

# When Politics Froze Fashion: The Effect of the Cultural Revolution on Naming in Beijing<sup>1</sup>

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The authors examine the popularity of boys' given names in Beijing before and after the onset of the Cultural Revolution to clarify how exogenous and endogenous factors interact to shape fashion. Whereas recent work in the sociology of culture emphasizes the importance of endogenous processes in explaining fashion, their analysis demonstrates two ways in which politics shaped cultural expression during the Cultural Revolution: by promoting forms of expression reflecting prevailing political ideology and by limiting individuals' willingness to act differently. As argued by Lieberman and developed further in this article, the second condition is important because endogenous fashion cycles require a critical mass of individuals who seek to differentiate themselves from common practice. Exogenous factors can influence the operation of the endogenous factors. The authors discuss the implications of their study for understanding the nature of conformity under authoritarian regimes and social conditions supporting individual expression.

A weak person steers clear of individualization; he avoids dependence upon self with its responsibilities and the necessity of defending himself unaided. He finds protection only in the typical form of life.

(Simmel 1957, p. 550)

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Our generation used to live for others, for our parents, for our country, worst of all, for the opinions of others. We always worried about how others would respond to our words and deeds.

("Lingmu," a survivor of the Cultural Revolution  
[Wen 1995, p. 144])

Recent scholarship directs us to the importance of endogenous factors for understanding fashion and explaining cultural change more generally (Lieberson 2000; Kaufman 2004). This research reveals that fashion is its own engine of change in a manner that "suggests a large measure of independence from outside historical events" (Robinson 1976, p. 1138). For instance, while the rise of the miniskirt in the 1960s might be interpreted as reflecting the influence of the women's movement, it may also have been driven solely by long-term cycles in women's fashion concerning hemlines, whereby the impetus to engage in marginal differentiation accumulates to become significant change (cf. Richardson and Kroeber 1940; Lieberson 2000, pp. 93–98). More generally, Lieberson argues that the attribution of fashion trends to exogenous forces is often based on post hoc reasoning. His analysis of fashion in "first" or "given" names in Western countries provides what is perhaps the strongest empirical support for the importance of endogenous processes in relation to exogenous factors (see also Besnard 1994; Salganik, Dodds, and Watts 2006).

Yet despite the increasing evidence for the importance of endogenous processes in Western fashion, their role would seem limited in contexts in which politics permeates culture, as occurred in China during the Cultural Revolution. From the Maoist regime's inception in 1949, it engaged in a series of aggressive interventions in cultural expression that has no parallel in any of the countries studied by Lieberson—and perhaps none in human history. At no time were these interventions as apparent as during the Cultural Revolution, which began at the end of May 1966 and was officially declared over shortly after Mao's death in 1976. The Cultural Revolution seems to have "frozen fashion" in a vast array of cultural domains. A salient example from the domain of apparel was the near-

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universality of “Mao suits”—buttoned-up jackets with rounded collars and four patch pockets with flaps (Garrett 2007). As attested by many photographs from the period, this suit was worn by many across the country, regardless of sex, age, or occupation.

Existing theory points to two straightforward ways in which politics can influence culture and could lead to the freezing of fashion. First, politics can restrict the supply of cultural material. This mechanism is well known from research in the “production of culture” tradition, where the focus is on how industry structure (in capitalist economies) shapes the supply of cultural forms (see Peterson and Anand [2004] for a review), but it can be extended to include political structures insofar as they intervene in the economy. The Maoist regime’s monopoly on the production, distribution, and importation of cultural (and other) products meant that even those Chinese who might wish to deviate from common cultural practices had limited ability to do so. For example, some Chinese jokingly call the Cultural Revolution “eight hundred million watching eight shows” (*Ba yi ren kan ba bu xi*), referring to the fact that only eight revolutionary operas were permitted (Clark 2008, p. 3). To return to the case of the Mao suit, a major factor behind its widespread adoption was that, because of the rationing of thread and cloth during the Great Leap Forward (1958–61), “there was little choice but to wear clothes until they fell apart, or buy a Mao suit” (Garrett 2007, p. 219).

A second way in which politics can influence culture is implied by reflection theory (see Albrecht 1954; Griswold 1981; Kaufman 2004). The key idea is that individuals choosing a cultural practice select from a repertoire of practices that are privileged by the political environment (Swidler 1986). In Mao’s China—and, more specifically, during the Cultural Revolution—the regime made a concerted effort to reshape the cultural repertoire, and many people’s choices during this period appear to reflect this. For example, the Mao suit was associated with Sun Yat-sen, a founder of the Chinese republic, and was later adopted by Mao Zedong and other leaders of the Communist Party to symbolize the Communists’ inheritance of Sun’s republican mantle. It also embodied important elements of the regime’s ideology, such as the equality of individuals with respect to age, sex, and occupation. At the same time, individuals rejected other forms of dress—such as the *qipao*, the traditional female dress, and Western three-piece suits—because they reflected the influences of traditional Chinese culture and Western practices.

These two exogenous and specifically political mechanisms for shaping culture—the restriction of cultural supply and the *repertoire-shift effect*—seem so salient during the Cultural Revolution that it is questionable whether endogenous processes were relevant at all. Yet theoretical con-

siderations suggest that we consider an additional mechanism through which politics influences fashion—what we label a “shift in the taste for popularity” or the *TFP-shift effect*—the idea that political context shapes fashion by triggering or dampening endogenous processes (cf. Fishman and Lizardo 2013). In general, the reason to posit such a mechanism is that while *change in fashion* may be driven by endogenous processes, it seems necessary to posit some exogenous factor to explain *fashion itself*, that is, why some social contexts have more variety and change in cultural practices than others. As Lieberman (2000) and Lieberman and Lynn (2003) argue, underlying such differences in the degree of fashion across contexts are shifts in the typical person’s “taste for popularity” (TFP)—the desire to differentiate himself or herself from common forms of cultural expression rather than conform to them. The epigraphical quotation taken from Simmel’s (1957) classic essay on fashion hints at how politics might shift the average TFP: the unconventionality that is the engine of fashion is avoided by people who are “weak” or insecure (see also Phillips and Zuckerman 2001). And as the epigraphic quotation from a survivor of the Cultural Revolution exemplifies, such insecurity was common then.

To develop and test these ideas, we focus on the popularity distribution of boys’ given names in Beijing before and after the onset of the Cultural Revolution. The beginning of the Cultural Revolution marked a sharp break that had immediate and dramatic effects on the cultural repertoire and on individuals’ security in expressing difference. In short, and as reviewed below, the Cultural Revolution was an ambitious and violent attempt to remold culture by removing vestiges of Chinese “feudal” tradition and Western “bourgeois” and “individualist” culture from all realms of life, including dress, music, and hairstyles. Also, insofar as the violent political chaos of the Cultural Revolution engendered deep feelings of insecurity in all Chinese citizens, we expect that this period involved a shift in the average citizen’s TFP toward greater conformity, thus dampening the operation of the endogenous mechanisms that produce fashion.

Our approach has three important advantages. First, the onset of the Cultural Revolution in Beijing was sudden and had wide-ranging effects on many people. This allows us to conduct a quasi experiment with a before-and-after design, examining how the distribution of popularity of boys’ given names was affected by these events.

