

Senior Thesis Paper

**Loving the State (爱国心): The Dynamics of Chinese Nationalism and Implications on
China's Role in International Relations**

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Introduction

In a comparative study, China was shown to have one of the highest levels of popular nationalism in the world, falling at 80 out of 100 on the feelings thermometer, while other countries ranked in the top 10 remained within the 70s range (Tang & Darr 832). With this statistic, it would be natural to assume Chinese nationalism is not only more intense than other nations, but is a popular national movement likely bolstered by the authoritarian Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Within the past two decades, international incidents that sparked mass demonstrations from Chinese citizens have been widely broadcasted and serve to reinforce the image of uncontrollable Chinese nationalism.¹ With the state-propagandized patriotic education campaign beginning in the 1990s combined with mass demonstrations, the expectation would be Chinese nationalism is intensifying from the “top-down”.² The purpose of this thesis is to study the dynamics of Chinese nationalism moving into the 21st century. I argue that the civilization-state and its historical context are central to understanding Chinese nationalism. While historical international relations do play a major role in shaping Chinese nationalism, it is important to note contemporary Chinese nationalism is not necessarily intensifying or “rising” as conventional wisdom has concluded.

Defining Chinese Nationalism

To begin unpacking Chinese nationalism, the Western notion of “nationalism” must first be defined. The concept of the “nation” can be described as an “imagined community” that applies politicized borders to a homogenous culture (Anderson 6). The “state” is the organization

¹ A few examples are the 1999 demonstrations after the NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade; the 2005 reaction to Japan’s bid for membership on the UN Security Council; 2008 demonstrations in front of Chinese outlets of Carrefour, a French supermarket chain, in retaliation for France’s pro-Tibetan sympathies; the 2012 Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands incident; and most recently, protests opposing South Korea’s THAAD missile system in the South China sea in 2017.

² “Top-down” nationalism refers to state-manufactured and propagandized nationalist attitudes meant to incite citizens to action.

that maintains a monopoly on violence and sovereignty over a territory; in the case of contemporary China, the “state” is controlled by the CCP. The concept of the modern-state is most commonly derived from post-Westphalian European states and has become the prevailing structure for international order and international law.³ The basest form of the “nation-state” manifests in the sovereignty of the “people,” implying the “uniqueness” and distinction of the people themselves considering sovereign within determined territorial boundaries constitutes (Greenfeld 11). Nationalism is a social construction linked to national identity, and the right of the nation to maintain its integrity and self-determination. Modern China cannot be framed in terms of the institutional invention of “nation-state” since China did not experience the same fragmentation as European states (Pye 58). Instead, this essay regards the characteristics of Chinese nationalism through the concept of the civilization-state.

A “civilization” is a complex society defined by its urban development, social hierarchies, economy, and domestication of agriculture and livestock. Unlike the nation-state, a civilization-state encompasses multiple communities that can also be considered separate nations. Because Sinic-civilization pre-dates the framework of the modern state, China cannot be counted as “another nation-state in the family of nations” (Pye 58). China is more so a cultural entity with unique values instilled in the Chinese identity over its 4,000-year-old history (Campbell 2). The difference between the nation-state and civilization-state is that in a nation-state, there is emphasis on individualism and liberalized competition, typically turning neighboring nations into rivals. A civilization-state is a “common entity” with a shared destiny, shared interest, and shared responsibility (Chung). The characteristics of the ‘common entity’

³ The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 is often accredited to the current structure of the international system and evolution of the modern state. On the perspective of European exceptionalism and Westphalian-state universality, see Kayaoglu 214; Beaulac 148-177; for a contrasting view, see Osiander 43; Gross 20-41; Flesmes 1016-30.

have allowed the Chinese civilization to remain unified while Western civilization fragmented into nation-states (Pye 59). Under the civilization-state, a unified population and strong integration with its government creates a state-society relationship unlike Western nation-states. Furthermore, the Sinic civilization-state's foundation is characterized by the socio-political structure of Confucianism and the Mandate of Heaven in which the defining principles are those who control the state enjoy absolute power defined by a moral, "natural authority" (Bislev & Li 23; Pye 58). This structure allowed the imperial state to function as a "the guardian, custodian and embodiment of the imperial civilization," all the while maintaining China's territorial integrity and unity (Bislev & Li 23).⁴ The nucleus of unity has been the state's embodiment of Chinese culture, rites, values, and familial relationships (Campbell 3). Now, the CCP uses this Confucian principle to garner loyalty to a government that embodies the values of Chinese civilization and its unity. Even if the political system were to change—as it did from the fall of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) to the Nationalist Party to the Communist Party (1949-present)—unity of the civilization-state is embedded in the culture itself.

