolutionary nostalgia (IRN), measured by online searches for red songs in China's 31 provinces (including four province-level municipalities and five province-level autonomous regions) on the Baidu search engine, the largest and most widely used internet search engine in China. First, we constructed a list of famous red songs. For each province, we then quantified the IRN by measuring the total frequency of searches for the titles of these songs on Baidu within the province. Baidu releases its scaled search engine volume data publicly on the Baidu Index (https://index.baidu.com). This provides the data searched for on Baidu over time from June 2006 to the present on a daily basis.[38] The Baidu-based red song search volume can also be representative of the total online search behaviour among Chinese internet users since Baidu is the most widely used search engine in mainland China (particularly since Google's exit from mainland China in 2010). As reported by the China Internet Network Information Center in 2017, more than 95 per cent of internet users in China choose Baidu over all other search engines.[39]

Based on the list of the most famous red songs published in Baidu's Encyclopedia (which is similar to Wikipedia), we gathered information for 172 of the most celebrated traditional red songs (composed before the 1990s) and 62 new red songs (composed after the 1990s). The Baidu Index provides search volume data for 88 of the most searched-for traditional red songs and 44 of the most searched-for new red songs, since data for songs with a search volume lower than a certain threshold are not provided by the index. Consequently, the list used for our main analysis contains 88 traditional red songs (including ten Soviet songs), while robustness checks also included 44 new red songs. The full list is presented in Table 1. To avoid device-using bias, we considered searches conducted from both computers and mobile devices. Also, given that internet access is uneven among provinces, we normalized the total frequency of searches for all red songs in each province using the responding annual provincial population of internet users to compute the IRN for all 31 provinces by:

$$IRN_{i\_t} = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^{m} Search_{k\_i\_t}}{Netpop_{i\_t}} \tag{1}$$

In Equation (1), IRN_{i_t} is the index of nostalgia of Province i in year t, $Search_{k\_i\_t}$ is the frequency of searches for song k on Baidu by net users of

38 Yang, Xin, et al. 2015.
39 "Statistical report on internet development in China." *China Internet Network Information Center*, 8 June 2017, https://cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/201706/P020170608523740585924.pdf. Accessed 30 July 2018.

Table 1: **The Full List of Red Songs (Search Terms in the Baidu Index)**

New Red Songs

最美的歌儿唱给妈妈	阳光路上	情系老百姓	红旗飘飘
走向复兴	小白杨	强军战歌	好男儿就是要当兵
祖国万岁	想家的时候	你是英雄	歌声与微笑
追寻	相亲相爱	南湖菱花开	光荣与梦想
祝福祖国	五星红旗	卢沟谣	共筑中国梦
祝福你亲爱的祖国	我要去延安	两岸一家亲	共和国之恋
中国人	我们众志成城	今天是你的生日	多好啊
咱当兵的人	我们的天空	假如我是你	春天的故事
在灿烂阳光下	我和我的祖国	家乡的味道	把一切献给党
一二三四歌	我的中国心	家的牵挂	把心交给你
迎风飘扬的旗	为了谁	加油中国	爱中华

Traditional Red Songs

遵义会议放光辉	我们走在大路上	没有共产党就没有新中国	光荣啊中国共青团
祖国颂	我们要做雷锋式的好少年	毛主席派人来	工农兵联合起来
中国少年先锋队队歌	我的祖国	毛主席的战士最听党的话	革命人永远是年轻
中国人民解放军进行曲	我爱祖国的蓝天	毛主席的书我最爱读	翻身农奴把歌唱
咱们工人有力量	我爱北京天安门	毛主席的话儿记心上	翻身道情
咱们的领袖毛泽东	万岁毛主席	毛主席的光辉	东方红
在太行山上	万泉河水清又清	毛委员和我们在一起	地道战
游击队之歌	听妈妈讲那过去的事情	妈妈教我一支歌	党啊亲爱的妈妈
游击队歌	太阳最红毛主席最亲	敬祝毛主席万寿无疆	当兵的人
英雄赞歌	松花江上	井冈山下种南瓜	弹起我心爱的土琵琶
义勇军进行曲	四渡赤水出奇兵	解放区的天	大海航行靠舵手
沂蒙山小调	十送红军	解放军军歌	打起手鼓唱起歌
雁南飞	少先队队歌	黄河大合唱	打靶归来
血染的风采	山丹丹开花红艳艳	洪湖水浪打浪	草原上升起不落的太阳
学习雷锋好榜样	三峡的孩子爱三峡	红星照我去战斗	毕业歌
绣金匾	三大纪律八项注意	红星歌	北京有个金太阳
绣红旗	人说山西好风光	红太阳照边疆	北京的金山上
无产阶级文化大革命就是好	人民军队忠于党	红梅赞	阿瓦人民唱新歌
我向党来唱支歌	让我们荡起双桨	红领巾	
我是一个兵	娘子军连歌	红军不怕远征难	

