

Comment

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Much ado about TV plagiarism

Popular Internet writer Lai Bao denounced the high audience rating TV drama *Love Apartment 3* on his *weibo* or micro blog on Aug 4 for using a number of his original jokes from his books without authorization. As expected, it drew wide public attention.

In less than 24 hours, the TV drama group tendered a public apology on its official *weibo* for using Lai's original jokes. It said it would like to pay for all of Lai's original pieces it had used in the show. Lai accepted the apology and said what he wants is to be recognized as the author of the contents rather than money. Famous playwright Ning Caishen went a step further and praised the group for "showing respect to network copyright".

Thanks to the quick response and excellent public relations strategy, a hit play's plagiarism scandal was resolved and even turned into a promotion for the show. But the "happy ending" bears a closer analysis.

According to an old Chinese saying, using things that belong to others without permission is stealing; in this case, it is plagiarism. But in the official apology, the producer of *Love Apartment 3* didn't directly admit to have committed plagiarism. He only said that he was sorry for "creating trouble for the original authors" and "saluted them".

This seems to convey a strange logic, that using others' works without permission is not plagiarism. A public apology becomes mandatory when somebody harms others' rights and interests. But, to some extent, the TV drama group has been let off leniently. I wonder why it should be praised and why Lai doesn't understand "the 'thief' is being encouraged to 'steal'".

The TV drama group argues that it is hard to define network copyright and it has "real" difficulties in contacting the original authors of the network contents it uses. It sounds like a reasonable explanation. But the fact is that the contents it "uses" in the drama are far more than network jokes.

Right from its first season the TV drama has been criticized by netizens for copying a number of plots, scenes and dialogues from a couple of famous TV dramas. But the dramatist and crew members of *Love Apartment 3* have denied doing so in an interview to the media.

The *Love Apartment 3* plagiarism dispute is quite typical of and exposes the chaos in the domestic TV drama copyright market. In recent years, some netizens have accused a number of TV dramas of copying scenes from other TV shows. But only a few of them have bought copyrights from the producers of the originals before making their own versions, such as Hunan Satellite TV's *Ugly Wudi*, which was legally adapted from famous Mexican TV drama *Ugly Betty*.

China lacks specific regulations to define "plagiarism" in films and TV dramas. Under such circumstances, it is hard to determine whether it's "plagiarism" or "referential use". Even in clear cases of plagiarism, the cost of safeguarding copyright through legal channels is rather high.

Copying popular TV dramas can easily get high audience rating because of their excellent contents. Considering the small fine one has to pay for copyright violation and the huge profits such copycat versions can bring in, it's not surprising that the producers of most of the "clones" don't buy the copyright. Besides, distorted media promotion has also polluted the environment of the TV drama industry. Instead of being ashamed of plagiarizing, some producers even take advantage of the scandal to draw audience attention and hype their upcoming programs.

I remember what our journalism mentor once said: "Mediocre is mediocre, but plagiarism is a sin." Learning from the experiences of other films and TV dramas is somewhat unavoidable. But we can at least safeguard the bottom line when it comes to plagiarism.

Moreover, netizens' supervision and criticism cannot resolve all the plagiarism disputes. It is the authorities' responsibility to protect copyright owners' legal rights. The government has to improve the laws and regulations on copyright to rid films and TV dramas of plagiarism.

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CHINA FORUM | HU ANANG

Spirit of collective leadership

Effective mechanisms of CPC help ensure sound political progress and pave the way for country's development

Adopted in most countries across the world, the presidential system has long been hailed as a democratic system for modern countries.

Elected directly or indirectly through nationwide elections, the president stands as the head of state when dealing with foreign countries and leads the formulation of foreign policies. Domestically, the president acts as the chief of government, and decides on domestic policies.

In China, however, it is a different story. Here, a collective leadership system has been created through joint efforts of a new and modern political party and country, namely, the multi-member Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China, which works under the mechanism of collective leadership.

According to the Constitution of the Communist Party of China, the members on the Standing Committee, the CPC general secretary, the secretary of the Central Discipline Inspection Commission and the chairman of the Central Military Commission shall be chosen through democratic elections by the Party's national congress and its central committee.

On the government side, the Constitution of the People's Republic of China says that all State leaders, including the president, the vice-president, the chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the premier, the vice-premiers and the chairman of the Military Commission of the Central Government shall be democratically elected by the NPC.

There are nine members on the Political Bureau Standing Committee, representing the country's top

leading bodies and exercise joint leadership over Party, government and military affairs.

Forming a core of collective leadership featuring clear division of work, cooperation and coordination, this mechanism can be described as collective leadership with Chinese characteristics.