Contemporary Chinese nationalism is a construct that utilizes loyalty to express a Sinicized nationalism that must pose no threat to the unity of a multiethnic China.⁵ Under the Western concept of the nation-state, minority groups like the Uyghurs or Tibetans calling for autonomy have the potential to be sovereign. However, Chinese nationalism is rooted in "cultural tradition" from the "imagined multiethnic community designed" by the Chinese Communist Party (Tang & Darr 823). The words for "patriotism" and "nationalism" in Mandarin have different connotations than they do in the West. In academic texts, Western scholars

⁴ The Chinese "state" refers to the organization that is recognized as sovereign in the international system, often used when discussing China in relation to other states.

⁵ Loyalty is defined by vigorous support for an individual's country or their "patriotism".

typically use the English terms interchangeably, however, they can also be distinguished in terms of the honorable patriots versus the nationalist zealots (Bislev & Li 24). Literally translated, *aiguo zhuyi* [爱国主义] means “loving the state-ism”, which is the term for patriotism. *Aiguo zhuyi* is the term most frequently used to describe “both the current wave of popular nationalism... and state sponsored ideology” (Bislev & Li 25). This term cannot be used interchangeably with “nationalism”, *minzu zhuyi* [民族主义], literally meaning “ethnic-group-ism”. *Minzu zhuyi* is most often used to describe nationalism retroactively or ethnic nationalism in other countries. The connotation for patriotism in China is loyalty to a centralized government with a cohesive civilization. This brand of national identity remains embedded in the imperial framework previously explained. National identity is not determined by emphasis on the ethnic component of the nation, but through loyalty to the civilization itself. To apply the Western approach to nationalism, where national sovereignty and ethnic identity go hand-in-hand, would undermine loyalty to the Chinese state, therefore posing as a threat to its unity. This provides an explanation as to why China views minority dominated regions (i.e. Tibet, Xinjiang, etc.) campaigning for autonomy as a threat to its national security.⁶ Chinese leadership expresses no qualms allowing special administrative regions autonomy if the territory remains under the CCP’s unitary system.

Interpretations of loyalty to one’s nation and one’s state differ from Western national identities. The CCP defines China as a multiethnic nation, unified by loyalty to immemorial Chinese culture (Bislev & Li 24). Chinese nationalism is more akin to the Western understanding

⁶ The “One Country, Two Systems” Policy allowed Hong Kong and Taiwan to become special administrative regions that maintained a high degree of autonomy and different political systems. However, Chinese central authorities exercised sovereignty over the territories. This article also accounts for potential reunification with Taiwan as it did with Hong Kong in 1997. Constitution of the People’s Republic of China of 1982: *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xianfa*, 1982 (Xianfa art. 31, sec. 1 (1982)).

of patriotism. A 2011 study comparing “patriotism” and “nationalism” among Chinese and Americans found both ideologies in China to be “empirically distinct” (“Patriotism, Nationalism and China’s US Policy” 16). American patriotism and nationalism were found to be empirically similar; patriotism, or acts of loyalty to one’s country, were expressed through feelings of national exceptionalism in comparison to other states. Gries et al. argues the way in which Westerners understand nationalism “goes beyond a love of one’s own country... to a belief in the superiority of one’s own country over others” (“Patriotism, Nationalism and China’s US Policy” 6).⁷ The CCP utilizes this type of patriotism to justify the unity of 55 ethnic minority groups and Han majority under one civilization-state.