Soviet Red Songs

苏军之歌	神圣的战争	莫斯科保卫者之歌	共青团员之歌
斯拉夫女人的告别	三套车	喀秋莎	
胜利日	牢不可破的联盟	啊朋友再见	

Province *i* in year *t*, and *Netpop*$_{i\_t}$ represents the netizen population of Province *i* in year *t*. Further, *m* is 88 for traditional red songs.

We restricted our research to the period between 2008 and 2014 (inclusive). This is because the Baidu Index of provincial names is only available from 2008, and some key variables after 2015 were missing when we started collecting data in 2015. This relatively short time frame, in fact, has its own strengths: restricting our time range to seven years for the 31 provincial regions brings about panel data, not only of "small T, large N" (T = 7, N = 31) but also sufficient numbers of waves to improve the efficiency of estimation (both important for performing dynamic panel analysis). Note that we accessed daily search data for all songs for each province via the Baidu Index (https://index.baidu.com/) from 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2014. We then summed them up and computed the annual average data to perform a panel analysis, controlling for the annual socio-economic and political factors of all 31 provinces.

One issue nevertheless deserves further discussion. If we aim to construct a nationally representative portrait of nostalgia, we cannot be certain whether searchers of red songs on Baidu are representative of the overall Chinese population. Since the Baidu Index records age and gender, we examined the demographic distribution of red song searchers who logged in when performing a search and found that people older than 50 and younger than 19 were relatively underrepresented in comparison with the overall Chinese population. Two aspects, however, make our Baidu-based analysis insightful and reliable. First, the online queries came from the vast majority of around 600–700 million Chinese internet users, who accounted for around 40–50 per cent of the whole population from 2010 to 2015.[40] Outnumbering the entire US or Indian populations, the sheer numbers and growth rate of Chinese internet users make them a vast, powerful and interesting social force that deserves sociological inspection. Second, in the robustness check, we adopted a pseudo re-weighting strategy by dropping samples of less developed provinces (where fewer older people and youths have access to the internet) to make the sub-sample as representative as possible of the overall target population. By comparing the results from full samples and sub-samples, we could check whether our results are sensitive to sample compositions.

Spectrums of nostalgia

Figure 1 plots the Z-score of the IRN for all 132 red songs in each province from 2008 to 2014 to give a visual representation of the time trends and to identify the stratification of the IRN among provinces. It clearly shows a dramatic rise in the number of searches for red songs since 2008. This number rose steadily after 2009 and peaked in 2011 when a national campaign for promoting red culture was