Second, while the Maoist regime’s control over cultural production caused an obvious constraint on the supply of cultural material, we follow Lieberman and other recent researchers (see Besnard 1994; Gerhards and Hackenbroch 2000; Gerhards 2005; Sue and Telles 2007; Berger and Le Mens 2009; Gerhards and Hans 2009) and focus on a cultural domain in which such restriction of cultural supply is irrelevant: fashion in given

names.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, given names have important consequences for a range of social and economic outcomes (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2004; Aura and Hess 2010), so we should be able to observe the impact of a political shift on the popularity of particular names.

Third, the particulars of Chinese naming practices provide good reason to expect that the onset of the Cultural Revolution produced both a repertoire-shift effect and a TFP-shift effect. Unlike Western names and especially English names, most Chinese names have a meaning that is salient to the audience. This suggests that political conditions that make certain meanings more or less desirable are likely to affect what names the parents consider (cf. Weitman 1987). This provides a strong basis for expecting a repertoire shift whereby parents prefer names with politically desirable content over names with politically undesirable or politically neutral content. But we also argue and show below that the Cultural Revolution had a more subtle effect on culture: It froze fashion by increasing the desire to conform.

We organize the rest of the paper as follows. In the next section, we discuss two mechanisms—the repertoire-shift effect and the TFP-shift effect—by which politics can influence culture generally and naming practices in particular. In the following sections, we provide background on Chinese naming practices and a historical overview that develops our hypotheses about how the Cultural Revolution shaped naming practices in China. Next, we discuss the data we collected and present our results. We conclude by drawing lessons for our understanding of (a) the political culture of authoritarian regimes, (b) the interaction of exogenous conditions with endogenous cultural change, and (c) the political foundations of individual expression.

#### MECHANISMS BY WHICH POLITICS CAN INFLUENCE CULTURE

As discussed above, supply-side factors aside, politics can influence culture through two demand-side mechanisms. The first, which we label the *repertoire-shift effect*, is implied by reflection theory (see Albrecht 1954; Griswold 1981; Kaufman 2004). The idea is that politics can change individuals' preferences for content, leading many parents to choose politically desirable options—specifically, names. For example, in Germany, the use of traditional German names (such as Kurt, Ernst, and Otto) increased between the two world wars, then sharply decreased after World War II (Gerhards 2005, pp. 41–46). This pattern seems to reflect the rise and fall

<sup>2</sup> In Chinese culture, a given name follows a surname. Accordingly, to avoid confusion, we do not use the terms “first” and “last” names.

of fascist ideology. Similarly, politics might render a certain name less desirable. Accordingly, in Germany after World War II, parents avoided the name Adolf. Similarly, after the Civil Rights movement, many African-Americans avoided names common among whites (Lieberson and Mikelson 1995). To the extent that many individuals prefer practices with politically desirable content and avoid practices with politically undesirable content, politics will be reflected in cultural expression.

The second way in which politics can affect culture is by changing the form rather than the content of cultural expression (cf. Fishman and Lizardo 2013). In particular, what we label the *TFP-shift effect* is based on the idea that politics can induce changes in the average individual's preference for conforming to (as opposed to differentiating from) popular cultural practices. Much prior theory and research suggest that individuals select practices not simply for their content but also for their relative prevalence; Lieberson and Lynn (2003) label this behavior an individual's "taste for popularity" (see also Lieberson 2000; Varnum and Kitayama 2011; cf. Berger and Le Mens 2009).<sup>3</sup> Below, we discuss theory that suggests why the taste for popularity might vary within and between populations. For now, it is sufficient to note (see Zuckerman [in press] for a review) that people typically prefer a practice that is not so common that they resemble everyone else (e.g., it is awkward when one finds that one is wearing exactly the same outfit as others) and not so rare that one's cultural competence or commitment to the group becomes questionable (e.g., wearing pajamas to a dinner party). Also, while it is difficult to observe TFP directly, there is some evidence that it is a stable trait. For example, Lieberson and Lynn (2003) use General Social Survey data to show that parents with two children typically give both of them names similar in popularity.

The *TFP-shift effect* describes the macro implications of a population-level shift in the mean TFP.<sup>4</sup> To appreciate how this effect operates, consider first how variation in TFP within a population acts as an endogenous engine of cultural variety and change (Lieberson and Lynn 2003). Assume that the average member of the population prefers practices of moderate popularity and that various subgroups in the population exhibit continuous variation in their TFP, from the "innovators"—those with a

<sup>3</sup> Note that the idea of a TFP is related to models of collective behavior based on threshold effects (see Bass 1969; Granovetter 1978; Schelling 1978; Granovetter and Soong 1983; Marwell and Oliver 1993). The difference is that whereas a threshold is a trigger for action based on a minimum level of popularity, a TFP is an ideal point in a popularity distribution such that practices can be too popular as well as too unpopular.

<sup>4</sup> For a computational model that clarifies the internal logic of the informal model described in the next two paragraphs, see the appendix below.

strong preference for rare practices and a corresponding aversion to common practices—to the “conformists”—those who prefer the most common practices and avoid rare practices (cf. Rogers 2003). Under these conditions, once innovators make a rare practice somewhat popular, it will be adopted by subgroups with ever-lower mean TFP, the practice diffusing until it is embraced even by the conformists. But as it diffuses, it becomes too popular for the innovators, who then turn to new practices. It is clear that such a system will always feature variation in cultural practices. And we can see that such a TFP distribution will also generate significant change in cultural practices over time. That is, the system will exhibit fashion dynamics.

Now consider how a population-level shift in the TFP distribution would turn on or turn off the fashion engine. Lieberman (2000, pp. 66–68) and Lieberman and Lynn (2003) show that in the 19th century, naming patterns in the West underwent a phase shift from being governed by tradition (with very little variety and change) to being governed by fashion (greater variety and change). For example, throughout the 16th and 17th centuries in England, nearly half of all boys were named William, John, or Thomas (Smith-Bannister 1997; cited in Lieberman and Lynn 2003, p. 238). By contrast, in 2000 in the United States, the three most popular boys’ names accounted for only 4.6% of boys. Furthermore, one of these names had not been in the top three a decade earlier, indicating fairly rapid change in the popularity distribution. Lieberman (2000, pp. 66–68) and Lieberman and Lynn (2003) posit that this historical shift in the typical person’s TFP away from conformity and toward differentiation was brought about by a range of exogenous factors summarized as “the rise of individualism.”

Extending Lieberman’s logic, we suggest that such a shift in TFP can be reversed by political processes that shift a typical person’s TFP away from differentiation and toward conformity. This mechanism underlies a second way in which politics might influence culture and lead to the freezing of fashion. Consider that at one extreme, if everyone has a very high TFP, there will no longer be any innovators to create cultural variety and serve as the engine of change. Thus, if exogenous (political) conditions can shift the average TFP toward this extreme, they will dampen fashion. Below, we will develop the idea (drawn from the literatures on status and conformity and from the events of the Cultural Revolution) that a typical person’s TFP is influenced by how secure she feels about her group membership. We argue that during periods of political turmoil, such as the Cultural Revolution, the pervasive sense of insecurity might shift a typical person’s taste for popularity toward more conformity and less differentiation, dampening the operation of the fashion mechanism.

## THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND NAMING PRACTICES

Having clarified how politics can shape culture through the repertoire shift and the TFP shift, we next provide historical evidence to support our argument that both of these mechanisms affected naming practices at the onset of the Cultural Revolution. But before doing so, it is worth emphasizing certain distinctive aspects of Chinese naming practices that are important for understanding our case. To begin, the meaning of a Chinese person's name is salient to her. Traditionally, Chinese names have three parts, each represented by a single character: a surname, a generational name (given to all members of a lineage born in a given generation), and a given name. In modern China, generational names have fallen into disuse and two-character given names have become common (Zhu and Millward 1987, p. 15). Each character making up a name is a unit of meaning on its own; this meaning can also be modified by the characters preceding and following it (Sung 1981, pp. 72–85). As mentioned in the introduction, this fact makes it more likely that names in China are subject to the regime's efforts to reshape cultural repertoires than are names in Western societies, where a name's meaning is less salient (cf. Weitman 1987).

In addition, we argue that Chinese given names are also likely to be subject to the TFP-shift effect. Since given names are all-purpose markers of identity that individuals use across social situations—including interactions with the state—we expect Chinese parents to be especially conservative in choosing given names for their children. It is important to note in this regard that the Chinese often avoid using official given names in interaction among family members, friends, or even acquaintances. It is very common in China, as in other cultures, to use pet names or nicknames within one's family or local community (on “milk” names, see Sung [1981, pp. 69–70]). Among friends and acquaintances, it is common to use fictive kinship terms such as “older sister” or nicknames that combine an individual's last name with a short description, such as “little Zhang” (on nicknames, see Zhu and Millward [1987, pp. 18–20]). Official names are therefore expressly designed for public situations and interactions with the state (Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002).

Chinese naming practices characteristically differ from those typical in the West in at least two ways that are important for our study.

*Greater variety.*—We expect to see a much greater variety of names in our data than Lieberman reports in the West for at least three reasons. First, almost any character can be used in a name, and some parents slightly alter existing characters. Second, a distinctive aspect of Chinese naming practices is the general custom of “family avoidance”—a taboo against publicly speaking the name of an ancestor (Sung 1981, pp. 87–88). This means that Chinese avoid naming their children after relatives—living or dead (cf. Rossi



1965). Third, the Chinese language has a very limited number of surnames: only 5,652 have ever been recorded (Hang 1981; cited in Zhu and Millward [1987, p. 9]). As a result, there is a much stronger tendency to choose uncommon given names (Sung 1981, p. 88; Watson 1986, p. 622). For example, Watson reports that “the Chinese find the idea of sharing one’s given name with millions of other people extraordinary” (p. 622), and Sung (1981) describes official policies on name changing by the Taiwanese government, which are designed to avoid confusion among people with the same name.<sup>5</sup>

*Girls’ names.*—Until recently, girls’ names were not more fashion driven than boys’ names, as they are in most Western societies. Historically, because of the low status of women in Chinese society, the Chinese have paid less attention to their daughters’ names than to their sons’ names. For example, an ethnographer of rural Hong Kong in the 1960s describes women as “nameless”: at marriage, they lost their baby names and became known and referred to by their relationships (e.g., as “wife of Li” or “mother of Zhang”) and, in old age, simply as “an old woman” (Watson 1986; cf. Sung 1981, p. 89). As the status of women in Chinese society improved following the Communist Revolution, parents started to pay more attention to their daughters’ names. However, because of (a) the expense of obtaining both girls’ and boys’ names and (b) the issue of how changes in the social status of women might complicate the interpretation of the results for girls’ names, we decided to focus our analyses on boys’ names (but see Obukhova et al. 2011).

### The Two Mechanisms in Historical Context

In this section, after a brief historical overview of the onset of the Cultural Revolution in Beijing, we review suggestive historical evidence for the two mechanisms we proposed, especially as they relate to naming.

On May 16, 1966, the Cultural Revolution was officially launched in a politburo notification that announced a purge of Beijing’s mayor.<sup>6</sup> On May 25, seven Peking University professors posted a “big-character” poster denouncing the university party hierarchy.<sup>7</sup> On June 1 and 2, the contents

<sup>5</sup> Similar restrictions are known in other labor markets. For example, the Screen Actors Guild does not allow two members to have the same name (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stage\\_name](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stage_name)). This is an important impetus for the generation of unusual names in Hollywood.

<sup>6</sup> Our account of these events is primarily based on MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2006) and Walder (2009).

<sup>7</sup> These were posters written in large characters and posted in public places for passersby to read.

of the poster were broadcast nationally and published in all of China's newspapers, making ordinary Chinese aware that something extraordinary was going on in the capital. Events in Beijing moved rapidly: over the next two weeks, work teams composed of outside cadres descended on universities and secondary schools to evaluate the performance of their party hierarchies.<sup>8</sup> The extent of the purges varied by school, but when they were over, more than half of the university party secretaries had been branded as antiparty reactionaries (Walder 2009, p. 57).

The events surrounding the purges of the party hierarchy gave rise to a large-scale mobilization of university and secondary-school students who became known as Red Guards and played an important role in shaping events over the following months.<sup>9</sup> After the publication of the Peking University poster, all universities and secondary schools in Beijing suspended classes and students were encouraged to engage in politics. During June, at Tsinghua University in Beijing alone, 65,000 big-character posters were put up (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, p. 67). Across Beijing's universities, Red Guards primarily focused on the actions of the work teams sent to their campuses (Walder 2009). In contrast, secondary-school Red Guards did not limit their concerns to their schools' political hierarchies, but also went on violent rampages through their cities with the diffuse goal of remaking China's culture. As these events unfolded, the party leaders—and even Mao himself—found themselves increasingly unable (or unwilling) to control the direction and violence of the movement.

### The Repertoire-Shift Effect

In the summer of 1966, the actions of the Red Guards in Beijing, particularly those drawn from secondary schools, had important effects on culture. These Red Guards terrorized Beijing, attacking any manifestation of the "Four Olds" decried by Mao: old habits, old routines, old thoughts, and old culture. The methods of delegitimizing cultural practices were public and violent and included searching households and destroying objects considered "feudal" or "bourgeois." During the month of August, 114,000 homes were searched, and 2.3 million books and 3.3 million paintings, art objects, and pieces of furniture were confiscated (Walder 2009, p. 145). During the entire Cultural Revolution in Beijing, three out of four (or 4,922 out of 6,843)

<sup>8</sup> In China, secondary schools that offer six years of postprimary education are typically known as middle schools.

<sup>9</sup> Red Guards were not a unified force. Rather, as Walder (2009, p. 174) writes, "the basic building block of the red guard movement was a small group of students, usually no more than ten to fifteen individuals from the same classroom, who pledged allegiance to broader factional groupings as they formed." The first Red Guard group emerged in the secondary school affiliated with Tsinghua University on May 29, 1966.

“places of cultural or historical interest” were destroyed, most of the destruction taking place between August and September of 1966 (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, p. 118). Those whom the Red Guards found to be harboring “decadent” or “bourgeois” items had their hair forcefully shaved in a ying-and-yang style (*ying yang tou*), where the hair on one half of the head was chopped short and the hair on the other half was shaved clean (Wen 1995, p. 10).

In their attempts to remove “feudal” and “bourgeois” influences on Chinese culture, the Red Guards did not overlook names. One Red Guard group campaigned for Beijing to be renamed “East Is Red City” (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, p. 119). As summarized by MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, Red Guard factions attempted to rename many prominent landmarks in the city to reflect their ideology: “Perhaps the most harmless part of the movement was the changing of names—streets, shops, schools, theaters, restaurants, hospitals, newspapers, journals. . . . In Beijing, Zhou Enlai allowed the name of the road on which the Soviet embassy was located to be officially changed from Yangwei Street to Anti-Revisionism street, as requested by the Red Guards” (pp. 114–15).