Conventional wisdoms assume China’s nationalism is rising and, in turn, influences a more assertive foreign policy. However, this can oversimplify the effects of discourse surrounding Chinese nationalism on international relations. Furthermore, these conventional wisdoms often have polarizing effects on identity discourses in which attribution errors and racial resentments can increase. This essay argues contemporary Chinese nationalism is not intensifying and its roots are in the historical consciousness of the Chinese people, which has been overlooked and often misinterpreted by outgroups. Understanding Chinese nationalism provides an explanation for the scale of mass nationalist demonstrations because an attack on China as a state is perceived as an attack on the entirety of Chinese civilization and identity. Outsiders tend to disregard the historical context in which contemporary Chinese nationalism stems from, often misinterpreting nationalistic ire. An article from *The Wall Street Journal* advises to move forward, China must “move beyond” its emphasis on a century of national

⁷ A similar study conducted among students at Renmin University of China, Peking University, and Tsinghua University upheld Gries’ et al. claims and determined nationalism has a “stronger link” to foreign policy preferences than patriotism. See Sinkkonen 1059.

humiliation in favor of a “more constructive national story” (Schell & Delury). This presents a scenario in which China’s festering obsession with the past spurs nationalistic zeal and hinders development. If this is truly the case, why has China’s current national narrative persisted and what is its function for the CCP?

The Legacy of Victimhood

On November 29, 2012, President Xi Jinping visited the National Museum of China’s “The Road of Rejuvenation” exhibit, documenting China’s national experience beginning with the First Opium War and emphasizing the Century of Humiliation (“Xi Pledges Great Renewal of Chinese Nation”). This was also the first time President Xi would publically address his ideological strategy in the slogan of ‘the Chinese Dream’. The theme of what would come to be known as Xi’s signature ideology is the “renewal” the Chinese nation from having “suffered unusual hardship and sacrifice in the world’s modern history” (“Xi Pledges Great Renewal of Chinese Nation”). Xi’s concept of the Chinese Dream also emphasizes harmony between China’s victories and defeats as pragmatic, like the rhetoric of his predecessors (Zhao & Brown). Referencing the Century of Humiliation, Xi’s speech reiterates how the discourse of the ‘Century’ is engrained in Chinese national identity. His rhetoric signals the Chinese state once was a great civilization, and now must restore its former glory. Using the rhetorical argument that Chinese civilization must be revived to its former glory before the Century of Humiliation has the consequence of structuring Chinese national identity around victimization and anti-foreign sentiments. William Callahan states, it would “not be an exaggeration” to claim the perceived humiliation has become the “master narrative” of Chinese history and Chinese national identity (“National Insecurities” 204). The Chinese Dream seeks to breathe new life into the once predominant Chinese civilization that has fallen from grace since the middle of the 19th century.

Chinese nationalism is heavily influenced by the period of Chinese history commonly known as the Century of Humiliation, *bǎinián guóchǐ* [百年国耻], the literal translation being “one hundred years of national humiliation”. The literal translation, which the English term lacks, invokes the importance of this period has had in shaping contemporary Chinese nationalism. From 1839 until 1949, the interference by Western and Japanese imperialism impeded the “sovereignty and integrity of [Chinese] territory” (“National Insecurities” 199). The term itself originates in 1915, responding to the concession of General Yuan Shikai to Japan’s Twenty-One Demands during the First World War, which included the territory of Manchuria and control of the Chinese economy (“National Insecurities” 211; Luo 310). Both the Chinese Nationalist Party and the Chinese Communist Party used the term to gain support from the masses. The concessions the Chinese state made to the great powers of the 19th and 20th centuries left a lasting impression on both the people and the leadership in the new era referred to as “the rise of China”, or China’s ingress into the international order.⁸ Ryan Kilpatrick, student of the University of Hong Kong, succinctly summarizes how the ‘Century’ has played a major role in shaping the rhetoric of Chinese nationalism, despite regime changes and throughout time:

“...the Century of National Humiliation is not a linear history; it is an emotional and moral discourse that transcends party lines and is firmly planted at the grassroots, establishing itself as the common-sense means of understanding China’s modern history. China figures into this narrative as a magnificent civilization uniquely threatened by immoral barbarians, the innocent and blameless victim of international bullying and unwarranted imperialism” (“National Humiliation in China”)

⁸ Various scholars have cited events defining the Century of Humiliation such as: the unequal treaties of Whampoa and Aigun, the Taiping Rebellion, both Opium Wars and the sacking of the Old Summer Palace, the Eight-Nation Alliance suppressing the Boxer uprising, the Sino-French War, the First Sino-Japanese War, the British invasion of Tibet, Japan’s Twenty-One Demands, and the Second Sino-Japanese War. For a more in-depth analysis of the ‘Century’, see Gries (2004) chapter 3 and chapter 5; Callahan (2004) 199-218; Wang 1-13; Bislev and Li 21-32.