40 Ibid.

Figure 1: **IRN of the Chinese Provinces, 2008–2014**
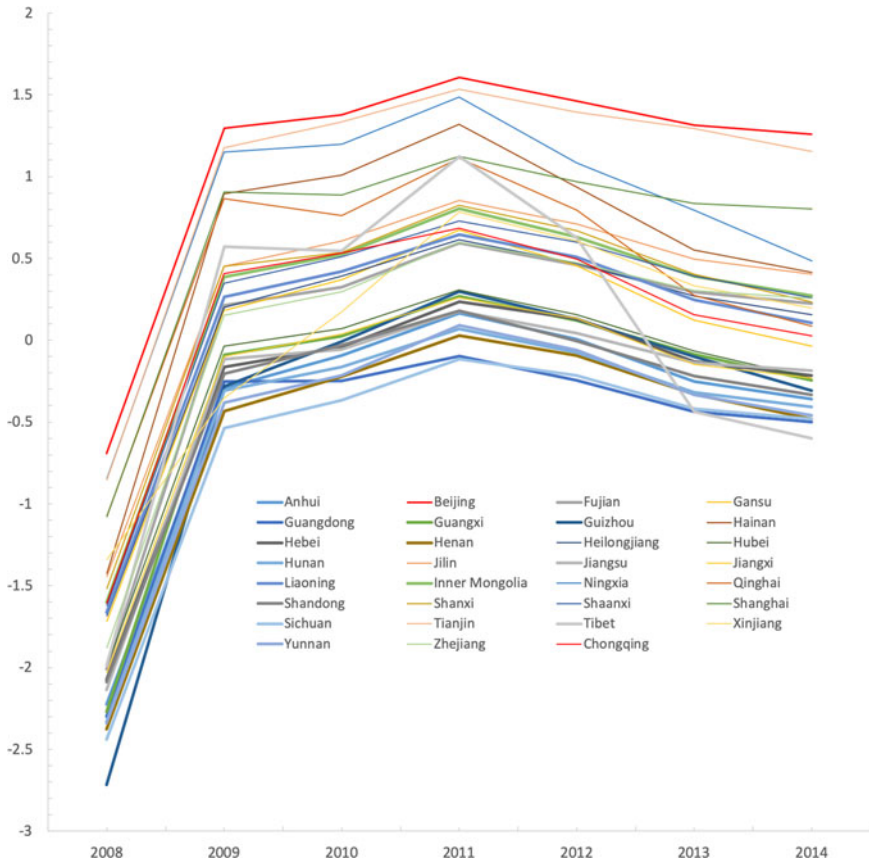
underway to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the founding of the CCP. During the campaign, the government at various levels organized citizens to perform patriotic and red songs to praise the Party for liberating the Chinese people from the Nationalist Party's oppressive rule, for founding a new socialist country, and for reviving the Chinese nation in the early 21st century.[41] There is a gradual decline in red song searches after 2011.

Interestingly, but unsurprisingly, all provinces show almost the same overall tendencies from 2008 to 2014. Taking Shanghai and Chongqing for comparison, although the general trends in online searches for red songs are quite similar for both cities, the extent to which people harboured feelings of nostalgia towards the pre-reform era is much higher in Shanghai than in Chongqing over the seven years studied. This leads to the exciting speculation that revolutionary nostalgia is not merely a product of particular political atmospheres at the regional level,

41 Ho 2017.

but rather a combination of people's reconstruction of collective memory and government-guided socio-political campaigning at the national level.

Using the same time framework between 2008 and 2014, we also present three types of IRN based on different types of red song (classic/traditional red songs, new red songs and Soviet red songs) in Figure 2. It is easy to see that the patterns for the three IRNs are, in general, consistent, except for searches for Soviet songs in some regions, such as Beijing.

We used the time series data for each province's IRN to examine regional variation. As Figure 3 shows, between 2008 and 2014, online searching for red songs was most prevalent in Beijing, followed by two other province-level municipalities, Tianjin and Shanghai. We speculate that this may be owing to the fact that 1) Beijing is the political centre of China and Tianjin is geographically close to Beijing; 2) Shanghai is the birthplace of the CCP and the site of the First National Congress of the CCP in 1921, thus the historical context might explain the relatively higher level of searching for red songs there; and 3) province-level municipalities tend to focus more on developing urban community-level Party organizations, for which singing red songs and square dancing are often the most effective methods of social mobilization.[42]

Notably, Chongqing, the newest inland municipality under the direct administration of central government, also ranked highly in revolutionary nostalgia. This is perhaps partly owing to the "sing red and crack the black" political campaign launched in late 2007.[43] In addition, Ningxia, Hainan and Qinghai, the three most undeveloped provinces, also topped the list, implying that the formation process of nostalgia is quite complicated. Likewise, the most developed provinces in coastal China (such as Guangdong, Jiangsu and Shandong) and some of the most undeveloped inland provinces (including Guizhou, Yunnan and Henan) had relatively low levels of revolutionary nostalgia. This encouraged us to perform a regression analysis to see how various local factors contribute to the level of revolutionary nostalgia.

