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The Chinese Dream: National Rejuvenation and Suspension of Political Agency

This paper elaborates on the ambiguity of a political rhetoric that builds on the dream metaphor. Xi Jinping, since 2013 the President of the People's Republic of China, helped the formula of the "Chinese Dream" (*Zhongguo meng*) to prominence, which he characterised as: "a dream about history, the present, and the future. [...] The Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation will be realized ultimately through the endeavours of young people, generation by generation" (Xi 2017). First ridiculed as an unnecessarily hazy concept, the Chinese Dream remains a crucial ingredient in the internal discourse on the country's future. While Western analysts have interpreted Xi's dream as the project of accommodating the population's prosperity with continued Party control and rediscovered Confucian values (Feng 2015; Bisley 2015), dissidents have criticised the notion as a "pipe dream" (Xu 2020) and argued that such imprecise rhetoric "does not even make sense logically [...], it is preposterous that we are making the entire Party study it" (Cai Xia, 2020).

My presentation will inquire into the ambiguity of the term "Chinese Dream", which has occasioned a plethora of publications that paraphrase Xi's dream – related speeches as well as critical essays that connect the hazy dream rhetoric to specific fields of application, e.g. to the ecological crisis. Although the "Chinese Dream" obviously draws on the "American Dream" with its focus on middle – class wealth accumulation, the term also inherits the Buddhist undertones of the dream metaphor, which represents a dominant trope in traditional literature in China. Drawing on contemporary Chinese novels, including Chen Qiufan's *The Waste Tide* (Huang Chao, 2013) and Zhao Defa's *Anthropocene* (Ren Lei Shi, 2018), I will argue that the "Chinese Dream" contains a strand of meaning that endorses the wholesale rejection of classic political agency in favour of quasi – metaphysical defeatism.

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