Personal names were also subject to change. The most famous incident involving a change of a given name occurred during the mass rally in Tiananmen Square on August 18, 1966.<sup>10</sup> At this rally, Mao symbolically endorsed the Red Guard movement by accepting an armband from a secondary-school student who had been involved in the violent actions that led to the death of a teacher at her school. The report in the press related that, upon learning that her given name was Binbin—meaning “refined and courteous”—Mao suggested that she change her name to Yaowu, meaning “be martial.” Similarly, Lu and Millward (1989) report that during the Cultural Revolution, a student voluntarily changed his name from Xue Ru, meaning “to learn from Confucius,” to Xue Biao, meaning “to learn from Lin Biao,” who at the time was a defense minister groomed to be Mao’s successor. Another student was forced to change his name from Zhongli, meaning “remain neutral,” to Zuo, meaning “left.”

It is worth noting that none of these name changes resulted from an explicit regime policy. With the exception of the renaming of Song Binbin in Tiananmen Square, there is no evidence that Mao or anyone close to him explicitly encouraged the adoption of politically desirable names or actively discouraged the adoption of names considered politically illegitimate. In fact, by December 1966, Premier Zhou Enlai, known to be a moderate in

<sup>10</sup> This story appears with slight variations in various accounts (see Lu and Millward 1989, p. 268; Honig 2002, p. 259; MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, p. 108). Also, see *Morning Sun: A Film about the Cultural Revolution* (2003), a documentary by Carma Hinton. The relevant clip is posted at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLtoZTLMR3k>.

this period, repudiated the extent of the name changing. Citing Mao's authority, he told a group of Red Guards that, "As for names, as long as they're not too feudal or too backward, then they're all right" (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, p. 116). In this respect, the Maoist intervention into naming was far less extensive than some interventions in other times and places.<sup>11</sup>

From the anecdotes about name changing related above, we might surmise that the events at the onset of the Cultural Revolution altered the repertoire from which parents picked names for their children. And we expect such a repertoire shift to have a characteristic effect on popular names; it will increase the popularity of practices reflecting the prevailing political ideology. Indeed, some evidence suggests that this did occur during the Cultural Revolution. For example, Lu and Millward's (1989) study of students in Nianjing shows a high incidence of "political" names among children born during the Cultural Revolution, and Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden (2005, p. 101) report that about half of the children born during the "high tide" of the Cultural Revolution in the model village of Wugong in Hebei Province were given "revolutionary" names. Also note that a sudden repertoire shift will produce a short-term spike in turnover, as politically desirable practices replace previously popular practices that either are politically neutral or have become politically undesirable.

### The TFP-Shift Effect

In addition to the shift in the repertoire of names discussed above, we contend that the onset of the Cultural Revolution induced a shift in the TFP distribution, dampening the endogenous processes that drive fashion. This argument derives from the lesson derives from the literature on status and conformity (see Phillips and Zuckerman 2001; Phillips, Turco, and Zuckerman 2013) that in order to publicly engage in practices that are unusual (and potentially seen as deviant) among category members, individuals must feel a sense of security or "unquestioned [category] membership" (Hughes 1946). In many contexts, high-status individuals are more likely to feel such security, allowing them to engage in rare practices with the confidence that this will not raise questions about their competence or commitment (Phillips et al. 2013). Accordingly, Simmel (1957) argues that the tendency to conform rather than differentiate reflects the "weakness" of an actor's social position.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, the long-standing guidelines for legitimate names in the French legal code, the German *Namensänderungsverordnung* policy of 1938, or Turkish restrictions on Kurdish names (Aslan 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Note that even actors who differentiate tend to do so in very limited fashion, by conforming on most available dimensions of difference and by avoiding practices that would clearly convey incompetence or a lack of commitment (see Zuckerman, in press).

Accordingly, considerable research shows that immigrants who give their children host-society names tend to select the most prevalent ones (Sue and Telles 2007; Watkins and London 1994; Lieberman 2000, chap. 7; Zhang, Zuckerman, and Obukhova 2013).<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, while such research shows how greater conformity in a subgroup derives from group members' relative lack of security as members of a larger society, this logic can be extended to situations in which virtually everyone experiences a high level of insecurity about their standing with respect to the regime and thus prefers more popular cultural practices. In such contexts, latent suspicions about the commitment or loyalties of all actors—and perhaps especially high-status actors who can be accused of having feigned loyalty to get ahead (cf. Phillips et al. 2013; Hahl and Zuckerman 2014)—rise to the foreground.

The onset of the Cultural Revolution engendered such conditions. The Red Guard factions delivered severe punishments to those they perceived as engaging in deviant behavior or even likely to engage in such behavior. During the summer of 1966, those accused of being counterrevolutionary were subjected to humiliation and even violence during public “struggle sessions”—rallies at which one or more individuals had to answer accusations and confess their alleged crimes. Many secondary schools and universities set up makeshift prisons where Red Guards kept and tortured their prisoners, including party cadres, teachers, and fellow students. As a result, for August alone, the death toll in the capital reached 1,772 (Walder 2009, p. 145). And by the end of the summer, some 77,000 residents from “bad” backgrounds, or nearly 2% of Beijing's population, had been forced to return to their ancestral villages (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals 2006, p. 123). Despite this escalation of violence, directives were issued to army and public security units on August 21 and 22 prohibiting them from interfering with Red Guard actions, however violent.

While penalties for engaging in deviant behavior were severe, there was intense ambiguity about what constitutes a correct pattern of behavior. For

<sup>13</sup>In addition to the most secure actors, very-low-status actors can also be expected to engage in rare practices. Insofar as they are outsiders effectively barred from recognition as members of a category, they can be expected to cease identifying with it (Phillips and Zuckerman 2001). Accordingly, Varnum and Kitayama (2011) show that parents in frontier settlements in the United States and Canada, who were largely excluded from the status ordering of the established settlements, picked more unusual names than parents in established settlements. Similarly, Lieberman and Mikelson (1995) document a trend among African-Americans to invent unusual names for their children, consistent with a lack of identification with the mainstream white culture. Note that this trend began after the Civil Rights movement, when African-Americans achieved a certain level of political security (i.e., such that asserting their legal rights did not depend on cultural conformity). Thus, this case seems to involve two mechanisms that heighten the willingness to engage in rare practices.

example, Walder (2009, p. 13) writes that “in China’s schools during the summer of 1966, the institutions that stabilized expectation about authority and linked one’s status and position to political response were breaking down rapidly in novel and unpredictable ways. The signals about expected behavior, very clear in stable circumstances, were suddenly scrambled.” Similarly, one Englishman teaching in Beijing recalled how he tried to make sense of what was going on following the purge of Beijing’s mayor: “When the first work groups came into the school I asked my most intelligent grad student (from Shanghai) what was going on; ‘I haven’t a clue,’ he said. ‘Can’t you sit on the fence until things are clearer?’ I asked him. ‘No,’ he said; ‘you have to choose one line or the other.’ ‘But surely you can sense which is going to win?’ I asked him. ‘No, it is quite impossible. You just have to jump’” (cited in MacFarquhar and Schoenhals [2006, p. 59]).

