Hypocrisy

The Tales and Realities of Drug Detainees in China

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1
Introduction

This book tells the story of Chinese drug detainees who have been incarcerated for illicit drug use. It documents their experiences of being arrested and imprisoned as well as their lives after release. Behind their painful experiences is a fundamental contradiction between the unrealistically ideal party propaganda, which is made according to 'exemplary norms' (Bakken 2000), and the actual everyday practices of police officers and detention facility and prison officers, which are based on a variety of practical norms guided by different bureaucratic rules and regulations. This book is first and foremost about a failed system of rehabilitation, but also bears on a more general system that drug detainees perceive as hypocritical in contemporary China.

All former drug detainees depicted in this book had been arrested and incarcerated in different detention facilities, 're-education-through-labour' camps or centres because of using illicit drugs.[1] They were all discharged and claimed to have been able to abstain from drugs[2] when I met them in two Chinese cities—Zhiyang and Motai.[3] These detention facilities are all prison-like, although they are not legally classified as 'prison'. In this book, I use the term 'former prisoners' interchangeably with the term 'former drug detainees' and 'former drug users'. By 'prison', I am not referring to the legal definition of prison in China. According to Chinese law, 'prison' (*jianyu* 監獄) refers to what was previously called a 'reform through labour camp' (*laodong gaizao* 勞動改造) where court-sentenced criminals are incarcerated. However, in this study, I do not limit my definition of prison to the Chinese official use of the term. Instead, I refer to the former drug detainees' colloquial use of the term, which includes 're-education through labour' (*laodong jiaoyang* 勞動教養), 'compulsory isolation for drug rehabilitation centre' (*qiangzhi geli jiedu suo* 強制隔離戒毒所), 'compulsory drug rehabilitation centre' (*qiangzhi jiedu suo* 強制戒毒所), and 'detention centre' (*kanshou suo* 看守所). These institutions are also

1. These drugs include heroin (n=40), amphetamines (n=18), ecstasy (n=6), ketamine (n=5), dolantin (n=3), marijuana (n=3), cocaine (n=3), magu (n=3), and morphine (n=1).
2. One former prisoner, Jim, however was using a pill called 'happy pill' (*kaixin wan* 開心丸) when I met him in 2013. Jim claimed that it was not an 'illicit drug' but a prescription medicine he obtained from Japan. However, according to one of Jim's friend, his behaviour after taking the 'happy pill' was very similar to his behaviour after taking amphetamine.
3. Both Zhiyang and Motai are pseudonyms.

sometimes referred to colloquially as the 'great wall' (*daqiang* 大牆), the 'palace' (*gong* 宮), or merely the 'inside' (*limian* 裡面). All the former prisoners had been incarcerated in at least one of the above institutions. Among the forty-six former prisoners, thirty-three had been incarcerated in 're-education through labour'. Forty had been incarcerated in 'compulsory drug rehabilitation centres', and eight had been incarcerated in 'compulsory isolation for drug rehabilitation centres'.

Since one of the main parts of this book concerns the condition in the 're-education-through-labour' (*laojiao*) institutions in China, some clarification of this system must be made at the start of the book. This is particularly important since the system was officially terminated in 2013 (Liu 2017), in the midst of my fieldwork on the project. *Laojiao* is not a legal but an administrative system of punishments. It enables police officers to sentence anyone for as many as three years of detention in a re-education-through-labour camp, with a possible one-year extension—in some cases, this is even stretched to much longer periods (State Council 1982). The police may decide on this without the participation of courts, lawyers, prosecutors, or legal interference at any level. The re-education camps or 'centres' were in all practical ways totally dependent on police discretion. Subsequently, the inmates were not seen as 'criminals' but as offenders of administrative orders and regulations only.

The mainstay of the camps' inmates are drug users, and the official propaganda surrounding these detainees (or 'former inmates' and 'prisoners' as I freely call them here) is that of 'helping', 'educating', and 'saving' them from their drug habits and the 'evil drug dealers' who lure them into drug abuse. The final aim—so goes the official narrative—is rehabilitating them for a future normal life in society. The system is clearly a prison in all but name. This book will focus on the conditions in these institutions and the daily life of their inmates. I will also focus on how the ideals of the official propaganda run counter to the reality and experiences of the inmates, creating an ethic and structure based on hypocrisy rather than 'help' and 'education'.

After the termination of the *laojiao*, 'compulsory isolation for drug rehabilitation centres' (*qiangzhi geli jiedu suo*) were established all over China to take over drug users from *laojiao*. Much like the *laojiao*, the new centres are also prison-like institutions. Arrested drug users are still sent to an institution of incarceration rather than a court after the official termination of the *laojiao* system. In other words, the change is more one in name rather than in substance for the type of inmates I describe in this book. Some of my interviewees, as well as the steady stream of new people recruited into the system, might well find themselves in different forms of 'treatment' or 'legal education centres', or other types of 'community correction' units in the future. They will still be detained over long periods of time under more or less the same prison-like conditions described in this book. Discretion will still be the reality of the system, and there is reason to believe that the system I describe here will continue in one form or another. There may be some added humane traits like better food and living conditions, but the basics of the system will most probably be upheld in the forms I describe here. The discrepancies between the ideals

of rosy party propaganda and the realities of humiliation and pain in detention will also most probably be upheld in forms similar to those described in this book. We may hope that some of the system of 'hypocrisy' discussed in this book will wane and finally disappear, but for that to happen there needs to be much more reform of the system than a merely formal 'termination' of the system. This change will continue, but there is no 'abolishment' on the books whatsoever in terms of the reality of inmates' suffering under prison-like conditions during detention.

Many studies exist that examine the factors that contribute to former prisoners reoffending and factors that make them withdraw from offending (Adorjan and Chui 2014; Das 2008; Farrall et al. 2011; Gao 2008; Maruna 2001, 2004; Maruna et al. 2004; Maruna and Roy 2007; Mauer 2005; Meachum 2000; Mulder et al. 2011; Paternoster and Bushway 2009; Sampson and Laub 1993; Sinha 2001; Spohn and Holleran 2002; Visher, La Vigne, and Farrell 2003). One common factor that contributes to recidivism, according to these studies, is ironically the interventions from the criminal justice system (Farrall et al. 2011; Mathiesen 1990). The prison, among other criminal justice agents, has been regarded as a breeding ground of subculture, hate, and recidivism (Meachum 2000; Spohn and Holleran 2002; H. Yao 2012). Instead of being rehabilitated, inmates very often go through a process called 'prisonization', in which they take on the prison culture (Clemmer 1966), which is usually seen as 'deviant' and counterproductive to rehabilitation. Moreover, instead of learning from the 'education' provided in the prison, prison inmates tend to 'reject the rejectors', which further reduces the chances of rehabilitation (Mathiesen 1990; McCorkle and Korn 1954). Beside the criminal justice system, other risk factors like individual personality and psychopathic traits (Das 2008), employment opportunities (Mauer 2005), drug use (Visher et al. 2003), neighbourhood environment (Kubrin and Stewart 2006), and dysfunctional families (Mulder et al. 2011) were suggested to be related to discharged prisoners' recidivism.