Why has China created and developed such a collective leadership system? The answer is to be found both in the political logic of the evolution of the ruling history of the Party and in the logic of governance of a country meeting every basic condition of a super country.

First, China is a super country in population, which is 1.6 times that of the aggregate population of the United States and 27 European Union countries.

Second, China is a super country in size but suffers from big development gaps between its urban and rural areas and between its different regions, gaps wider than that seen in European or US history.

Third, China is a super country in governance, with five levels of governments, two more than in the US. It is difficult to coordinate these governments, and even more difficult to administer them.

And lastly, the CPC is a super ruling party with more than 80 million members and, therefore, close supervision and tight control are an absolute necessity.

All this makes the bipartisan system, the tripartite system, the presidential system and the bicameral system followed in most countries too simplistic, too limited and too defective for application in China.

Some of the systems were tried out in China by various regimes after the 1911 Revolution which dethroned the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) emperor. One after another, however,

they ended in failure, with none proving to be a solution for a "land of total disunity", a phrase used by Dr Sun Yat-sen to describe China's situation in those days.

During the course of building a new China, the CPC made every effort to find a model fit for the country's national conditions and development stage. Through constant exploration, experiment and adjustment, it finally "crossed the river by feeling the stones" and put in place the current collective leadership system for a "super state apparatus".

As a super country, China must have a super state apparatus. This is not only a subjective selection, but also an objective mandate. Neither is China the only case in the world.

In a super society with more than 1.3 billion people born into 56 ethnic groups in about 2,860 counties across 30-plus provincial administrative regions, high-quality and effective governance is of key importance.

A most important feature of the "collective leadership system with Chinese characteristics" lies in the word collective, which means that it is composed of a group of members instead of a single president, consists of a large number of organs instead of just one, relies on the wisdom of a team instead of an individual, and opts for collective instead of personal decision-making.

As the head of the central leading team, the CPC general secretary plays the role of a guide and leader. Such a system will make it possible to pool the wisdom of the whole leading team. This has been proved by what China has achieved so far.

Through a study of the Political Bureau Standing Committee of the 16th and the 17th Central Committee of the CPC, I have found five major mechanisms operating in the collective leadership system with Chinese characteristics:

First is the mechanism of collective appraisal of candidates, and collective withdrawal and succession of membership, which both terminates the tradition of individual succession of power seen in China's history and prevents selection of politicians totally through election as practiced abroad.

The second, the mechanism of collective coordination and distribution of responsibilities, is an effective firewall against indecision, buck-passing and opposition in the decision-making process.

The mechanism of collective study, the third, leads to common view through sharing of decision-making wisdom and expertise.

The fourth, the mechanism of collective inspection and investigation, gives the members a solid ground to speak, to propose and to decide.

And the last, the mechanism of collective decision-making, prevents an individual from making decisions on major issues and allows timely correction of mistakes.

At the core of these five mechanisms is the mechanism of collective decision-making. Viewed from the theory and practice of decision-making, the collective leadership system has its advantages in terms of information sharing and correct decision making, thanks to its democratic nature.

Just as Deng Xiaoping said in 1990, the key issue in China is that the CPC has a good Political Bureau, a good Political Bureau Standing Committee, in particular. So long as nothing goes wrong in this link, China will remain as stable as Mount Tai. This conclusion has proved true throughout China's development over the past 30 years.

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CHEN WEIHUA

Money talks in US presidential race

The Occupy Wall Street protest last year was against money in politics. It is not difficult to figure why if you have been following the 2012 US presidential campaign.

US President Barack Obama has stepped up his campaign despite being head of a state haunted by a huge national debt, high jobless rate and serious droughts. He appeared in multiple campaign events in Connecticut on Monday, Washington DC on Tuesday and Colorado on Wednesday.

Last Monday, Obama caused a traffic snarl in New York City when he returned for a \$40,000-a-head fundraiser after having raised \$4.5 million at a star-studded event at actress Sarah Jessica Parker's house in Manhattan about seven weeks ago.