Zheng Wang makes sense of China's legacy of victimhood through Johan Galtung's "Chosenness-Myths Trauma" (CMT) complex. The three facets of the CMT complex are the idea a people have been chosen by transcendental forces, the cultural myths constructed in the collective conscious of a people, and context of the chosen traumas themselves (Wang 3). The purpose of a "master narrative" hinged on victimhood and humiliation has proven to be extremely strategic and transcends temporal boundaries by passing through multiple generations of leadership. Humiliation becomes a part of a group's identity as much as culture and bind the group closer together (Wang 3). What is unique about Chinese nationalism is that ethnic minorities are included in this narrative. A 2008 survey showed even among China's minority groups—the Huis, the Manchus, the Uyghurs, and the Mongols—nationalistic sentiments were just as high as the Han majority (Tang & Darr 819). However, the stipulation is that minority groups are far more willing to accept Chinese nationalism if they maintain a "high degree of cultural and religious autonomy" (Tang & Darr 819). This finding suggests Chinese nationalism is less dependent on shared ethnicity and more influenced by group adherence to the civilization-state.

Nationalism provides the regime with legitimacy from mass loyalty, but it also can threaten the regime's international ambitions if the consensus of the public feels their state is being mistreated by other states.⁹ Since a group's chosen trauma can "symbolize [its] deepest threats and fears through feelings of hopelessness and victimization," it can be argued that China's chosen legacy of victimhood influences contemporary national interests (Wang 3). The national interests of the Chinese state are namely maintaining sovereignty in the international system and territorial integrity, which align well with the humiliations of the 'Century'. A

⁹ "Regime" refers to the authoritarian system of governing and government under the Chinese Communist Party.

majority of the humiliations come from events in which the state was too weak domestically to prevent foreign invasion and the following tragedies, creating a “public space for bottom-up emotional venting and policy advocacy” (“The Emerging Sino-Japanese Conflict” 3). To outsiders, this is evidence the CCP is provoking nationalist sentiments as an act of hostility.

The Role of the Regime

From the perspective of the victim, Chinese nationalism legitimizes and strengthens loyalty to the regime, but it also has the potential to hinder China’s relations with other states. At the core of the discourse rests lingering scars from the Century of Humiliation. The emotive response from the public has frequently been exploited by political figures. While leadership and regimes changed rapidly in the early 20th century, what remained the same is the method in which leadership mobilized the public’s support through “humiliation discourse and the goal of rejuvenation” (Wang 2). The “rejuvenation” of the Maoist socialist policy ended in turmoil as the Cultural Revolution came to a close in the late 1970s, leaving the state with a weakened economy and isolationist foreign policy. Not only were the people doubting Maoism, the public was beginning to doubt the post-Mao reforms, which promoted rapid economic growth based through liberalization while rejecting political democracy. Because of these reforms, the public began to question the value of capitalism in a society that had defined itself as socialist for decades. The chaos from Mao’s radical development policies and then the transition into a capitalist market economy left the public with a “national identity crisis” (Zheng 48). This “identity crisis” is defined as a shift in the policy of the state that did not coincide with the narrative the society had been given. To maintain its legitimacy, the CCP faced the challenge of restoring patriotic feelings towards the regime to draw attention away from corruption and socioeconomic disparity.