Beyond what makes offenders reoffend, another major question in the existing literature is what makes some other offenders withdraw from offending (Adorjan and Chui 2014; Gao 2008; Maruna 2001, 2004; Maruna et al. 2004; Maruna and Roy 2007; Paternoster and Bushway 2009; Sampson and Laub 1993). One of the earliest criminological discussions of desistance from crime can be found in Quetelet's (1984) discussion of the relationship between age and desistance. Some scholars have suggested that this age invariance theory conforms to the 'law of nature', which suggests that criminals 'age out' of crime when they grow up and get old (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990, 124). Similarly, Matza suggests that adolescents would leave delinquency behind after their 'maturational reform' (1964, 22). Other than ageing factors, criminologists also examine psychological and social factors that help former criminals withdraw from crime. Braithwaite (1989), in his treatment of traditional Japanese society, suggests that reintegrative shaming is useful for the prevention of recidivism. By shaming the criminal act instead of the criminal, and by having a 'ceremony' of reintegration with words or gestures of forgiving,

Braithwaite suggests that the criminal can be more effectively deterred from reoffending. Other social factors like successful job placement and marriage are also shown to be beneficial to former offenders' desistance from crime (Sampson and Laub 1993).

In addition to looking at how social factors can affect former offenders' withdrawal from crime, some criminologists also examine how former offenders can desist from crime through cognitive process (Maruna 2001, 2004; Paternoster and Bushway 2009). By comparing persistent criminals and former criminals who desist from crime, Maruna (2001) suggests that the key for former criminals to 'go straight' is their ability to 'make good'—that is, to reinterpret their past failings or criminal acts in a positive way. Instead of seeing their previous criminal acts simply as shameful or as a failure, those who desist from crime can actually 'distort' their criminal past and positively 're-biograph' their life stories. One common story is that previous criminal history does not determine future failure but instead can operate as a necessary prelude for a new life. Other than self-biography, criminologists have also found that former criminals who have the will to acquire a more desirable non-criminal identity (the positive possible self) and are anxious about what they might become (the feared self) are more likely to desist from crime (Paternoster and Bushway 2009). To them, it is the *intention* of change that makes them change.

While important in explaining why certain former prisoners withdraw from crime and others continue to commit crime, such theories are less helpful in explaining the feelings and the narratives of the former prisoners I encountered. In traditional criminology, former prisoners' perceptions, especially their complaints against law enforcers, are very often seen as a neutralization technique which is used to rationalize or downplay their own wrongdoings (Sykes and Matza 1957). The neutralization argument suggests that delinquents develop different justifications so as to rationalize their criminal acts. Such rationalizations are used to protect the delinquents from self-blame and to more effectively lay the blame on others. Though the neutralization thesis explains the psychological mechanism behind former prisoners' complaints, it very often fails to take the full extent of the former prisoners' experiences seriously. This study attempts to fill this gap by examining and explaining Chinese former prisoners' subjective experiences and exploring the wider socio-political structure that might have contributed to their experiences.

Play-Acting and Hypocrisy

Former prisoners in this study have various complaints against police officers and prison officers. This study discusses issues surrounding two of their grievances: 'They are self-interested' and 'They say things in one way and do things in another' (*shuo yitao zuo yitao* 說一套, 做一套). By 'they', the former prisoners were referring to police officers, prison officers, and the party-state itself. When I dug deeper into what they actually meant when they said this, they were criticizing the fact that

'what they say' was far better than 'what they do'. To the former prisoners, they had seen a 'system of hypocrisy' in which the official propaganda glorifying the unrealistically 'selfless' 'models' (*mofan* 模範) of law enforcers or 'educators' contrasted sharply with the practical reality of the 'self-interested' individuals and the daily pain and humiliation of prison life. Since 'hypocrisy' is the main theme of this book, it is important to explain this concept in more detail before going deeper into the former prisoners' narratives.

The English word 'hypocrisy' derives from the Ancient Greek *hypokrisis* (ὑπόκρισις), meaning a 'public or theatrical performance', or simply 'play-acting' in the negative connotation of insincerity (Morwood and Taylor 2002). In moral psychology, the term is often defined as the failure to follow one's own expressed moral rules and principles. While psychologists have often seen the act of hypocrisy as the dark side of human nature, the concept has also had political connotations of deceit and manipulation. Niccolò Machiavelli, the master interpreter of political intrigue and the cynicism of power, once remarked: 'the mass of mankind accept what *seems* as what *is*; nay, are often touched more nearly by appearances than by realities' (Machiavelli 2006). This analysis of the discrepancies between ideals and realities can be applied to the rationalities of propaganda in today's China—to what *seems* and what *is* real—a theme I will return to later in this book.

Former prisoners frequently used the Chinese term for hypocrisy, *xuwei* (虛偽)—connoting falseness, emptiness, and ill intent—when referring to the way authorities had treated them. They often talked about the hypocrisy of the authorities that promised them help and education but in the end only provided pain, shame, and humiliation. Many former inmates confessed that they felt conned or manipulated. A recurring theme in my interviews and talks with the former inmates was distrust towards police and prison officers, a feeling that developed into resistance and scepticism towards official propaganda and official intent in general.

Building on my interactions with former inmates, this book attempts to visualize the very phenomenon of 'hypocrisy' as they experience it. I will take the original *etymological* meaning of hypocrisy as 'play-acting' and apply that original meaning to Erwin Goffman's *sociological* analysis of how such 'play-acting' takes place on different stages: one on the 'front-stage' and one on the 'back-stage' (Goffman 1958). According to this dramaturgical approach, individuals perform in specific ways on the front stage of 'impression management' that do not carry over to the backstage.

By rewinding this observation to the original Greek roots of 'hypocrisy', I hope to use that term as a lens through which we can see the lives of the former inmates from a clearer perspective. I will attempt to explain that in our context 'hypocrisy' is not only a personal, psychological, or ethical issue. While many of the roots and connotations of hypocrisy are anchored at the micro level, hypocrisy can also be understood from a larger macro perspective. Hypocrisy has to do both with structural and psychological factors. We may talk of more structural 'ways of lying' that are not only the fault of indecent or unethical men in uniforms, or the mere 'evil

intent' of individuals (Bakken 2000). The system has its own logic of political and corrective philosophy, survival strategies, managerial rationality, and forced implementation. In a more concrete context, the official promises of 'help and education' to 'erring' individuals have been replaced with 'pain, shame, and humiliation' for alleged 'criminals' destined to suffer such negative treatment.