Determinants of Nostalgia

To explore how the local level of revolutionary nostalgia is formed, we performed a regression analysis to see whether (and how) prior socio-economic and political conditions shape IRNs across Chinese provinces.

Data and variables

The dependent variable is the IRN. To consider the dynamic structure of nostalgia, we introduce its lagged value, or the IRN of the prior year, into the

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42 Zhang, Han 2015.
43 Ho 2017, 34; "A brief history of the red song." *China Media Project*, 10 June 2011, http://chinamediaproject.org/2011/06/10/a-brief-history-of-the-red-song/. Accessed 25 July 2018.

Figure 2: **IRN Based on Different Types of Red Songs, 2008–2014**

Traditional red songs   New red songs   Soviet red songs
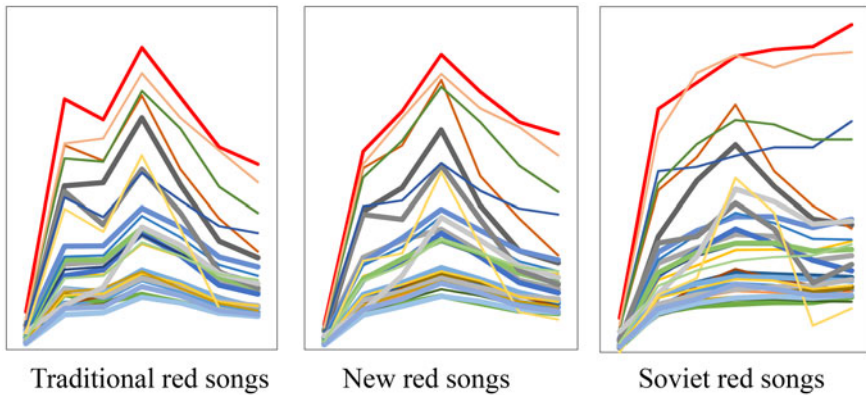
regression model. Following Jennifer Pan and Yiqing Xu's pioneering study on China's ideology, we include two economic indicators at the provincial level, economic development (GDP per capita) and income inequality (Gini coefficient), to predict regional revolutionary nostalgia.[44] Specifically, economic development is captured by the level of GDP per capita of the province. This factor reflects the production level and market size of a particular region.[45] Income inequality is also expected to impact the IRN significantly and is measured by the household Gini coefficient of the province.

In addition to this, we also consider whether education (edu) at the provincial level might have an impact on shaping regional revolutionary nostalgia, since Pan and Xu uncovered a relationship between the two. This variable is captured by the number of college students per 100,000 of the population. We also add a series of macro indicators suited to measuring regional development levels, such as the level of social development, legal development and the degree of globalization. Legal development is measured by the number of cases of administrative ligation per 100,000 people in a province.[46] It indicates the extent to which Chinese citizens, legal persons or other organizations have the right to, and can, prosecute a lawsuit in the courts if administrative organs or personnel infringe their lawful rights and interests. NGO development, as represented by the number of non-governmental organizations (NGO) per 100,000 people within the province, is an indicator of the strength of the public sphere, reflecting a region's social development level.[47] This has been shown to exert a far-reaching impact on nostalgia in previous literature. Finally, foreign tourism receipts (FTR) and foreign direct investment (FDI) are two widely used indices that measure the
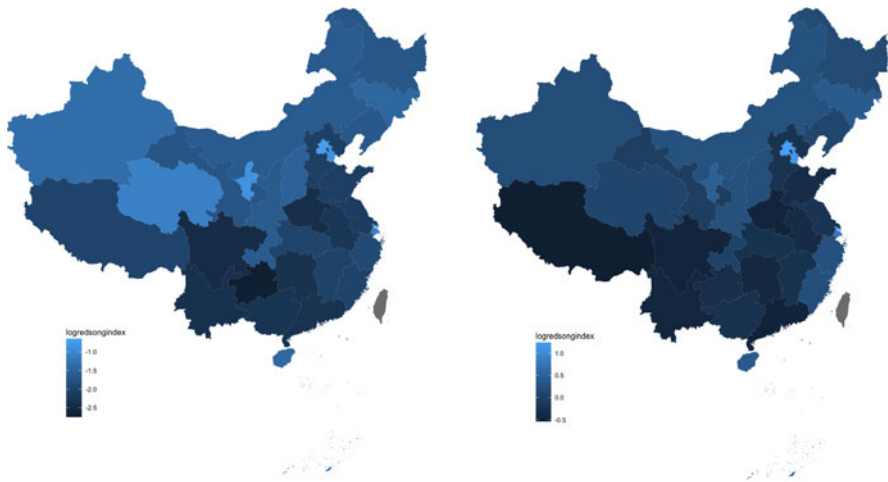
44   Pan and Xu 2018.
45   Blomström and Lipsey 1991.
46   Olson 1990; Scheingold 1974.
47   Foa and Tanner 2012.