Even high status could not protect one from the possibility of making a wrong choice. High-status party officials were the first victims of the purges (Walder 2009).<sup>14</sup> And nobody was safe from the Red Guards’ accusations, even previously untouchable party members such as those who had joined the party before the revolution or had spent time in the revolutionary base in Yan’an. Consider, for example, the following dialogue recounted in a memoir of the Cultural Revolution: “‘Doesn’t your position as a delegate to the Political Consultative Conference give you some protection?’ I asked my friend (Li Chen). ‘I hear the Maoists want to abolish that organization. They call it a collection of radishes, red on the outside but white inside. They claim that while all the delegates talked as if they supported the Communist Party, in actual fact they oppose the party,’ she said” (Cheng 1986, p. 74).<sup>15</sup>

While we cannot directly measure the degree of insecurity individuals felt, it is reasonable to surmise that, under such circumstances, everyone experienced significant insecurity about his or her standing with the regime. As a result, we expect that the onset of the Cultural Revolution triggered a population-level shift in TFP toward more conformity.

In the realm of names, we expect that such a shift had two implications for the shape of the popularity distribution. First, we expect that parents chose more popular names for their children and avoided rare names.

<sup>14</sup> As Phillips et al. (2013) discuss, high status confers security in membership only insofar as the achievement of status implies that the actor is committed to the audience who confers status. But conditions like the Cultural Revolution explicitly undermine this implication, as they suggest that those who have achieved high status had ulterior motives and were faking their commitment (cf. Hahl and Zuckerman 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Li Chen was the head of the Piano Department at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. According to the memoir’s author, Li committed suicide (one of thousands during this period) at her piano, unable to resist the pressure from the Red Guards.

Indeed, some parents might have been wary of using a political name to signal their commitment to the regime because of the dramatic—and often rapid—changes in the party line and uncertainty about which political faction would dominate. A vivid example of such a reversal is provided by Friedman et al. (2005, p. 101): A boy was named Xuesu, or “emulate the Soviet Union,” in the early 1950s but was renamed Pixiu, or “criticize revisionism,” in a futile attempt to stave off bullying and beating during the Cultural Revolution when the post-Stalin USSR was vilified as having betrayed socialism. In addition, we expect that a TFP shift will lead to a decline in cultural change because fewer members of the population adopt new practices, slowing down the engine of fashion.

#### DATA, METHOD, AND MEASUREMENT

The data for this study come from National Citizen Identity Information Center (NCIIC), managed by China’s Ministry of Public Security (MPS). Under the household registration system (*hukou zhidu*) introduced at the inception of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the MPS records and manages the information (including name, birth date, gender, and address) of all citizens. In the early 2000s, the MPS, as part of its program of replacing paper identity cards with smart cards, compiled a digital record of all individuals with identity cards. The MPS database records people’s current names, but because registering a name change with the MPS is a cumbersome process, we expect that these data are a fairly accurate reflection of names given at birth. When our data were compiled, people born at the onset of the Cultural Revolution would have been in their early 40s, and since the life expectancy of that cohort is over 50 years, it is not likely that mortality significantly influences our results.

We obtained data on the names of male Beijing residents born every other month between January 1964 and November 1969. We decided to focus on Beijing because it was the epicenter of the Cultural Revolution and events there are relatively well documented compared to other areas of China (Walder and Su 2003; Walder 2009). We can therefore benefit from the well-established chronology to explore how particular historical events shaped the popularity distribution of boys’ given names. Because it is possible that, among male residents of Beijing during our study period, some were born outside of Beijing and later migrated there, we restricted our data collection to the oldest areas of the city: the Dongcheng, Xicheng, Chongwen, and Xuanwu districts located inside the second ring road. Since these districts are the most densely populated, we believe that they received the fewest in-migrants.

For each of these 36 months, we obtained a list of the 30 most popular boys’ names and the share of all newborn boys they represent. Ideally, we



would have preferred to obtain a list of all names, but NCIIC's pricing policies made this impossible. Instead, because we expect to find a greater variety of names in China than in Western cultures (as discussed above), we also obtained the share of boys who had any one of the 1,000 most popular boys' names, but not the names themselves. These data provide a robustness check for our analyses of cultural variety, but since we do not know the names themselves, we cannot use them to calculate cultural change among the top 1,000 names. Despite their limitations, our data compare favorably with data used in the study of Western names, which typically uses fewer than 30 names (e.g., Lieberman 2000, chap. 2; Lieberman and Lynn 2003).

Note finally that our analysis is a quasi experiment with a before-and-after design without a control group. To find a control group, we would need a setting that was comparable to Beijing in all respects except for not having received the "treatment" of the Cultural Revolution. After careful consideration, we concluded that no such control group exists. The problem with constructing a control group from Taiwan or Hong Kong is that they were quite different from Beijing prior to the onset of the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, while it was once thought that the Cultural Revolution was heavily centered in Beijing (thus affording the possibility of control groups from elsewhere in the PRC), it is now understood that the Cultural Revolution's effects spread very rapidly and took different forms across different regions of China (see Walder and Su 2003). Thus, as in any before-and-after design, the key assumption underlying our ability to draw causal inferences is that nothing else changed about Beijing in the summer of 1966 that could affect fashion in naming and competed with the effects of the Cultural Revolution. On the basis of the historical record, we believe that this is a safe assumption.

## ANALYSES

### The Repertoire-Shift Effect

We argue that a shift in the cultural repertoire at the onset of the Cultural Revolution should be characterized by an increase in the prevalence of practices reflecting the prevailing political ideology. To evaluate whether such a shift occurred, we begin by identifying names with politically desirable content. First, we compiled a list of the 108 names that appeared among the 30 most popular boys' names in any of the months for which we obtained data. Then, we asked seven individuals from the PRC over the age of 60 (i.e., at least 11 years old at the beginning of our study period) to identify names that "reflected the political culture during the Cultural Revolution." Because we were concerned that the raters might simply identify



names that they remember as being prevalent during the Cultural Revolution rather than names that reflected its ideology, we asked another seven raters to identify from the same list names that “reflected the political culture after the founding of the PRC.”<sup>16</sup>

In table 1, we list every third name that appeared on our list of 108, its approximate English translation, and whether our raters identified it as a politically desirable name. In columns 1 and 3, we display names that raters unanimously identified as reflecting political content for the narrow and broad definitions, respectively. In columns 2 and 4, we present names that the majority (i.e., at least four out of seven) identified as reflecting political content for the narrow and broad definitions, respectively. Not surprisingly, all raters agreed that the name “Cultural Revolution” reflected the political culture of the Cultural Revolution. The majority of raters also identified “Protect East,” “Learn from Army,” “Loyal,” “Forever Red,” “Love Army,” and “Red” as reflecting the political culture of the Cultural Revolution. All raters agreed that “Protect East,” “Learn from Army,” and “Cultural Revolution” reflected PRC political culture, and the majority also identified “East,” “Army,” “Nation Red,” “Build Nation,” “Build Loyalty,” “Build People,” “Aim for Army,” “Loyal,” “Forever Red,” “Love Army,” “Red,” and “Unity” as reflecting PRC political culture. It is plausible that some of these names, such as “Build Nation,” reflect themes of nation building that are more emblematic of the period immediately after the founding of the PRC in 1949.