While I am far from suggesting a 'theory' about hypocrisy and its link to the prison system, I will propose a way to describe and understand the discrepancy between the 'ideals' and the 'realities' experienced by former inmates in the Chinese system of incarceration. We can perhaps see the contours of an even larger social 'system' in my description of the experiences of the former prisoners. While former prisoners very often criticized individual police and prison officers for the system of hypocrisy, this study can also be seen as an attempt to address the structure behind this 'system'. C. Wright Mills (1959) in his celebrated book *The Sociological Imagination* reminds us of the importance of understanding 'personal troubles' through 'public issues of social structure'. This book attempts to follow this wisdom and locates the former prisoners' grievances in a wider 'system of hypocrisy'.

Similarly, I understand the party propaganda as the party-state's self-presentation and strategy of 'impression management'. The actual day-to-day practices, especially those that involve the direct confrontation between former prisoners and the police and prison officers, can be seen as the 'backstage'—as practices which are usually not seen by the general public. From the vantage of the former prisoners, this is hypocritical—the front-stage ideal presentation is far better than the backstage 'reality'. For the 'system of hypocrisy', as I try to develop in more detail in this book, I am referring to this simultaneous occurrence of both the front-stage propaganda and the backstage reality not presented to the front-stage audiences, but exposed to the insiders of the backstage only.

The main research objectives of this book are to (1) document the discrepancy between the ideals of propaganda and the realities of the former prisoners' lives, with a particular focus on their experiences of arrest, imprisonment, and life after release; and (2) to examine a 'system of hypocrisy' as it is reflected in the experiences of the former prisoners.

More specifically, I first explore how the party-propaganda presents the model police officers and the model prison officers. I also examine the logic behind such presentations. Second, I examine former prisoners' narratives about their experiences with the police and prison officers when they were being arrested. I put particular focus on one of the police practices—the use of informers—and explore the police officers' concerns behind such practices. Third, I uncover former prisoners' interpretations to their experiences of imprisonment. With the example of what I call the 'initiation ceremony' in the prison and the example of the cooperation between the prison officers and the powerful inmates, I examine the practical norms that govern the day-to-day practices in the prisons. Finally, I explore former prisoners' encounters with police officers in their current post-release life. With the

example of a surveillance system targeting former prisoners, I study the administrative concerns behind the police officers' practices. All these issues may reflect more specifically the Chinese former prisoners' personal experiences, but I would argue that they also possibly reflect a broader 'system' that is sometimes seen as hypocritical in contemporary China in general.

Heroes in the Propaganda and the Criminal Justice System in Reality

Mass media have been used as tools to propagandize political ideology in China at least since the early Maoist time (Brady 2008). In this propaganda, different 'model figures' (*mofan renwu* 模範人物) are made to educate the public, to enhance the party's moral legitimacy, and to maintain social order (Bakken 2000; Jiang 2001; B. Xu 2012; R. Yan 2004). Among other 'model figures', 'police officers' and 'prison officers' are very often presented in a way that highlights their 'exemplary' moral qualities, which are usually unrealistically 'ideal'. The specially tailored image of the model police and prison officers has, however, led to a specific form of hypocrisy. Former prisoners, with their experiences of direct contact with police and prison officers, can see the 'reality' behind the propaganda by comparing the model figures with those whom they meet and experience in their daily lives. While the propaganda very often propagates the idea that the law enforcers strive to save and rehabilitate drug users, the reality experienced by the former inmates was very different. We might say that the propaganda seems to somehow still work in the beginning, since the former prisoners did expect the police and prison officers to be possessed with at least some of the propagated moral qualities. It was not until the former prisoners had experienced real-life contact with the police and prison officers that they witnessed the system of hypocrisy.

Former prisoners might have had different types of personal contact with police officers even before they started to use drugs. However, their first arrest usually marks the inauguration of their experiences to the system of hypocrisy. While police officers are very often depicted as 'selfless', 'brave', or 'wise' in the party propaganda, the former prisoners saw the backstage of reality. Through their new experiences they began to see the police officers who arrested them as immoral, cunning, and self-interested. Most former prisoners would relate one specific police practice when they talked about the police officers—the use of drug dealers or drug users as informers. Former prisoners saw the police use of informers as a self-interested and immoral act. Although the Communist Party has a long tradition of using informers (Dutton 2005b), the police use of informers also seems to be grounded in the bureaucratic pressure which requires the individual police officer to meet a certain arrest quota (Han 2009; G. Wu 2009). Similarly, the individual police officers are required to maintain a close surveillance of former prisoners and former drug addicts upon their release from the prisons. The surveillance tactics, however, very often expose former prisoners' stigmatized identity and thereby put them in

humiliating and degrading situations. From the former prisoners' point of view, all these practices show that the police officers are only concerned about their own self-interests and not in saving or rehabilitating drug users. This kind of hypocrisy can also be found in their experiences of imprisonment.

Prison, according to the propaganda, is a place for offenders' education and rehabilitation. Prison officers are supposed to be the people who help the inmates in their rehabilitation. The propaganda is all about helping and rehabilitating the drug users to get back to society, and the former prisoners also expected to see such efforts before they were incarcerated. The prison officers did provide some type of 'education' to the inmates by forcing the inmates to memorize classical Chinese moral texts and legal documents. The former prisoners' memories about imprisonment, however, are overwhelmed with different types of physical and mental pain. Upon the arrival of the new inmates to the prison cell, the prison officers and powerful prison inmates organized different 'initiation ceremonies' to socialize the new inmates into the prison environment. They were painful and humiliating ceremonies in which the new inmates were physically tortured and mentally degraded. Similar pain and degradation can be found throughout the whole process of incarceration. In the daily life of the prison, inmates were forced to obey different degrading rules and regulations in the name of 'education' or 'rehabilitation'. To many former prisoners, these rules are nothing more than tools of the prison officers to maintain power and prison order. Similarly, compulsory labour was enforced in the re-education-through-labour centres in the name of 'rehabilitation' and 'vocational training'. However, to the former prisoners, compulsory labour was more about generating profit for the prison authority. While the former prisoners recognized the 'pretence of rehabilitation', they had also learned to survive the prison by pretending that they were rehabilitated. While they saw the discrepancy between propaganda and reality, they also had learned to be hypocritical in order to survive the prison system.

Another important dimension of prison life is the formal and informal control system in the prisons. In order to maintain control and ensure the efficiency of the prison factory, prison officers appointed and cooperated with various powerful prison inmates in the daily operation of the prisons (Feng 2012; Y. Lu 2009). In order to maintain the control of these powerful prison inmates, the prison officers very often would provide them with legitimate and illegitimate benefits and privileges. In order to maintain these inmates' power, the prison officers invested them with the power to discipline and punish other inmates, which not only encouraged the heightened level of violence in the prison but also exposed another nasty backstage reality of the prison system to the inmates.