Figure 3: **Geographic Distribution of IRN in 2008 (left) and in 2014 (right) in Surveyed Provinces**

degree of globalization, a factor which may play a crucial role in influencing people's revolutionary nostalgia.[48]

All of the original data, except for Gini coefficients, come from various years of the *China Statistical Yearbook*. Owing to the changing inflation rate between 2008 and 2014, the monetary variables are not comparable from year to year. Thus, we use the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to adjust data for inflation. In the analysis, we use a logarithmic transformation of GDP per capita. For GDP, FTR and FDI, we also convert the data into real values using 2008 as the base year of the CPI. Since the official provincial Gini coefficients are not available, we calculate the Gini coefficients from multiple data resources including the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS), Chinese Social Survey (CSS) and China Family Panel Studies (CFPS). In the robustness check, we also use the Gini coefficients (2004–2010) calculated by Ye Tian to examine whether our findings are sensitive to different measures of the Gini coefficient.[49] We present the major statistics of the variables of interest in Table 2.

Dynamic panel model

Since the level of revolutionary nostalgia in a certain province is very likely to be hinged on its past values in previous years (for instance, the IRN of the previous year), we take into account the dynamic structure in the model of the IRN at the provincial level by introducing the lagged-value of the IRN. To avoid a mutual causality problem, we impose the temporal order by using the lagged value of all

48 Bandelj 2008.
49 Tian 2012.

Table 2: **Descriptive Statistics of Variables of Chinese Provinces, 2008–2014**

Variable	Abbr.	Description	Mean	S.D.
Dependent variable				
Nostalgia	*IRN*	IRN measured by total frequency of searching "red song" in Baidu, normalized by net user population (Log value)	0.074	8.89
Explanatory variable				
Economic development	*GDP*	GDP per capita (Log value)	9.433	0.487
Income inequality	*Gini*	Gini coefficient (household income)	0.403	0.052
Education	*Edu*	College students per capita (Log value)	7.690	0.362
Legal development	*Al*	Administrative litigation per capita (Log value)	7.009	1.328
Social development	*NGO*	Association number per capita (Log value)	1.218	0.354
Degree of globalization	*FTR*	Foreign tourism receipts (Log value)	6.449	1.736
	FDI	Foreign direct investment (Log value)	12.351	1.797
Year	*T*	2008–2014		

Notes:
The means and standard deviations of IRN are scaled by a factor of 100,000 for readability.

the explanatory variables to predict the IRN. The model is thus written as:

$$IRN_{i\_t} = \alpha IRN_{i\_(t-1)} + \beta_1 GDP_{i\_(t-1)} + \beta_2 Gini_{i\_(t-1)} + \beta_3 Edu_{i\_(t-1)}$$
$$+ \beta_4 Pol_{i\_(t-1)} + \beta_5 NGO_{i\_(t-1)} + \beta_6 FTC_{i\_(t-1)} + \beta_7 FDI_{i\_(t-1)} + T_i$$
$$+ c_i + \mu_{it} \quad (2)$$