Since its conception in 1921, the CCP has propagandized Japan as the national enemy. This tactic was revived in the 1980s, when Mao's class-struggle ideology was no longer a rallying point for the CCP. Instead of emphasizing the Capitalist-Communist conflicts, the real national enemy became the "vicious Japanese imperialist aggressors" ("The Emerging Sino-Japanese Conflict" 7). For instance, the CCP's victim narrative is used to justify the One China Policy because it is meant to create solidarity between mainland China and Taiwan.¹⁰ However, the consequence of this is the sense of victimhood has pushed the public to "absorb information selectively with regard to Japan," thus giving power to a radically anti-Japanese popular nationalism ("The Emerging Sino-Japanese Conflict 3). Humiliation has thus become "one of the modes used to draw ethical boundaries between self and other, between domestic and foreign" ("National Insecurities 203). In this sense, the narrative that the state orchestrated a nationalism born out of victimhood is both a blessing and a curse for the CCP.

Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations were normalized in 1972, when both parties signed a Joint Communiqué in Beijing. In this treaty, Japan agreed to recognize the People's Republic of China as the central government while China agreed to renounce claims for war reparations from World War II (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*). The decade following the treaty experienced an economic boom brought on by bilateral trade, "increasing more than nine times" ("The Emerging Sino-Japanese Conflict" 4). However, this newfound friendship is largely considered to be illusionary. Yanan He argues this newfound solidarity is largely due to the perceived threat from the Soviet Union; both governments set aside issues such as the dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and contentions over war history for security purposes (5). In this period, the governments were very much in control of propagating national myths that

¹⁰ Since Taiwan was once a colony of Japan, the victim narrative is used to justify Taiwan's reunification with mainland China. See Yanan He 3-7.

“prevented rigorous investigation of historical facts” (“The Emerging Sino–Japanese Conflict” 6). Both Chinese and Japanese elites participated in national myth-making, even reinforcing the others’ claims.

During the opening of Sino-Japanese diplomatic relationship, both governments placed material self-interest over the contentious history. In 1972, Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka expressed “deep reflection” on the “unfortunate period” in the relations between the two states, never making a formal apology or defining the ‘unfortunate period’ (“The Emerging Sino–Japanese Conflict” 5). The Japanese war narrative was sponsored by a conservative faction that singled out a small group of militarists, responsible for hijacking the state and entering a war Japan would eventually lose. China’s Premier, Zhou Enlai, endorses this ‘myth of the military clique’ that whitewashed Japanese war atrocities committed outside the influence of the blamed militarists, committed to the material interest of the budding Chinese economy (“Remembering and Forgetting the War” 46). Distinguishing the “many good Japanese and the few bad Japanese” could be justified through “class-base, communist ideology,” which was the primary foundation of the CCP’s regime legitimacy (“Remembering and Forgetting the War” 47). Furthermore, this bilateral agreement between China and Japan was overshadowed by a need to counterbalance the threat of its ideological adversary, the United States and its support of the Kuomintang (KMT) regime in Taiwan (Lu 201).

In the post-Mao era, where Deng Xiaoping took power, the 1970s were defined by replacing “economic pragmatism” to ‘get rich, quick’ (Tang & Darr 813). China made a small step towards the process of liberalization, at least by becoming a state with a capitalist economy. By the late 1980s, the public became increasingly disillusioned with its government as the regime could not compensate for or ideologically justify the reform’s current high inflation,

corruption, and unemployment (“China’s Pragmatic Nationalism” 134). In this regard, during the post-WWII period, national identity was defined by the ideological difference between the CCP and the KMT. Therefore, when the ideological vacuum occurred in the post-Mao era, it allowed ideas of liberalization to infiltrate society, and a new threat to the regime’s legitimacy would arise: democratization.¹¹ By the late 1980s, the dissatisfaction would culminate in 1989 when the government violently suppressed student-led demonstrations for democracy in Tiananmen Square (“China’s Pragmatic Nationalism” 134). Following what would come to be known as the Tiananmen Square Massacre, Chinese leadership sought ways to restore its legitimacy through mass national support. China’s economic nationalism soon turned into pragmatic nationalism to protect the legitimacy of the CCP. Moreover, the CCP in the began its “top-down” Patriotic Education Campaign in the 1990s. The CCP-staged patriotic education began in schools from the kindergarten level to college, emphasizing the narrative of humiliation and the chosenness-myths trauma (Wang 9; “Is Chinese Nationalism Rising?” 7). Unlike the 1970s when details of China’s traumatic past were glossed over, they were now front and center in the discourse of national identity.