Breaking into the Social World of Former Drug Detainees

The journey of this research can be traced back to 2007. I met three former prisoners when I was doing fieldwork for my MPhil thesis in a coastal Chinese city—Zhiyang (not the real name). After my graduation from the MPhil programme, I travelled to Zhiyang again in 2009. The original purpose of this trip was to express my gratitude to the former prisoners who had provided me with enormous help during my fieldwork. In a banquet a former prisoner told me a story about one of her friends—also a former prisoner—who was humiliated by police officers during a raid at a hotel. This story triggered me to explore this topic further. I did not at first plan to develop my explorations into a book; at most, I planned to develop my thoughts into a paper. The more stories I heard from them, however, the more I got interested in their experiences.

Between 2007 and 2013 I met forty-six former prisoners who were willing to share their stories with me. I have conducted semi-structured interviews with forty-three of them and participated in their formal and informal social gatherings. In these interviews, I adopt a life-history approach. The former prisoners were invited to talk about previous experiences that they found important to their identity as a 'former prisoner' or 'former drug user'. I was also invited to join two Internet-based online chat groups counting over fifty members, who are all either former or current drug users. In this chat group, I had access to a database that contained daily conversations between the members.

Gaining access to the social world of former drug detainees is not an easy task. I was clearly an outsider when I first met the former prisoners. First, I was not born there and did not grow up in their city. I cannot speak their local dialect. Second, and probably more importantly, I have never been jailed, nor have I ever taken any illicit drugs. Similar to the situation in most other countries, people who have been incarcerated and taken illicit drugs are discriminated against, labelled, and stigmatized in China (Y. Chen 2008). Former prisoners do not want to expose their stigmatized identity and experiences to any outsiders.

This fact made part of my data collection difficult. When I first met Kaopu, a former prisoner in his early twenties, he refused to talk to me about any issues related to his previous experiences in the criminal justice system. He said, 'Why should I talk about it? I am now "normal" [*zhengchang* 正常]. There is nothing much else I want to say.' Similarly, Hui refused to see me in person when I contacted him through another former prisoner.

Goffman (1968b) has pointed out that once the stigmatized identity is exposed, stigmatized persons might not only face discrimination and reduced life opportunities but also blackmail from anyone who knows their secret identity. Therefore, stigmatized persons, especially those whose stigma is not immediately visible, usually manage their image and hide their stigmatized past very carefully. They only share their 'secret' information to those 'sympathetic others' who can adopt their world

view and standpoints. Goffman points out two types of the 'sympathetic others': they are the 'own' and the 'wise' (1968b, 20). The 'own' are those who share the same stigma. Spending time with their 'own' people, stigmatized persons can feel at ease and be accepted as normal persons. For the former prisoners whom I met, their 'own' are other former prisoners who have been incarcerated for using drugs. Being a person who has never been incarcerated nor taken any drugs, I had no chance to be counted among their 'own' people.

The 'wise' are 'normal' persons, but 'whose special situation has made them intimately privy to the secret life of the stigmatized individual and sympathetic with it, and who find themselves accorded a measure of acceptance, a measure of courtesy membership in the clan' (Goffman 1968b, 28). According to Goffman, facing the 'wise', the stigmatized person can feel easy and knows that he would be seen and treated as a normal person. There are two types of the 'wise'. The first type is people who work in agencies that allow them to have close contact with stigmatized people. For example, social workers who serve former prisoners would be one type of the 'wise' in their conception. The second type of 'wise' people is those who are personally related to the stigmatized persons and who somehow share their stigma. They can be family members or close friends of the stigmatized person. I am neither the first nor the second type of the 'wise'. However, what I learned from Goffman is that stigmatized persons trust those whom they see as different from other people who might discriminate against them, threaten them, or blackmail them. The problem I faced in the beginning of the fieldwork is how to present myself as different from the dangerous 'others'.

A little bit about me and the winning of trust

Almost every former prisoner has said to me, 'You won't understand us, because you do not have our experience.' However, as some of the former prisoners said, I am somehow different from the 'ordinary people' (*yiban ren* 一般人). Some of my personal characteristics and habits might have made me 'different'. I have also consciously managed my image to make me 'different' from the others. Some of my personal characteristics and (bad) habits have turned out to be surprisingly helpful in kick-starting me to mingle with the former prisoners, and later winning their trust. I had spent a few years in a youth gang at a lower-class public housing estate when I was a kid. 'Deviant' acts like swearing usually bring me excitement rather than disgust. I had once been quite a heavy party drinker, and I am still a cigarette addict. I enjoyed the moments when I smoked and drank with the former prisoners. These little deviant acts became effective social lubricants and icebreakers for me during my fieldwork. During my research, I talked with them, listened to them, dined with them, sang with them, danced with them, smoked with them, and got drunk with them. To many former prisoners, the 'ordinary people' would never do these kinds of things together with them.

Many of the former prisoners had the experiences of being discriminated against. From their point of view, the 'ordinary people' do not want to talk to them, do not care about them, are afraid of them, or even hate them. A former prisoner, Shufang, said:

> In the ordinary people's eyes, we—those who take drugs—are not human beings [*bu shi ren* 不是人]. [In their eyes] we are 'inhuman' [*mei renxing* 沒人性]. (Shufang, interview 67, 2012)

Paradoxically, the social stigma, which was supposed to be a barrier for me to win the trust of the former prisoners, has instead made my fieldwork easier than I thought. Willingness to talk, eat, smoke, drink, and dance with them became evidence to many former prisoners that I was different from the 'ordinary people'. During these occasions my image as an 'outsider' gradually faded away—at least I felt so. Three of the former prisoners had asked me similar questions on different occasions: 'Are you really studying for a PhD? You look more like a "little gangster" [*xiao hunhun* 小混混]'.

I was very aware of my self-presentations during the research. However, my membership role is not totally under my control. My membership role in the field was in between what Adler and Adler (1987) called peripheral and active membership. In the very beginning my role among the former prisoners was quite detached and they saw me as a 'student'. In 2007 when I was doing my fieldwork, in order to minimize the power relationship between the 'researcher' and the 'informants', I presented myself as a 'university student' (*daxue sheng* 大學生) who came to 'understand' (*liaojie* 了解) them. From 2009 to 2013 I was gradually referred to as 'the boy from Hong Kong' and 'the one who cares about us' (*guanxin women qunti deren* 關心我們群體的人). I saw it as a good sign that they increasingly trusted me while I could maintain a more detached role. I was physically with them, but without being seen as one of them.

