

# **When Chinese Communist Party Elites Disagree: Factional Model-Making in Chinese Politics**

**Olivia Cheung**

**Conference presentation on 27 August 2021**

Conference details: 23<sup>rd</sup> Biennial Conference of the European Association for Chinese Studies (EACS), Leipzig University, Leipzig, 24-27 August 2021

Title of paper: When Chinese Communist Party Elites Disagree: Factional Model-Making in Chinese Politics

Abstract of paper:

This paper introduces “factional model-making” as a theoretical framework to analyse the public expression of critique against the Party line by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cadres. It is posited that cadres aligned to factions cutting across the Party-state hierarchy cultivate local areas into “models” in order to promote contentious political ideas marginalized by the Party line. This paper consists of four sections. The first section contextualizes the research agenda in the ongoing “institutions versus factions” debate in the scholarship of post-Mao elite politics. The second section introduces the theoretical framework of factional model-making. It also offers a comprehensive overview of the practice of factional model-making under CCP rule. The third section applies factional model-making to analyse how the Party’s Left—an eclectic combination of hardliners, military leaders, princelings and Maoists—joined forces in making the Nanjie Model, in order to promote agricultural recollectivization, question the legitimacy of the market reforms, urge the CCP to be faithful to communism, and to put Mao front and centre in the policy process from the early 1990s to 2010s. Based on the findings of the case study, it is concluded in the final section that factional model-making ensures a competitive policymaking process. The dynamism of political contention under factional model-making far exceeds the Party’s prescribed norms of democratic centralism and intra-Party democracy. Although factional model-making has been suppressed under Xi Jinping, it is predicted that it will recur in the future, possibly in a disruptive form, when the political climate loosens.