The campaigns sought to link together China’s past, present, and future; the past being the national humiliation of its modern history, the present as the ongoing reconstruction of a state powerful enough to be in the international order, and the future as the message of national rejuvenation (Liao 547). The new nationalist identity was first “top-down” propagandizing and started during the 1982 Sino– Japanese textbook controversy when China protested an attempt to whitewash the history of Japanese aggression in textbooks (“The Emerging Sino-Japanese

¹¹ As an authoritarian political system, the CCP enjoys singular control as a one-party state and is guaranteed that right through the constitution. Democratization would introduce multiparty elections and threaten the positions and power of current leadership.

Conflict” 7). This would be the first time since the war that China confronted Japan’s historical views. The Patriotic Education Campaigns pushed for the reconstruction of national identity, this identity emphasized the CCP’s symbolic role as “savior and guardian of the Chinese nation” since gaining power in 1949, expelling foreign invaders, and staging a revolution in the name of the people (Liao 547). In this sense, national identity and patriotism are hinged on the notion love for one’s nation is indistinguishable from loving the state, allowing the authoritarian CCP to maintain its control. However, this is not without risk. When mass nationalist demonstrations orchestrated by the public become too large to contain, the state faces the choice of cracking down for the sake of its international interests, but risks undermining its own patriotic narrative of legitimacy.

A Rock and a Hard Place: The CCP’s Dilemma

In September 2012, protests erupted across China in what is considered the largest anti-Japanese demonstration since the People’s Republic of China reestablished diplomatic relations with Japan in 1972. Nearly 3,000 protesters gathered outside the Japanese consulate in Shanghai. Police clashed with demonstrators outside the Japanese Embassy in Beijing. In the city of Shenzhen, police used tear gas to deescalate the crowds. In the port city of Qingdao, a Panasonic factory and Toyota car dealership were set on fire, while Japanese cars in Xi’an were also set aflame. The protests were in reactions to the Japanese government’s purchase of three contested islands from a private owner, both claimed by China and Japan. This event was not state-orchestrated and the scale of the demonstrations threatened to undermine China’s relations with Japan and its ally, the United States. Gries theorizes the historical content of the Patriotic Education Campaign of the early 1990s, following the Tiananmen Square Massacre, “probably contributed to an ‘aggrieved nationalism,’” accounting for the bottom-up phenomena that has

pressured China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs "to pursue tougher foreign policies than it might otherwise prefer" ("Patriotism, Nationalism and China's US Policy" 3). Contemporary Chinese nationalism is state designed to increase legitimacy, but now the CCP faces a new challenge.

In the event of mass nationalist demonstrations, the CCP has two choices: tolerance or repression, effectively putting leadership between a rock and a hard place. When anti-foreign nationalist demonstrations do occur, the CCP faces a crisis of legitimacy of its own making.¹² However, most outsiders-looking-in tend to view such demonstrations as the CCP and Beijing leadership inciting a rise in Chinese nationalism, when the CCP is likely grappling with how to rein in bottom-up nationalism without losing face ("China's Pragmatic Nationalism" 142; Weiss-Chen 2). The CCP's resolve is often interpreted as the state keeping a hardline position on foreign policy issues, when its motivations may have more to do with becoming more responsive to public opinion (Weiss-Chen 26). Usage of cellphones and the Internet also provides the average Chinese citizen instant access to information, as well as the means to express opinions, including their nationalist feelings ("China's Pragmatic Nationalism" 142). These demonstrations are not limited to opposing Japan. Because of its status as a rising power and adversary of the United States, Chinese nationalist demonstrations have the potential to strain already tense international relations.