However, starting from 2010, more and more former prisoners actively found me for 'heart-to-heart talk' (*tanxin* 談心) and consulted me on different issues like their relationships with their boyfriends, girlfriends, or partners, issues related to their studies and their work. Some of them started to refer to me as 'Teacher Cheng' (*Zheng laoshi* 鄭老師). I have told all of them that I am studying sociology and criminology instead of psychology. However, no matter how many times I explained the difference, some of them still referred to me as 'PhD in psychology' (*xinli xue boshi* 心理學博士), vaguely implying that I was a kind of counsellor or even clinical psychologist. I was seen as someone who could give them consultations. Moreover, since I had become one part of some of the former prisoners' lives—their 'counsellor'—I was no longer just a 'researcher'. Instead, I played a more functional role in their social community. The good side of it was that more and more former prisoners started to tell me their 'secrets'. The bad side was that it was increasingly difficult for me to 'play dumb'. As inspired by previous research (Becker 1954), I

employed a 'playing-dumb' strategy in the beginning of my fieldwork so that I could ask some 'stupid questions' which might otherwise seem too naive to raise. By using this strategy, I was also able to make the former prisoners elaborate on some of their points of view that they had taken for granted. Playing dumb worked very well in the very beginning of my journey. However, the more the former prisoners treated me as a 'teacher', the less I could 'play dumb', especially in the last stage of my research during my revisit. When I asked them questions like 'Do you think the police officers arrested you so as to help you to be rehabilitated from using drugs?', many of them responded to me as if I were asking them a very stupid question. They assumed that I should have known the answer that they had taken for granted—the answer is no.

In this study, I recruited all my informants through inmates' referral, or what social scientists called 'snowball sampling'. Through recruiting a small number of informants, the researcher can get access to a larger number of similar informants through their social networks (Neuman 2004; Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Without the aid of government officers or social workers, former prisoners in China would be hidden populations to me. The most obvious way for me to recruit them was to go through the former inmates whom I already knew from my MPhil project. The former prisoners I had met in 2007 were also the first snowflakes, and they again introduced me gradually to some of their friends. Their friends further introduced me to more friends and so on.

Besides interviews, I joined the former prisoners in different social activities like attending banquets, drinking and singing in karaoke bars, and making short trips to nearby cities. These activities served several purposes. First, they provided me with chances to observe and participate in their usual daily interactions. By listening to their conversations, I had the chance to triangulate the data I had collected during the interviews. It was especially the case when I sometimes heard them talking about their experiences. I could cross-check what they had said with their friends and what they had told me during the interviews. The content of both was generally consistent. However, doing data collection during these social activities was sometimes difficult. Sometimes the former prisoners talked to each other in their own dialects, of which I could understand less than half of the content. Many times they would speak at the same time, which made it even more difficult for me to grasp what was being said, especially when someone was talking to me at the same time. I had to turn on my 'research radar', so to speak, all the time—to be very alert of conversations and words that were related to my research.

Recording these data was even more difficult. Whenever the situation allowed, I excused myself to the lavatory to write down short notes. When that was impossible, I wrote notes on my way back to my living place. Only on very rare occasions would I take notes in front of the former prisoners. There was one time when I attended a birthday party of a former prisoner, Ying, in a karaoke bar. I had drunk more beer than I should have and felt quite tipsy. Suddenly, she started to hold my

hand and started talking with me about her experiences of using drugs and about her incarcerations. My 'radar' was turned on by what she had said, and I started to listen very carefully. After she had finished, knowing that my impending hangover might totally blot out any memory of what she had said, I drew out a paper from my pocket and started writing them down. Below is an excerpt from my notes:

> Two guys came at about 1 a.m. She told me that one of them did not know her past and said, 'Do not talk about those things.' However, after she got drunk, she started to talk about her old life again. I said, 'Hey, the guy is there.' Ying's face turned pale and stared at me. After a while Ying started talking about those things again. She was very drunk by that time. She said, 'I told you the truth. I do not like those people. They are giving you "courtesy" [*ketao hua* 客套話], "lip service" [*menmian* 門面], and "official languages" [*guanfang de hua* 官方的話]. I do not need those things. I do not want to hear those things. They are working for the government. I wouldn't take drugs if I hadn't decided to do so.'

The process of taking such notes is both awkward and physically demanding. Ying and her friends saw me half-lying and half-sitting on the sofa, struggling to get hold of the ballpoint pen and take notes in English on a paper. Since liquor was spilled on the table, and I was so drunk that I could not sit up straight, I had to put the paper on my own chest when I wrote the notes. Ying and others were laughing and teasing me when I was struggling to concentrate and write down what Ying had told me. I only had two things in mind: I had to make my handwriting readable, and I had to keep the notes safe. It took me more than ten minutes to write this small paragraph.

During my fieldwork, sometimes I obtained important information when my informants and I were under the effect of alcohol. Alcohol is an effective social lubricant; however, it might also obscure the reliability of the information that I had collected. In our conversations, Ying had mentioned things that were closely related to my research—'lip services' and 'official language'. However, what she had said might have been affected by the fact that she was drunk. So I found her a few days later and talked to her again about this topic, and she confirmed what she had said. Similarly, when I interviewed Jim he vaguely confessed to me that he had recently used 'happy pills'. Since I could not use information obtained from informants who were under the influence of psychotropic substances, alcohol, or illicit drugs directly, instead I used it as a conversation starter for later interviews.

During the course of this study in 2012, three former prisoners invited me to join three QQ online chat groups of former drug users. Each of these chat groups had several hundred members. The first group was organized by social workers. In this chat group there were former or current drug users who had or had not been incarcerated and their family members, social workers, and some prison officers. The second chat group was for former or current drug users and their family members. The final one was exclusively for former or current drug users who had been incarcerated for using drugs. Since then, I have followed up these chat groups

very closely and use the content of the chat groups as a source for new inspiration and triangulations.

The Researcher Self

I started analysing the data from the very beginning of my fieldwork. I was more able to maintain an 'objective' self when I had just started my research. However, the more time I spent with the former prisoners, the more empathetic, and sometimes sympathetic I was to them. Each of these former prisoners had told me some of their sad stories. Some of them had offered me important advice not only to my research but also to me as a friend. Many of them had offered me different types of help during my research. In 2012 I was suffering from a stomach ulcer when I was doing my fieldwork. I was running out of pills one week after I left Hong Kong. There was a thunderstorm that day, and my stomach started severely cramping while I was in a former prisoner's house during one of their social gatherings. The house was somewhat rural and quite far away from any pharmacy. Several of them rode downtown with their electro bikes under the heavy rain to help me find the pills I needed. One of them had even saved me from a potential street fight during my visit to a karaoke bar. My experiences with some of the former prisoners had made me no longer able to maintain a completely 'objective' or 'distanced' self when I was doing my fieldwork.

Nevertheless, the longer I left the field, the more I felt able to retain my role as a researcher. I am fully aware of the need to present the former prisoners in an unbiased way. In this book I do not attempt to misrepresent or distort any of the data for the purpose of presenting a 'good image' of the former prisoners. Nor do I attempt to present those they dislike—the police officers, prison officers, and some local cadres in a negative way. This study is not solely about the former prisoners' suffering, nor about the police, the prison staff, or the local cadres as individuals. Following Mill's (1959) wisdom of sociological imagination, I seek to examine the problematic system behind the 'personal trouble' suffered by all these individuals. In order to explain the experiences of the forty-six former prisoners and the 'system of hypocrisy' behind it, the core chapters of this book will be divided as follows.

