

Chinese President Issues List of Virtues

By ALEXA OLESEN, Associated Press Writer *Wed Mar 15, 12:42 PM ET*

President Hu Jintao has a message for Chinese who are greedy, lazy or unpatriotic: Be ashamed, be very ashamed. Hu's list of eight do's and don't's was unveiled during the meeting of parliament that ended this week.

It aims to douse the excesses of China's 27-year-long economic boom with a bucket of cold virtue.

On Wednesday, the aphorisms were issued on a \$1 poster with plain, black Chinese characters above a photo of the Great Wall.

Hu's virtues are blandly apolitical, with none of the radical vigor of founding communist leader Mao Zedong, who declared: "Political power comes out of the barrel of a gun."

"Love, do not harm the motherland," says Hu's list. "Uphold science; don't be ignorant and unenlightened."

Hu's virtues add to efforts by communist leaders to assure the public they are fighting corruption and trying to close the gap between an elite who have profited from China's economic reforms and the poor majority.

The list also appears to be a tentative step toward legacy-building for Hu, who is general secretary of the ruling Communist Party and was appointed to the largely ceremonial post of president in 2003.

For centuries, Chinese leaders have tried, usually in vain, to mold public and official behavior with poetic maxims.

"In our socialist society we must not allow the boundaries to be blurred when it comes to right and wrong, evil and kindness, beauty and ugliness," Hu told a March 4 parliamentary seminar, according to the Communist Party newspaper.

"What we support, what we resist, what we oppose and what we promote all must be crystal clear," he said, adding that his "socialist concept of honor and disgrace" should be promoted to the masses, especially young people.

But countering lawlessness and greed with phrases extolling plain living is like trying to put the genie of economic reform back in the bottle, says one China watcher.

"The overwhelming majority of Chinese people don't want to go back to the simple life. They want the good life like the people in the cities have," said Merle Goldman of Harvard University, author of the book "From Comrade to Citizen: The Struggle for Political Rights in China."

The official Xinhua News Agency hailed the list as "a perfect amalgamation of traditional Chinese values and modern virtues."

"It shows that the party has become aware that earlier campaigns were not having much of an impact on the youth," said novelist Zhang Kangkang, a delegate to parliament's main noncommunist advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

"They have chosen to use very neutral language, very apolitical language, to get the message across," she said. "It's very populist, very middle-of-the-road."

The 2,280-member consultative conference — a gathering of businesspeople, religious leaders and others — closed its annual session Monday with a resolution praising Hu's list of virtues and pledging to "make it part of social norms."

The list is displayed on a poster that lacks the visual impact of revolutionary-era propaganda, which featured stark woodblock prints and vivid paintings of joyous peasants that have become collector's items.

Some welcome Hu's language and its echoes of temperate, pre-revolutionary Chinese philosophers.

"From Deng Xiaoping's saying that 'white cat, black cat' stuff to now, we have totally lost our sense of morality. It's been 20 years since we threw our morality out the window," said Sheri Liao, an environmental activist and former philosophy teacher.

Deng, then the supreme leader, launched China's economic reforms with the pragmatic declaration: "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white; it is a good cat as long as it catches mice."

"My personal opinion is that it's a very good thing," Liao said of Hu's value system. "The Chinese Communist Party is starting to take an interest in and adopt a friendly attitude to traditional culture and values."