The evidence presented in figure 1 indicates that the onset of the Cultural Revolution in Beijing had a profound effect on the repertoire of boys’ names. Specifically, we find that in all periods before the summer of 1966, no more than 7% of the top 30 names were identified by the majority of raters as reflecting the political culture of the Cultural Revolution, but in May 1966, this was true of 10% of those names and, by September, more than 25%. Similarly, in all periods before the summer of 1966, no more than 50% of the top 30 boys’ names were identified by a majority of raters as reflecting the PRC political culture, but in September 1966, this was true for more than 70% of the top 30 names. The patterns for names that raters unanimously agreed reflected Cultural Revolution or PRC political culture are substantively similar. The proportion of the top 30 names that met this criterion increased substantially in the summer of 1966, peaking in September. Also note that while the prevalence of political names declined

<sup>16</sup>For both questions, there was considerable agreement among our raters. For the narrower definition, the correlations ranged from .62 to .16, with an average of .44. For the broader definition, the correlations ranged from .72 to .24, with an average of .44.

TABLE 1  
EXAMPLES OF BOYS' NAMES IN OUR SAMPLE, THEIR APPROXIMATE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS,  
AND RATERS' JUDGMENTS ABOUT WHETHER THEIR CONTENT  
REFLECTED POLITICAL CULTURE

NAME	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	REFLECTS CR POLITICAL CULTURE		REFLECTS PRC POLITICAL CULTURE	
		7/7 (1)	4/7 (2)	7/7 (3)	4/7 (4)
东	East	0	0	0	1
健	Healthy	0	0	0	0
军	Army	0	0	0	1
利	Benefit	0	0	0	0
卫东	Protect East	0	1	1	1
国华	Nation Flourishing	0	0	0	0
国红	Nation Red	0	0	0	1
学军	Learn from Army	0	1	1	1
岩	Rock	0	0	0	0
庆	Celebration	0	0	0	0
建华	Build Nation	0	0	0	1
建忠	Build Loyalty	0	0	0	1
建民	Build People	0	0	0	1
志军	Aim for Army	0	0	0	1
忠	Loyal	0	1	0	1
振江	Shake River	0	0	0	0
文华	Literacy Flourishing	0	0	0	0
文革	Cultural Revolution	1	1	1	1
明	Bright	0	0	0	0
晓东	Dawn East	0	0	0	0
林	Woods	0	0	0	0
永红	Forever Red	0	1	0	1
波	Wave	0	0	0	0
涛	Billows	0	0	0	0
爱军	Love Army	0	0	0	1
玉春	Jade Spring	0	0	0	0
秀华	Elegant Flourishing	0	0	0	0
秀荣	Elegant Glorious	0	0	0	0
红	Red	0	1	0	1
联合	Unity	0	0	0	1
英	Hero	0	0	0	0
辉	Splendor	0	0	0	0
金龙	Golden Dragon	0	0	0	0
静	Peace	0	0	0	0
龙	Dragon	0	0	0	0

NOTE.—In the table, 1 denotes a name identified as political and 0 otherwise.

over the following two years, it never reached levels as low as before the Cultural Revolution, except for those names unanimously identified as reflecting the political culture of the Cultural Revolution. In sum, we have compelling evidence that the onset of the Cultural Revolution is associated with a shift in cultural repertoire.

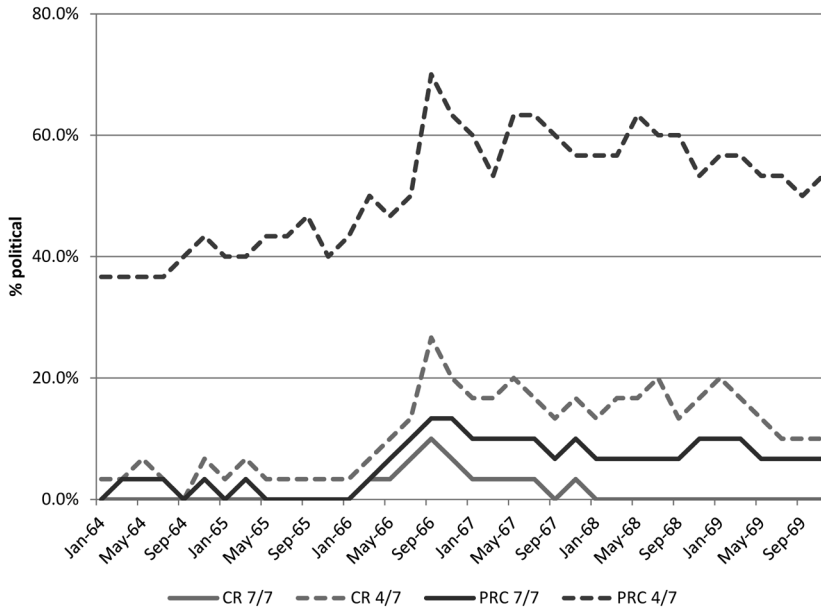


FIG. 1.—Prevalence of political names among top 30 names given to boys born in Beijing before and after the onset of the Cultural Revolution. CR 4/7 and CR 7/7 are the proportion of names that at least four out of seven or all seven raters, respectively, identified as “reflecting the political culture during the Cultural Revolution.” PRC 4/7 and PRC 7/7 are the proportion of names that at least four out of seven or all seven raters, respectively, identified as “reflecting the political culture after the founding of the PRC.”

### The TFP-Shift Effect

We argued that a shift in TFP should be reflected in a decline in cultural variety and change. We begin by analyzing cultural variety. To evaluate whether such a shift has occurred, we examine the proportion of boys who had one of the 30 most popular names and one of the 1,000 most popular names. The results for *top 30 share*, presented in figure 2, indicate a substantial increase in the prevalence of the most popular names in the summer of 1966. Specifically, before March 1966, a little over 5% of newborn boys were given one of the top 30 names. But among boys born in September 1966, almost 10% were. The results for *top 1,000 share* show a similar, though less dramatic, increase over the summer of 1966—from about 35% to about 45%. In sum, the evidence points to a substantial decline in cultural variety after the onset of the Cultural Revolution that is consistent with a TFP shift.

We proceed to examine how the onset of the Cultural Revolution affected the turnover in the most popular names. One way to measure turn-

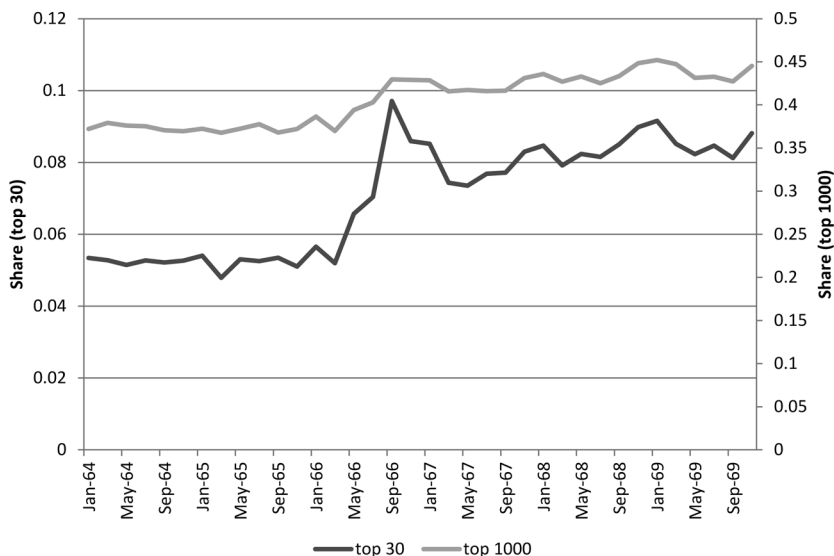


FIG. 2.—Share of newborn boys in Beijing given one of top 30 or top 1,000 most popular names before and after the onset of the Cultural Revolution.

over is to follow Lieberman and Lynn (2003, p. 264), who for each name calculate the difference in the share of population that uses this name between the two time points and then sum the absolute values of the differences across names. However, this simple measure has an important shortcoming that is likely to lead to misleading results in our case (see Zhang et al. 2013). Consider that if the ranking of the top  $n$  names remained stable but the share of the population who had one of the top  $n$  names declined, Lieberman and Lynn's measure would indicate an increase in turnover. As our analyses of cultural variety indicate, such a change did indeed occur during the onset of the Cultural Revolution, necessitating a change in our analytical strategy.