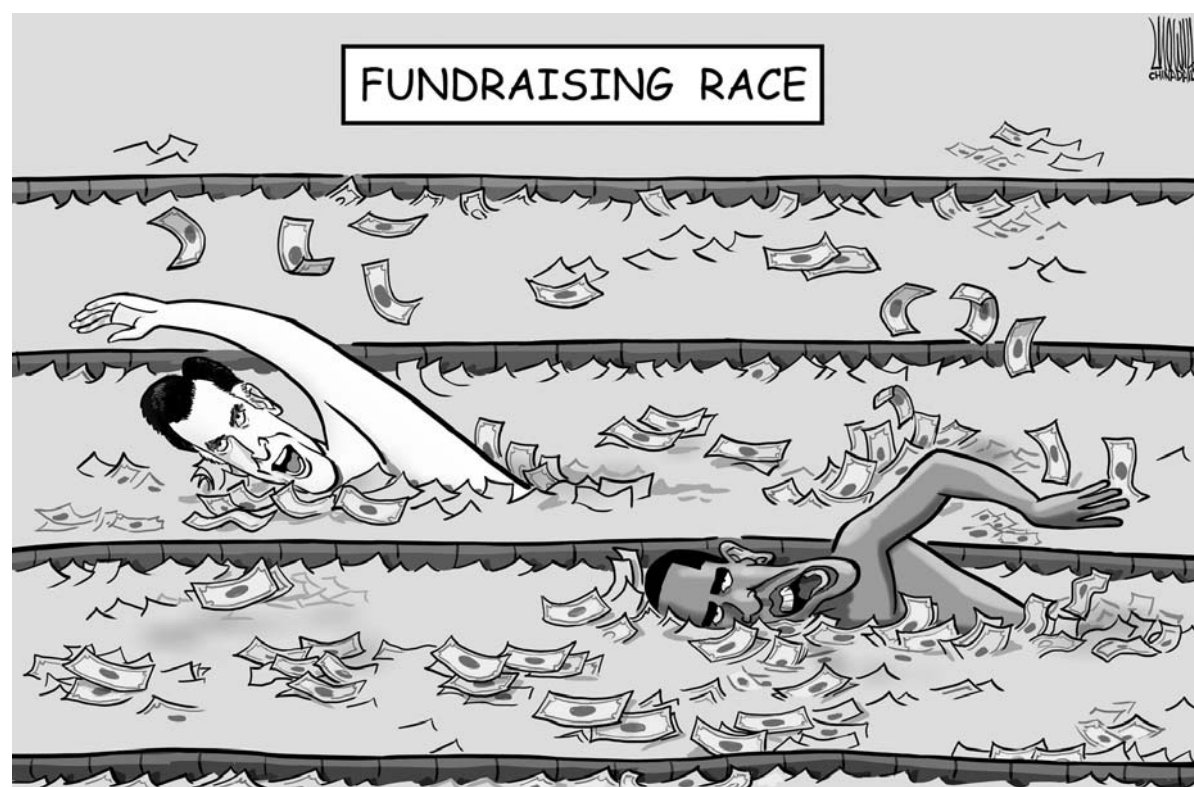
Obama is apparently trying to catch up with Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney who has raised more funds than him three months in a row. In July, Romney raised \$101 million against Obama's \$75 million.

But between January and June, Obama outspent Romney \$400 million to \$131 million.

Last month, Obama attended 21 fundraisers, in addition to 17 campaign-themed public events. It seemed odd to see him promising to help poor and middle-class Americans at grassroots campaign events in the day and dining with Wall Street financiers, Hollywood celebrities and rich liberal groups at fancy restaurants at night.

While some Republicans have dubbed Obama "Campaign-in-Chief", their candidate Romney's schedule is just as busy. He campaigned in Illinois on Tuesday and Iowa on Wednesday.

Obama's top contributors include Microsoft, University of California and Harvard University. The big



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donors for Romney are Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, Morgan Stanley and Bank of America, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Surely, both candidates believe the amount of money they raise will be crucial to winning the election. It has allowed them to spend an unprecedented amount of money running negative advertisements against each other in the battleground states of Ohio and Florida.

In Cleveland, Ohio, for example, an average viewer is seeing 87 presidential campaign spots on TV a week, compared with 70 in Orlando, Florida.

By spreading mostly biased or untrue stories about their rivals in the negative ads, both candidates

seem to firmly believe that a lie repeated often becomes the truth.

Of course, many nasty ads are paid for by the so-called Super PACs, usually big money from corporations and the rich. A Supreme Court ruling in the Citizens United case in 2010 entitled corporations to spend unlimited amounts of money in US elections, both at federal and local levels.

The increasing role played by money in politics has sparked an outcry among some Americans. They say democracy is now on sale to the highest bidder.

In an op-ed piece on Tuesday, former US Labor Secretary Robert Reich, a long-time critic of concentrated wealth and corrupt politics in the US, called on people to fight the buyers and sellers of

American democracy.

Money has already changed the nature of democracy and free election, which the US claims to champion and intends to spread across the world.

But if democracy and free election are all about how much money you can raise and how nasty you can get in negative ads, as is evident in this presidential race, I am not sure what kind of exemplary power the US is.

What I am sure of is that in the run-up to the November election, the exemplary power of money in politics will only multiply.

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