In Equation (2), IRN_{it} is the dependent variable, representing the level of nostalgia in a particular province in year t, while $IRN_{i\_(t-1)}$ is its one-year lag, or the nostalgia of the same province in the previous year. In addition, c_i is the time-fixed regional effect and μ_{it} is the error. We further control for T_i, the time/year dummies to make the assumption of no correlation across provinces in the idiosyncratic disturbances more likely to hold. Note that we do not estimate the panel vector autoregression (VAR) model to include all historical levels of the IRN and other explanatory variables, since our panel data are relatively short (only seven waves).

To estimate the above model, we adopt the Generalized Method of Moments (GMM) estimator to deal with provincial heterogeneity problems.[50] Specifically,

50 In GMM, the Difference GMM (DGMM) method is used to fit the first-difference specifications of the model and use the appropriate lagged dependent and independent variable as "internal" instrumental variables to address the endogeneity problem in estimating the first-differenced equations. The System GMM (SGMM) is used to deal with potential problems in implementation of the DGMM estimator: (1) the lagged variables in levels may be weak instruments for first-differenced equations, given the presence of many instruments; and (2) first-differencing may exacerbate the impact of measurement errors on the dependent variables. In our research setting, we employ both methods and perform the standard tests that are needed for implementing GMM estimators. See Arellano and Bond 1991 and Holtz-Eakin, Newey and Rosen 1988 for more technical details.

we perform (1) the unit-root test, to ensure that all variables are stationary time series; (2) the AR(2) test, to check whether μ_{it} is serially correlated; and (3) the Henson/Sargan over-identification test, to examine the validity of these instruments. We report test results together with the model regression results in the following section.

Results

The regression results are presented in Table 3 using two different GMM estimators. First, we fit the Differenced GMM model (Model 1) to estimate how the IRN is shaped by a set of explanatory variables among Chinese provinces between 2008 and 2014. As the results from Model 1 show, the level of revolutionary nostalgia at the provincial level as measured by internet searches for red songs is obviously path-dependent, as it is positively and strongly predicted by its lagged value (the IRN of the previous year), with a coefficient of around 0.5. Holding other factors fixed, economic development measured by GDP per capita negatively predicts the IRN of the next year. As expected, income inequality significantly shapes local nostalgia. The negative and significant effect of the household Gini coefficient at the provincial level is around 3, suggesting that a 0.05 increase of Gini coefficient (a one-unit increase of standard deviation of Gini) will produce a 0.15 higher search frequency for red songs on the internet, which is around one-fifth of the mean of the IRN.

Legal development is also associated with the IRN. As shown in Model 1, the more administrative litigation cases in a province, the fewer searches there are for red songs. Interestingly, however, more NGOs lead to a higher IRN. This can probably be explained by the fact that most NGOs in China are state led and grassroot NGOs are strongly controlled by the state through a symbiotic relationship.[51] Although recent studies show that individuals with higher educational attainments tend to be more politically liberal, we find that, at the provincial level, education did not predict nostalgia.[52] This finding is consistent with the insignificant effect of education on nostalgia found in Russia.[53] We also find that the degree of globalization negatively predicts IRN, as expected. Specifically, both the FTR and FDI of the previous year are negatively correlated with the level of nostalgia at the provincial level. Finally, we also find a significant year effect, although the long-term time trend is not found.

Using System GMM estimators, we arrive at the same conclusion as that which we find with the DGMM method. Although not reported here, we fit pooled OLS and FE models and found the coefficients to be 0.856 and 0.354, both highly significant at 0.001 alpha level, showing that both the estimates from DGMM and SGMM are adaptable. Both Models 1 and 2 also passed