To avoid this problem, following Zhang et al. (2013), we calculated “adjusted turnover,” under the assumption that the distribution of names follows a power law that is constant across periods. That is, using the name's rank, we assign each name an expected frequency of usage based on all historical periods for which we have data. This ensures that across time periods in which the cumulative share of top  $n$  names changes, names of similar rank contribute comparable amounts to changes in adjusted turnover.

The evidence presented in figure 3 provides important evidence for the “freezing” of fashion after the onset of the Cultural Revolution. Specifically, the results for our measure of adjusted turnover indicate a decline in turn-

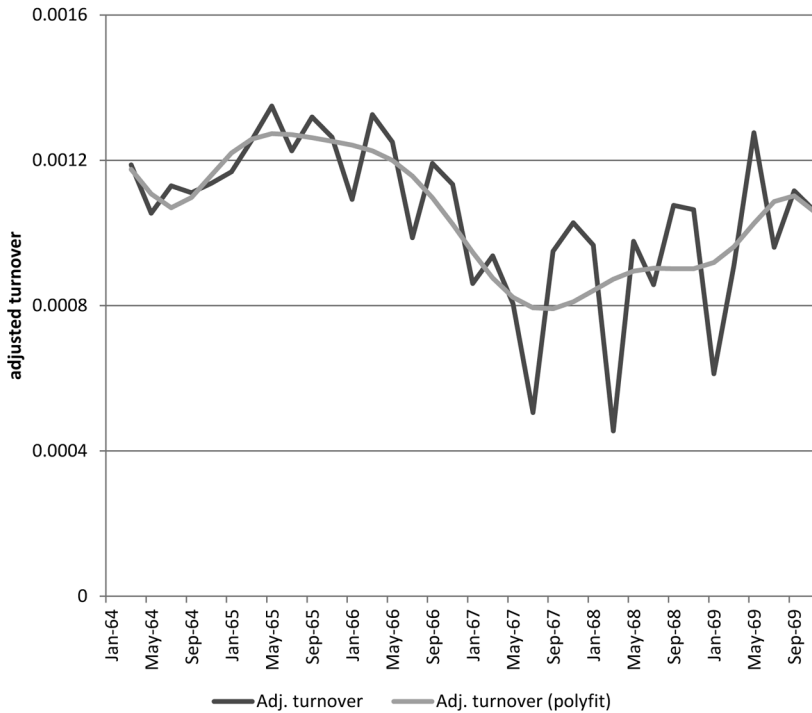


FIG. 3.—Adjusted turnover in the top 30 names given to boys born in Beijing before and after the onset of the Cultural Revolution. Turnover (polyfit) is best-fitting polynomial fit line of 11 degrees.

over after the summer of 1966. Also note that this decrease is particularly impressive considering that we might expect a temporary increase in turnover due to the replacement of politically neutral and politically undesirable names with politically desirable names (as shown in fig. 1). Furthermore, this decline had long-lasting effects on naming fashion. Note that turnover reaches its lowest point the following summer of 1967. Afterward, it rises gradually but never recovers the levels reached before the onset of the Cultural Revolution. In sum, our results point to a substantial decline in cultural change after the onset of the Cultural Revolution. The combination of this evidence and our evidence for the decline in cultural variety provides strong support for the shift in TFP toward more conformity.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The contributions of our study can be appreciated by situating it relative to the distinct literatures on (a) the political culture of authoritarian regimes,

(*b*) the effect of exogenous and endogenous factors on cultural variety and change, and (*c*) the rise and fall of individualism.

With regard to the first literature, our study suggests that individuals might adopt politically desirable practices not simply because they wish to signal commitment to the regime's specific ideology, but also because these practices are more popular and thus safer. Consider the following dilemma that any citizen faced during the Cultural Revolution: Which names will be regarded as politically desirable? The answer to that question being so unclear, a straightforward solution would be to select a name that not only appears to be politically desirable but also has already been adopted by many fellow citizens. That is, such a context produces a high taste for popularity as a basis for selection among politically desirable forms of expression. Accordingly, it is possible that a shift in TFP is partly responsible for the increased prevalence of names with politically desirable content. And more generally, this may help explain why the ideology of authoritarian regimes enjoys wide public endorsement even when such regimes engender private dissent (cf. Havel 1985; Kuran 1995; Wedeen 1999). Once such public enactments are widespread, they become shields behind which to hide, regardless of their content.

Second, our study makes two important contributions in the context of the recent trend in the sociology of culture to emphasize endogenous processes in cultural change. On the one hand, we have shown a clear reflection-theoretic effect, whereby there is a change in the content of cultural expression based on changes in the political regime. That is, after the onset of the Cultural Revolution, parents were more likely than before to select a politically desirable name. This exogenous effect of politics on culture is not surprising, given that we chose our research site precisely because China during the Cultural Revolution is a case very different from the liberal Western societies that Lieberman (2000), Lieberman and Lynn (2003), and other recent researchers (e.g., Gerhards and Hackenbroch 2000; Gerhards 2005) have analyzed. In particular, our case is distinctive because of both the greater salience of the meaning of Chinese names (cf. Weitman 1987) and the breadth and depth of political intervention into culture during the Cultural Revolution. While these factors make this case unique, it cannot be ignored if we are to have a general theory of how exogenous and endogenous processes affect cultural expression.

We have also shown that there is more to the exogenous effect of politics on culture than to promote ideas reflecting the prevailing political ideology (see also Fishman and Lizardo 2013). The key empirical results of our article are that after the onset of the Cultural Revolution, parents were more likely than before to select a popular name and there was less turnover in the popularity distribution. We argued that these results are consistent with

a more subtle effect of politics on culture; that is, by lowering the degree of security with respect to expressions of difference, the regime can shift a typical person's TFP toward a preference for conformity, which, in turn, suppresses the endogenous mechanisms that drive fashion (cf. Lieberman 2000; Lieberman and Lynn 2003). The major limitation of our analysis is that, even though there is strong support in the historical record for the idea that the level of political security decreased sharply in the early summer of 1966, we could not measure Chinese parents' TFP or how it changed over time. We can therefore say only that the empirical data are consistent with this hypothesis. In addition, there is strong support in the historical record for the idea that the level of political security decreased sharply in the early summer of 1966.