In Chapter 2 I critically discuss examples of model police officers and model prison officers. I examine how the 'models' were portrayed in the party propaganda and why they were portrayed in this way. I also examine how the party propaganda might affect former prisoners' expectations of the police and prison officers in real life. Chapter 3 focuses on former drug detainees' experiences of being arrested, and Chapters 4 and 5 look into the former prisoners' stories about their real day-to-day experiences in prison. Chapter 6 relates former drug detainees' experiences after they were released from prison. From Chapters 3 to 6 I highlight the law enforcers' practical concerns, like the need to maintain efficiency in making arrests, the necessity to maintain order in the prison, the pressure in the management of the

prison factories, and the obligation to control and manage the former prisoners. In the final chapter, I revisit the characteristics of the failing rehabilitation system and also argue that the experiences of the former prisoners could possibly mirror a larger social system in which people in different arenas can possibly see through the official propaganda when the experienced reality becomes very different from the officially propagated narrative.

7
Conclusion

When I presented my idea about the discrepancies between the propaganda and the former prisoners' experiences at an academic conference in 2013, someone in the audience commented:

> I do not know if you had read about it, but in psychology, we know that criminals tend to blame the police officers and the prison officers so as to make themselves feel better. What's the problem with that?

This argument resonates with the neutralization thesis. It was not clear whether the commentator just wanted to test me or if he was blaming the former prisoners for 'rejecting the rejector', thus belittling the former prisoners' complaints (McCorkle and Korn 1954). On another occasion, a scholar asked me, 'What's so special about former prisoners hating police officers? I would be surprised if they did not.' Both statements above have pointed out a taken-for-granted 'natural facts of life' (Garfinkel 1964, 225) argument held by many people; that criminals and former offenders hate those enforcing the law. The whole matter is regarded as self-explanatory. It is as simple as the fact that 'the rat hates the cat'. However, looking at this question from a humanitarian, or even a rehabilitative, perspective, former prisoners have suffered both physically and mentally from their experiences. First comes the physical pain they suffer during incarceration. Then the humiliation and shaming they suffer from the day they were arrested will often follow them throughout life. From the perspective of 'rehabilitation', as Sherman (1993) indicates, the feelings of injustice and unfairness are counterproductive to offender rehabilitation. It is difficult to imagine how the former prisoners can be 'reformed' through these processes. In a speech delivered in the House of Commons as far back as 1910, a young Winston Churchill announced, 'The mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilization of any country' (cited in Eady 2007, 264).

While Churchill's later life may not always have reflected that of a reformer, the quote has become part of his legacy, and may have been inspired by the famous British prison reformer John Howard (1726–1790) who strongly advocated a humane and rehabilitative prison system instead of an inhumane, punitive, and

non-rehabilitative system. This quote emphasizes the basic humanistic idea of rehabilitation, an idea the Chinese party and state claims they subscribe to in their propaganda. However, the prisons that the former prisoners experienced were the opposite: inhumane, punitive, and non-rehabilitative.

Moreover, as Garfinkel (1964) reminds us, it is essential for social scientists, and particularly sociologists, to detect the essential features of socially recognized 'familiar scenes' and relate them to dimensions of social organization. It is important for sociologists, again according to Garfinkel, to 'produce reflections through which the strangeness of an obstinately familiar world can be detected'. While I would agree that it might be normal for the former prisoners to dislike the police officers and the prison officers, I do find such 'strangeness' behind their narratives. It is the failure of rehabilitation; a clear commonality in their complaints is that they criticize the police and prison officers for being 'self-interested', and it is common for inmates to see the whole system as one based on sheer hypocrisy. I have tried to capture these attitudes of the former inmates I interviewed. On the one hand, this study treats the former prisoners' complaints as important in their own right and, on the other hand, sees these complaints as a 'window' through which the failure of a rehabilitative system and a broader system of hypocrisy can be revealed (Bauman 1993; Xu 2010).

The Failure of Education and Rehabilitations

In party propaganda, both the police officers and the prison officers have been portrayed as important components in the education and rehabilitation of the former or current drug users. However, what the former prisoners had experienced in the prisons and after their discharge was the complete opposite of what had been propagated, and their daily life was instead full of physical torture, humiliations, and lies.

As reflected by the names of the prisons—'*re-education* through labour' and 'compulsory isolation for drugs *rehabilitation* centres'—re-education and rehabilitation are presented as, and are supposed to be, the essence of imprisonment. Former prisoners' narratives have, however, presented a completely different picture and brought us to the dark side of the system. What we can see from chapters 4 and 5 is that the prisons are inhumane and have failed to deliver a system of rehabilitations. To many former prisoners, their experiences of imprisonment were simply about *physical* and *mental torture*. Former prisoners were physically tortured during the prolonged 'quiet-sitting', the 'march-drilling', the violent inmates' initiation ceremonies like *guoban* and 'cold baths', and their prolonged compulsory labour. They were also mentally tortured when they were humiliated during the 'strip-search', and when they were forced to follow the degrading paramilitary etiquette. Instead of 'education' or 'rehabilitation', shaming and humiliation have become the core features of imprisonment in China.

While it was suggested that the Chinese government used both disintegrative and reintegrative shaming to rehabilitate the offenders (X. Chen 2002), the former prisoners' experiences of incarceration and post-discharge life told us that they had been shamed *dis*-integratively instead of *re*-integratively (Braithwaite 1989). Braithwaite shows that official sanctions usually result in shaming without the efforts of reconciling the offender with the community. He called this process 'disintegrative shaming' (Braithwaite 1989, 55). In this process, formal sanction becomes a degradation ceremony that shames the *offenders* and transforms the labels into master status. Through this process, offenders are excluded from the support from their families, schools, and the wider community. This also increases the attraction of these labelled offenders to criminal subcultural groups that are more likely to provide social support for crime. Braithwaite, however, suggests that shame can also be used to reconcile offenders to the community. He calls this kind of shaming 'reintegrative shaming' (Braithwaite 1999, 55). This is an informal mediation that starts by community disapproval of the offenders' *act* but is followed by gestures of reacceptance into their original community. Gestures of reacceptance can be everything from a smile that symbolizes forgiveness to a lengthier ceremony that is aimed to 'decertify' the criminal as deviant. With this process in place, it would be less likely for the offenders to develop a negative self-perception.