51 Spires 2011.
52 Pan and Xu 2018.
53 White 2010.

Table 3: **Dynamic Panel Regressions of IRN in Chinese Provinces, 2008–2014**

	Model 1 D-GMM	Model 2 S-GMM
Lagged IRN (2007–2013)	0.561***(0.042)	0.537***(0.043)
Economic development (GDP)	−0.588***(0.098)	−0.318***(0.086)
Income inequality (Gini)	3.143*(1.363)	3.232***(0.644)
Educational attainment (Edu)	0.093(0.087)	0.151(0.096)
Legal development (Al)	−0.022***(0.004)	−0.016*(0.006)
Social development (NGO)	0.134**(0.042)	0.101+(0.055)
Foreign tourism receipts (FTR)	−0.074***(0.019)	−0.026+(0.013)
Foreign direct investment (FDI)	−0.005**(0.002)	−0.003+(0.002)
Wave		
2009	0.815***(0.085)	0.921***(0.089)
2010	−0.084***(0.021)	0.025(0.019)
2011	0.234***(0.012)	0.238***(0.010)
2013	−0.113***(0.014)	−0.137***(0.013)
2014	−0.067*(0.029)	−0.138***(0.027)
Concept	4.224***(0.755)	3.484***(0.973)
AR (2) p-value	0.504	0.452
Hansen test p-value	0.359	0.908
Number of instruments	28	33
N	135	162

Notes:
    IRN is measured by the frequency of searches for "red songs" on the Baidu search engine. Adjusted robust standard errors in parentheses; $p < 0.1+$ $p < .05*$ $p < 0.01**$ $p < 0.001***$ (two-tailed tests). The reference group is the year 2008. AR(2) is the Arellano-Bond test for zero autocorrelation in second-differenced errors (H0: no autocorrelation), and the Hansen test is the test of over-identifying restrictions (H0: over-identifying restrictions are valid). The year 2012 was dropped because of collinearity.

the AR(2) test. The Hansen test p-values of both Model 1 and Model 2 were larger than 0.1, showing that the use of internal instruments is valid. However, the Hansen test p-values for Model 2 were close to 1, showing that instrument proliferation may be an issue. In this regard, we adopt results from Model 1 or the DGMM estimator.

Robustness check

We also ran a robustness check. First, if a certain red song, or a certain type of song, was far more searched for on Baidu, then the IRN measured by the sum frequency of searches for the song name may simply reflect searches for a very specific or certain type of red song. Given that Table 2 shows that the standard deviation of the IRN is big, we ran a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) for each province in each year to generate the overall index of search frequency, rather than simply computing a sum of 88 time series of searches. The results are, in general, consistent with those shown in Table 3.[54]

Second, we tried different measures for several key variables to check if our results were sensitive to different operationalization. For instance, we added 44

54 The details of the PCA analysis and robust analysis results are available on request from the authors.

new red songs to calculate the IRN. We also used the Gini coefficients calculated by Tian rather than those we computed from general social surveys.[55] We also construed the IRN measure by not normalizing it with the provincial population. Again, different measures did not change our major conclusion.

Third, we dropped several provinces from our samples to make the demographic as similar as possible to the whole population of China, particularly age structure. We found that the results from sub-sample and the results in our main analysis using full samples were almost identical. This shows that the determinants of nostalgia (and their effects) among Chinese internet users and the wider population are quite similar in general. Our conclusions thus not only apply to the netizens of China but also to the whole population of the country.

Conclusion

Until now, empirical investigations of the determinants of nostalgia have been very limited because such an analysis requires a large volume of high quality and reliable data. To the best of our knowledge, our study presents the first ever large-scale empirical examination of the trend and determinants of revolutionary nostalgia in contemporary China. To quantify the level of nostalgia, which may not be adequately measured through traditional survey methods, we constructed an index of revolutionary nostalgia (IRN) based on large volumes of online enquiry data extracted from searches for revolutionary songs on Baidu at the provincial level in mainland China. By measuring and mapping the spectrum of revolutionary nostalgia, we contribute to the extant literature by unveiling the regional and temporal variations of revolutionary nostalgia among the Chinese. In particular, we find that the evolving trends of nostalgia across the provinces are interestingly similar but stratified, showing that nostalgia for the pre-reform era results from a combination of pervasive socio-political power at all levels and local social contexts. Our method of quantifying nostalgia using such unprecedented amounts of data could be more widely used in future to examine the transformation of sociocultural dynamics over the long term.