Although mass anti-Japanese or anti-American demonstrations may have consequences regarding long-term diplomatic relations, tolerating the demonstrations often benefits the regime. Tolerance, or withholding force as means of dispersing public demonstrations, has the potential to be used as posturing both internationally and domestically. For instance, the CCP publically appeared uncompromising during the 2001 US-China plane collision incident, while its private

¹² See footnote 1.

diplomatic actions were more measured.¹³ While the CCP publically refused to release of the American crew without a formal apology, the crew was privately released prior to an apology while only the spy plane remained (“China’s Pragmatic Nationalism” 140). Public posturing and appearing uncompromising allowed the CCP to save-face with its citizens while leadership quietly moved to censor anti-American sentiments on the Internet and state-run media, prohibited demonstrations outside US diplomatic missions in Beijing, and denounced the intimidation of foreigners (“China’s Pragmatic Nationalism” 141). These behind-the-scenes actions were to prevent the escalation of the demonstrations to those of the 1999-Belgrade protests.¹⁴ Not only is the CCP maneuvering to avoid confrontation with a foreign power, but also prevent the public’s passions en masse from turning against the government and fear the chaos would slow down economic development.¹⁵

On the other hand, anti-foreign protests also have value through the “public demonstrations of nationness,” which can strengthen authoritarian rule through affirmed unanimous loyalty to the state (Weiss-Chen 27). This ritualized form of nationalism provides a scapegoat and distracts from grievances with the regime. Even though there is an element of constraint on the regime’s ability to act, regime legitimacy is secured by maintaining a narrative of “us-versus-them” rather than risk being overthrown. Thus, the transition from top-down nationalism to bottom-up is a tradeoff between needing to remain flexible to be credible in the international system and avoiding a confrontation between the public and the regime.

¹³ An American EP-3 surveillance plane collided with a Chinese F-8 jet, killing a Chinese pilot and forcing the American aircraft to make an unauthorized landing on Hainan Island. "U.S. Accuses China over Air Collision." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 2 Apr. 2001. Web. 24 May 2017. See Gries (2004) 108-113 for insight on cultural diplomacy.

¹⁴ During the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, US bombs hit the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. Three Chinese nationals were killed, inciting mass anti-American protests from the Chinese public. Many outsiders believed the CCP had orchestrated or instigated the public’s outrage.

¹⁵ A travel warning was issued from multiple countries, advising tourists to avoid travel in China during the chaos. There were fears this could hurt many industries dependent on tourism. See Zhao (2005) 131-44.

Intensifying Chinese nationalism, while supporting the Chinese state, can constrain the CCP's political flexibility when the victim narrative exposes deeply embedded anti-foreign sentiments.

Discussion: Is Chinese Nationalism Intensifying?

In 2009, a book titled *China Is Not Happy* was published, written by five Chinese nationalistic writers. Authors Song Xiaojun, Wang Xiaodong, Huang Jusi, Song Qiang, and Liu Yang, composed this text as spokesmen of the China's Patriotic Education Campaign generation. The book itself is a compilation of essays citing grievances, mostly with the West, perceived as bullying China and treating the state harshly. Lu critiques the authors' rhetoric as "confrontational" and "belligerent" utilized through strategic terms and anecdotes and for the text's blatant rejection of the state's official discourse promoting a "peaceful rise" (Lu 207). Much like conventional wisdoms from the West, *China Is Not Happy* acts an incomplete and narrow narrative for the Patriotic Education Campaign generation (Lu 200). This type of nationalism is more aggrieved and aggressive, as shown in widely broadcasted media reports of anti-foreign demonstrations that support the claim Chinese nationalism has intensified.

Observing Chinese nationalism as a top-down or bottom-up phenomenon is also important to note when debating "rising" Chinese nationalism. Presently, Chinese nationalism is functions to legitimize the CCP. Considering the CCP's previous involvement in manipulating nationalist attitudes through media, outsiders tend to believe all Chinese nationalism is state-manufactured. Contrary to conventional wisdoms, Tang and Darr theorize "nationalism in China is likely to decline over time as levels of urbanization and education continue to increase" (823). This finding counters the conventional wisdom that it is the Chinese youth, called *fènqīng* [愤青; angry youth], that are the catalysts for rising nationalism. The *fènqīng* are also the typical explanation for how Chinese nationalism has shifted to "bottom-up". The angry youth have been

characterized by mass demonstrations such as the Diaoyu Islands incident in 2012. Typically urban, and not limited to Internet nationalists, *fènqīng* are willing to stage mass protests against a country perceived to be China's adversary. However, studies such as the one conducted by Tang and Darr suggest the image of the angry youth in the media "are outliers who are not representative of the broader population of youth in China" (820). This would suggest the majority of young Chinese that have been exposed to the Patriotic Education Campaigns are less nationalist than the *fènqīng* portrayed in media.