According to Braithwaite's definition, the shaming that the former prisoners in this study had experienced in prison and after they were discharged was clearly disintegrative. It was the *prison inmates* themselves, instead of their *acts*, that were shamed. They were humiliated, degraded, and deprived of their basic human dignity. There was also no 'gesture of reacceptance' in the experiences of the former prisoners. Their comment that 'they do not treat us as a human beings' has clearly shown their experiences of disintegrative shaming in the prison. Similarly, in Chapter 6 I have shown that they were still humiliated by the system after they were discharged. The unpleasant home visit, the surprise drug test, and the nationwide 'control system' in many cases exposed the former prisoners' stigmatized identity to the public and put them into embarrassing and humiliating situations. Perhaps different from the case in *laojiao*/*qiangge*, the continued shaming and humiliation after release may or may not be intended. However, the pain brought to the former prisoners was similar.

Moreover, the prison inmates do not learn anything other than mere survival strategies through the incarceration system. As seen in Chapter 4, during incarceration, instead of being rehabilitated, the former prisoners learned to talk and behave as if they were rehabilitated. Instead of learning the ways of 'becoming a better person', the prisoners learned the 'ways of lying' (Bakken 2000). In order to survive the system, prison inmates learned how to overtly perform self-criticism through both the writing of 'autobiographies' and 'inmates' trials'. The inmates had learned how to be hypocritical so as to survive the painful and inhumane prison environment. What we can see here is that the 'prison' system has broken its promise of

rehabilitation. It has also created a type of humiliation that goes against the basic human dignity of the inmates.

Propaganda and Moral Expectations

Besides the failure of rehabilitation, another important implication we can derive from the former prisoners' narratives is that the 'system of hypocrisy' is formed by the discrepancy of party propaganda, on the one hand, and the practical reality, on the other hand. The party propaganda about the model police and prison officers seems to be working well, until the former prisoners encounter the police and prison officers in real life. It is clear from my conversations with the former inmates that they all *expected* the police and the prison officers to possess at least some qualities portrayed in the propagandistic tales of heroic and upright helpers. In other words, the morally upright and sacrificing officer was a tale internalized by the inmates before incarceration. The reality came crashing down on them only when they were arrested and during their time in jail. During my interviews I encountered persons who still felt betrayed and lied to, people who had seen the contrast between propaganda and reality, and who had begun to see the whole system as one based on sheer hypocrisy.

It might be common for former prisoners or former offenders in most contexts to be afraid of or to dislike the police and prison officers. However, it might not be common for them to blame the police officers and prison officers for being 'self-interested' and see such behaviour as an 'immoral' quality. In other contexts, in modern-day China, as elsewhere, by saying someone is 'self-interested' one may not even imply a criticism, since every person is expected to be somehow 'self-interested'. As Adam Smith (1937, 14) wrote in *The Wealth of Nations*, 'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.' Here, whether 'self-interested' is moral or not is less important than whether it can contribute to effective economic performance. Of course, this is a far cry from the Maoist 'we' of collectivism and self-sacrifice, but still may be expected in today's China. Similarly, in criminology, there are many concerns about people's perceptions about 'police performance' (Cao et al. 1996; Cheurprakobkit 2000; Weitzer and Tuch 2005). Seldom, however, is there any concern about whether people think the police officers are 'self-interested'.[1] When the former prisoners in this study complained that the officers were 'self-interested', they demonstrated their moral expectations towards both the police officers and the prison officers: to serve in the interest of the drug users and the prison inmates.

1. There are a wide variety of studies about 'police ethic/morality' in its own right. These studies are more about the content of that ethic or morality. However, the focus in this study is about how people, particularly former prisoners, perceive what 'moral' means, how such moral expectation is created, and why these expectations were not met in the reality.

One of the origins of such a moral expectation, I would argue, is the moralistic tales of party propaganda.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, through party propaganda, the images of different model police and prison officers were distilled down to the everyday life of the general public. Similar to what Xu (2012) called the 'political performances', the stories of the models can be seen as the state's 'theatrical performance' or 'impression management' strategy (Goffman 1958). In the propaganda, the images of different model officers were carefully tailored to portray them as either the 'hero' or the 'saviour'. The core moral quality, as reflected in the propaganda, is the spirit of 'self-sacrifice'. One might argue that it is in the Chinese culture that people put emphasis on 'collectivism' and despise 'individualism', that there is a culture in which 'self-sacrifice' is glorified, and 'selfishness' is disgraced (Bakken 2000; X. Chen 2002). However, as Bakken (2000) reminds us, 'Chinese culture' is not a static but a malleable entity. The Chinese Communist Party selects and propagates specific cultural norms—the 'exemplary norms'—for the purpose of maintaining stability. 'Self-sacrifice' for the collective good is one of these selected norms of exemplary behaviour. In this context, the norm becomes a 'super-social norm', one that is propagated, managed, and enforced rather than being a product of a living culture. The purpose of the propaganda is to educate and to enhance the 'moral legitimacy' of the party-government (B. Xu 2012). The logic behind the propaganda is that through propagating the images of models, first, the public can learn from the models by imitating these models (Bakken 2000); second, the public can accept the image of the models as they are presented and at the same time connect these images to the image of the party-state and thereby enhance the moral legitimacy of the party-state (C. Jiang 2001; B. Xu 2012; R. Yan 2004). Through this repetitive and imitative process, people will gradually internalize such moral norms in themselves. At least so goes the methodology of party propaganda.

The 'Hideous Reality'

This theory of how propaganda is supposed to work, however, often fails to operate in the expected ways, depending on the experiences of the people who are subject to this propaganda. Much like in Scott's analysis (1990) on 'public transcripts', the effect of propaganda, as demonstrated by former prisoners' narratives, is very different from what the party-state would expect. Instead of simply accepting the ideology behind the propaganda, the former prisoners form expectations according to the propaganda. That is not to say that the former prisoners' expectations are exactly the same as what has been propagated. No former prisoners would expect officers to sacrifice their lives for the good of the public, but they do expect officers to work for the good of the drug users—to 'fight the evil drug dealers', and to 'save the drug users'. However, with their real-life experiences with the police and the

prison officers, no former prisoner thinks that the reality is even close to the stories in the propaganda.

As Chapters 3 to 6 have shown, the logic that governs the day-to-day practices of the local police and prison officers are completely irrelevant to the logic behind the making of the propaganda. In Chapter 3 I have shown that under the state bureaucracy, the police officers are assigned with the duty to meet certain performance criteria, in our case typically an arrest quota. The use of 'hooks' is a convenient tactic for the police officers to meet the arrest quota. However, to the former prisoners, this was evidence that the police officers were not interested in 'educating' or 'saving' them. Instead, they saw it as collusion between the police officers and drug dealers and other drug users. Besides meeting the arrest quota, the police officers are also required to control and manage information about the former prisoners and former drug users. The requirements are imposed bureaucratically and these requirements have nothing to do with 'heroically fighting the drug dealers' or 'saving the drug users'. These are structural requirements of a police bureaucracy, and as Weber has pointed out, the original meaning of bureaucracy is 'that which is not human'. It has little to do with kindness and morality and the heroic tales about how the self-sacrifice of the officers aids the drug user.