We also empirically examine how the provincial level of revolutionary nostalgia is shaped by a constellation of prior socio-economic and political factors. We exploit the dynamic panel feature of our data to address the correlation between the lagged dependent variable and errors by employing the GMM estimator.

Our preliminary findings have several implications for deepening scholarly understanding of how nostalgic feelings about the pre-reform past emerge and evolve in contemporary China. First, China's revolutionary nostalgia appears to be a by-product of the joint effect of regional development level and state-led political mobilization. Regions with a higher level of income inequality are more likely to show a higher level of revolutionary nostalgia, implying that widening income

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55 For example, Tian 2012.

inequality is the driving force behind this increased nostalgia for the Mao era. In addition, more nostalgic feelings towards the old regime are found in regions with greater capacity for political mobilization (such as Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai).

We also find that the intensity of revolutionary nostalgia is significantly and positively predicted by its lagged value in the previous year, implying it is path dependent across regions. Third, holding all other factors fixed, regions with a higher level of economic and legal development and a higher degree of globalization tend to harbour less nostalgic feelings towards the old regime. This suggests that more open provinces also have more liberal political views and thus less revolutionary nostalgia.

Fourth, social development, as represented by the number of NGOs, positively predicts revolutionary nostalgia. This may be related to the fact that most NGOs in China operate under conditions of state patronage.[56] According to He Jianyu and Wang Shaoguang, among the eight million NGOs in China, seven million are top-down government-affiliated GONGOs.[57]

Our findings nevertheless have some limitations that deserve further discussion. First, despite our considerable effort to extract related red songs, we may have still omitted important ones, a factor which could have led to underrepresentation in our sample. Second, searching for red songs online reflects only one dimension of revolutionary nostalgia. For instance, people might search online for great leaders, such as Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou for example, out of nostalgia for the past. The frequency of online searches for red songs could also be the result of several other factors, for example the intensity of red culture campaigns. Third, individuals searching for red songs online are likely to be a non-random sample, given that people aged 50 and above are under-represented – that particular age group might be expected to have a stronger sense of revolutionary nostalgia. Thus, data extracted from search engines could represent only netizens at most and not all Chinese citizens. Despite running a variety of robustness checks to avoid such bias, we hope future studies will empirically extend our preliminary results using more relevant controls and take advantage of the increasing number of netizens nationwide over time.

Acknowledgements

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56 Hsu and Hasmath 2014; Hsu and Jiang 2015; Saich 2000; Yuen 2018.
57 He and Wang 2008, 162.

Biographical notes

Shuanglong LI is an associate professor of sociology in the department of sociology at the School of Public Administration, Guangzhou University. He holds a PhD degree in sociology from Kyushu University, Japan. His research interests cover health, social networks, social stratification and mobility. His articles have appeared in, among others, *Social Science and Medicine*, *Social Indicators Research*, *Chinese Journal of Sociology* and *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

Fei YAN is an associate professor of sociology in the department of sociology at Tsinghua University. He received his academic training from the University of Oxford and Stanford University. His research focuses on political sociology, historical sociology and Chinese societies. His work has appeared in *Social Science Research*, *Urban Studies*, *The Sociological Review*, *Social Movement Studies*, *Modern China*, *China Information* and *China: An International Journal*.

摘要： 基于网络在线搜索形成的海量数据，本研究绘制了第一幅当代中国人革命怀旧情绪的大幅肖像，并对各省怀旧情绪的形成机制进行了实证分析。对每一个省份，我们使用网民在中国国内最广泛使用的在线搜索引擎——百度上搜索红色歌曲的标准化频次来测量当地的革命怀旧水平。我们发现，各省之间怀旧情绪的演变趋势相似但也有分化。基于广义矩估计的动态面板数据分析的结果表明，革命怀旧情绪受到一系列社会经济因素的显著影响，包括省级层次的人均 GDP 、收入不平等、社会发展、法制发展以及全球化发展水平。

关键词: 红歌; 革命怀旧; 中国; 大数据; 动态面板数据分析

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