Finally, our results have important implications for our understanding of how social conditions promote or dampen expressions of individuality. While the dividing line between premodern and modern society is notoriously difficult to identify, Lieberman's (2000, chap. 2) research provides clear and compelling evidence that in at least one respect—parental choice of given names for children—something fundamental changed in many Western societies during the 18th and 19th centuries. This naturally raises the question of why this shift occurred. Lieberman attributes the shift in the taste for popularity distribution to a cluster of changes associated with the "rise of individualism" that accompanied the modernization of Western societies (pp. 66–68; see also Varnum and Kitayama 2011). But what aspect of modernization was responsible for this shift? This question seems quite challenging, given the complexity of the processes associated with modernization, including secularization, urbanization, changes in family structure, and the increasing complexity of the economic structure. Our analysis can hardly produce a definitive answer, but it does suggest two lessons for future research.

First, modernization by itself may be insufficient to induce the rise of individualism—and especially the inclination to express individual difference. A long tradition in sociology, beginning with Durkheim ([1893] 1984), describes individualism as stemming from the more elaborated division of labor in modern economies that produces more complex role-sets, thereby heightening consciousness of social difference and creating a need for "mental adjustments" that facilitate participation in a variety of segmented roles and establish consistency (Coser 1991, pp. 18–19). But if modernization is a sufficient cause for the rise of individual expression, we would not expect the fashion mechanism to operate any differently before and after the onset of the Cultural Revolution. China under Mao experienced the transformations that we identify with the emergence of modernity in the West, including secularization, urbanization, education reforms, de-

creasing family size, and a highly elaborated division of labor, which make it indisputably modern. Despite this modernization, we witnessed a dramatic decline in individualism during this period.

Second, our analysis is consistent with those scholars who link the rise of individualism to the extension of citizenship rights (see Frank and Meyer 2002; Scott et al. 2002; Meyer 2010). According to this view, the individual becomes primary because she is granted certain basic rights by the liberal nation-state that ensure her membership in the polity as long as she obeys the law and regardless of any other identity or affiliation. Insofar as such citizenship rights truly secure an individual's membership in the polity, she is authorized to have and exercise individual tastes (Frank and Meyer 2002; Meyer 2010). Our analysis is consistent with this perspective. People who lived during the Cultural Revolution might have participated in a complex division of labor and been torn from many of their traditional roles and relational patterns. Moreover, they were given formal citizenship rights. But their everyday experiences of such rights were tenuous to say the least. And this *insecurity in their membership in the polity* conveyed a sense that they had relatively little authorization to exercise individual taste. That this effect is evident even in an area where the state made no explicit claims testifies to the power of the effect.

## APPENDIX

### A Computational Model of Naming Fashion

In this appendix, we present a simple computation model that clarifies how the TFP-shift mechanism influences the degree of fashion (i.e., the diversity of cultural practices at a point in time and their change over time).

First, consider a population of  $N$  actors who, from a menu of  $M$  ( $M \geq N$ ) possible practices at any point in time, adopt  $P$  ( $P \leq M$ ) practices. We randomly assign each actor a TFP (taste for popularity). We assume that the TFP is normally distributed with a mean between 1% (i.e., on average actors prefer practices that 1% of other actors adopt) and 20% (i.e., on average actors prefer a practice that 20% of other actors adopt). We examined two levels of variance for the TFP distribution ( $SD = 0.001$  and  $SD = 0.006$ ).<sup>17</sup>

In the initial state of the system ( $t = 0$ ), we randomly assign the  $P$  practices to the  $N$  actors and calculate the  $P$  practices' initial popularities—the popularity of a practice is the percentage of actors who adopt this practice. For instance, if we have 100 actors and 10 practices, the popularities

<sup>17</sup> Because of low mean, to avoid negative values, 0.006 is the largest SD we can use for a mean of 1%.



of the 10 practices will be between 1% and 91%. The rest ( $M - P$ ) practices' popularities are all zero. In the models we present, we assume  $P = N = 100$ .<sup>18</sup>

At  $t = 1$ , actors examine the actor calculates the differences between its taste for popularity and the popularities of all practices, including the one it currently adopts. If there is a practice whose popularity is closer to the actor's taste than the actor's current practice, the actor will change its practice to the new one.<sup>19</sup>

We assumed that actors make decisions in a partially sequential fashion. Specifically, we divided the  $N$  actors into  $K$  groups each of which has  $L$  actors ( $K * L = N$ ), and update the popularities of practices after every  $L$  actors update their practices. In the base case, we set  $L = 10$ ; this means that 10 actors search for a new practice simultaneously. We also explored cases where  $L$  was set as high as  $L = 100$  (i.e., simultaneous choice) and as low as  $L = 0$  (i.e., sequential choice). Turnover is limited at  $L = 0$ , and becomes unrealistically high at  $L = 100$ .

Illustrative results are presented in figures A1 and A2. In figure A1, we show how rising mean TFP (with two different levels of variance) increases the "market share" captured by the top 50 names and the top 10 names. As one might expect, the effect is nonlinear, in that initial increases in TFP sharply increase the share garnered by the most popular names, with the effect diminishing as the share approaches its limit. In figure A2, we see a roughly parallel effect of rising mean TFP on the rate of (adjusted) turnover in what is popular.

<sup>18</sup>Our models using 100 actors and 20 or 50 practices produced substantively similar results.

<sup>19</sup>If multiple practices meet this criterion, the actor will randomly pick one from them.

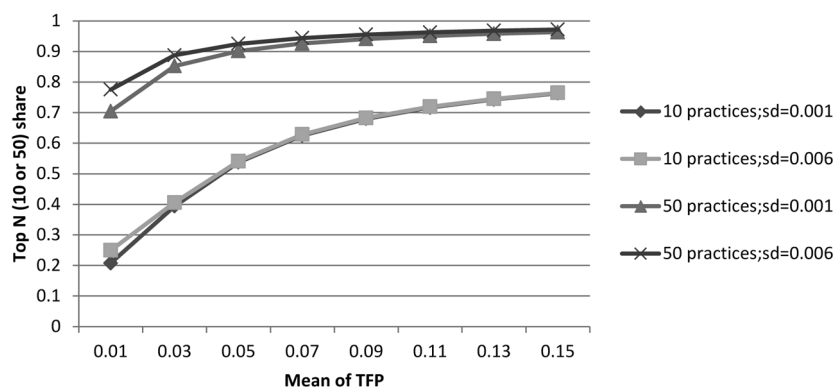


Figure A1. Effect of rising TFP on share of top (10 and 50) names

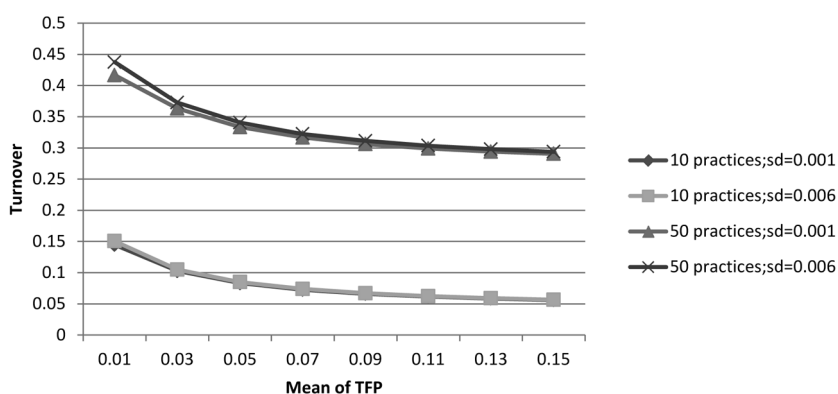


Figure A2. Effect of mean TFP on (adjusted) turnover

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