Similarly, the prison officers are required to maintain order in the prison environment. They are also assigned to operate the prison factory efficiently. The concern for order and effective operation of prison the factory has superseded the concern for education. Throughout their encounters with the police and prison officers, the inmates saw the cooperation between the officers, the so-called hooks, and inmate elites. They were also constantly shamed and humiliated throughout the process of incarceration, and this humiliation continued even after they were discharged. Although shaming has been one important component in traditional Chinese education and reform philosophy, the former prisoners did not see the police officers or the prison officers as having the intention of 'educating' or 'saving' them.

This confrontation of myth and reality is particularly acute when the former prisoners' stigmatized identities are exposed by the 'management and control system'. Former inmates continue to be harassed years after their release, and together with policies like the revocation of drug users' driver's licences, the former prisoners are constantly reminded that the police officers do not care about their 'rehabilitation or reintegration'. In many ways, what the former inmates instead experienced is a continuous process of shaming and humiliation. This continuous type of shaming is disintegrative rather than reintegrative.

When former prisoners criticized the police officers and the prison officers, very often they were also criticizing the 'Communist Party'. The term 'Communist Party' was sometimes used interchangeably with the terms 'police officers' and 'prison officers'. While the former inmates were complaining about the officers, they were also complaining about the 'party'. This again goes back to the party propaganda,

and comes back at the party as distrust and hatred rather than as trust and love for the party as prescribed in the propaganda.

The 'Models' and the Communist Party: A Double-Edged Sword

In Chapter 2 I have shown that in the propaganda about model police and prison officers the two were always subtly linked to the party-government. By showing the models as morally upright, the propaganda also bolsters the idea that the party-state is morally upright. The main purpose of this strategy is to enhance the authority and the legitimacy of the party-state (C. Jiang 2001; B. Xu 2012; R. Yan 2004). This strategy, however, can be seen as a double-edged sword. If the performance of the local police and prison officers can fit into what has been described in the propaganda, the party-state's image and thereby its moral legitimacy might be enhanced. However, if the reality is opposite to what has been portrayed, the party's image might actually be threatened. From the former prisoners' perspectives, they were not convinced that the party-state is as good as the model officers in the propaganda. Instead, they connected the behaviours of the police officers and the prison officers to the party-state. While the former prisoners criticized the police officers and the prison officers as being 'self-interested', they also criticized the party-state for being hypocritical. They saw the propaganda as what the party-state had 'said', and they saw the behaviour of the police officers and the prison officers as what the party-state had done.

In the last part of Chapter 6, I have mentioned that the former prisoners express their grievances with the party through an online chat group. Their complaints are not only targeting the revocation of drug users' driver's licences. Instead, it should be seen as a result of a whole series of life experiences—of being arrested, incarcerated, as well as of a range of experiences from their post-release lives. Although the former prisoners I met might not have been as angry as those in the chat group, it is clear that they see the whole party-state as being hypocritical. My analysis has also shown that the system itself is indeed hypocritical, especially when it presents the 'front stage' of propaganda and the 'backstage' of the actual practices to the former prisoners. Such a contradiction, I would argue, possibly threatens rather than enhances the party-state's legitimacy.

The Demise of Exemplary Models and Ideological Resistance

Brady (2008) seems to have overestimated the power of the modern party propaganda in her monograph *Marketing Dictatorship*, and she may also have underestimated Chinese audiences' ability to resist the propagated ideology. As demonstrated by former prisoners' experiences, instead of accepting the party-propagated ideology as reflected in the exemplary models, Chinese audiences have the ability to scrutinize the propaganda and compare such propaganda with their real-life

experiences. On 5 March 2013, which was the national 'learn from Lei Feng day' (*xuexi Lei Feng jinian ri* 學習雷鋒紀念日), three movies about the exemplary model Lei Feng were released in Nanjing. They turned out to be so unpopular that many theatres were not able to sell even one ticket (Levin 2013). When I talked about this movie with a former prisoner, she said that Lei Feng is now more of a joke in China since his complete 'selflessness' is so unrealistic in the modern society. It seems that the power of the national 'models' is now far weakened from what it used to be. Brady (2008) makes a point out of how propaganda is renewed and strengthened in the new millennium, but in terms of 'model learning' this seems not to be a case where propaganda has achieved such success. Maybe this is also a question of which audience one looks at since the former inmates seemed to have internalized the tales of heroic and self-sacrificing officers *before* their experiences of incarceration.

In 2014 when I was formulating my thoughts about the system of hypocrisy, I discussed the idea with a group of research students coming from Mainland China. None of them was surprised by the fact that the party-state presented itself in a way that was completely different from reality. Propaganda about different 'models' was so prevalent that it had become a part of their lives. While nobody actually believed in traditional models like Lei Feng, the power of the new types of 'normal people' models like the model police officers is still functioning (Ding and Li 2010). These 'normal people', much like the traditional models, are portrayed as 'exemplary models'. However, as I have demonstrated, the power of these 'exemplary models' no longer functions according to the will of the party-state. The party propaganda has in fact created an idealism that cannot be realized in real life. More importantly, model police and prison officers are only two out of many other types of 'models' propagated on state-controlled media on a day-to-day basis. While 'normal' citizens do not have many chances to see the 'backstage' of the criminal justice system, they do have chances to see the 'reality' in other arenas. With reference to former prisoners' experiences, it would also be reasonable to believe that other audiences can also see the hypocrisy behind the propaganda of certain exemplary models. Another possible consequence of the existence of such hypocrisy is the diminishing effect of the credibility of state propaganda in general. In the 2010s one joke has become popular on the Internet:

> Question: Why does the *National News Broadcast* [*Xinwen lianbo* 新聞聯播] have the most expensive television commercial time slot?
> Answer: Because businessmen know that those who like to watch the *National News Broadcast* are those who can be easily fooled. (Baidu 2014)

When I browse the Chinese online search engine Baidu (百度), this joke can be found on over 35,000 web pages. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Sigmund Freud (1976) points out that jokes allow people to avoid 'censorship' and express what would otherwise be prohibited to express. Jokes can also be seen as a 'looking glass' through which the perceived reality can be revealed in a slightly

distorted way (Zijderveld 1982). The *National News Broadcast* can be seen as one of the main mass-media outlets through which different stories of the 'models' were told, and different tales of party propaganda is being broadcast. What this joke can reveal is the possible effect of the system of hypocrisy—the loss of credibility of the party propaganda and the ability of the Chinese audiences to resist the party-indoctrinated ideology. It was clear that the former prisoners in this study lost their trust in the party propaganda after they experienced the failing 'rehabilitation' system. It would, however, require further research to see if audiences in other arenas would also resist the party propaganda in similar ways when their experienced realities run contrary to the propaganda.

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