This position is supported by a study published in 2014 by the *Asian Journal of Communication*. Termed "anti-Japanese activism", Hyun et al. cites the 2012 Diaoyu Island incident in which street demonstrations turned into violent acts such as tearing Japanese flags and destroying Japanese goods, and stopped only after intervention by Chinese police (Hyun et al. 591). Research suggests the Internet can serve as a catalyst that promotes ethnocentric orientations among the public, for instance, in the 2012 Diaoyu Island incident when the Internet could have provided Chinese netizens with mobilizing information, such as locations of anti-Japanese rallies and lists of goods imported from Japan, "which are not available in state-controlled mainstream news media" (Hyun et al. 593). However, the Hyun et al. study found no correlation between nationalism and motivation to seek out information pertaining to anti-foreign content. Based on previous observations, it was concluded that "individuals motivated to use the Internet for expression and discussion related to Sino-Japanese issues are the ones who are most committed to the issues and most likely to participate in anti-Japanese actions," offering a counter argument to the angry youth trend. (Hyun et al. 599). Therefore, anti-foreign sentiments, such as in anti-Japanese activism, is less likely to be heightened without a pre-impressed motivation to seek such information.

Although a facet of Chinese nationalism has propagated anti-Japanese and anti-foreign rhetoric, it may not have as strong of a hold on Chinese youth as media portrays in mass demonstrations. Evidence countering what Johnston refers to as the “rising China meme”, can be shown through a study of Chinese consumer action and animosity for the United States and Japan. Ishii’s 2009 study showed animosity and consumer ethnocentrism could not be solely determined by the nationalist tendency of xenophobia. Since the relation between patriotism and consumer ethnocentrism was positively correlated while patriotism and xenophobic animosity was negatively correlated, suggesting pride in one’s own country comes before anti-foreign sentiments for another (Ishii 306). A possible explanation for this, which supports the notion Chinese nationalism is not intensifying, is that the state’s rapid economic progress has both increased patriotism and strengthened confidence in the country (Ishii 307).

Globalization may also have an influence on decreasing nationalism among Chinese youth. A 2016 government report published by the Chinese Ministry of Education showed 523,700 Chinese students would be studying abroad in 2015 (*ICEF Monitor*). It is assumed that studying overseas affects how favorably one views the international system and one’s host country (Han & Zweig 304). Han and Zweig’s 2008 study compared patriotic sentiments between Chinese that had studied abroad and those that did not. This suggests returnees support international cooperation more than middle-class in China and have had more exposure to foreign policy issues. The idea of a middle-class nationalism in China is also supported by a 2013 study conducted by Hoffman and Larner, who concluded there was greater nationalism in older, less affluent, and more rural respondents (189). These scholars conclude nationalist sentiments are higher in people social group that are less exposed to foreign media, travel or branded imports and whose livelihoods are more threatened by international economic

competition (Hoffman and Larner 200). While this does not indicate whether China's foreign policy will become less assertive in the future, it does support the claim the Patriotic Education Campaign generation is not more nationalistic as conventional wisdom suggests.

An even more recent study by Johnston conducted in 2015 came to the same conclusion. The Beijing Area Study (BAS) is a random sample survey that has administered by the Research Center for Contemporary China at Peking University to the Beijing municipality since 1995 ("Is Chinese Nationalism Rising?" 13). Johnston compares surveys from 2007 to 2015 to argue for the case Chinese nationalism is not intensifying and is largely overestimated. The comparisons of the BAS provide evidence in some cases levels of nationalism in Beijing today are lower than they were in the early 2000s and Chinese youth are less nationalistic than older generations, and by some measures less nationalistic today compared to the early 2000s" ("Is Chinese Nationalism Rising?" 17). While there are some deviations where nationalism is not temporally linear, this study suggests contemporary Chinese nationalism is often misrepresented. Using his findings from the BAS, Johnston concludes the rising nationalism narrative is linked to Western discourse over a newly assertive China that "generalizes from China's coercive diplomacy in maritime space to claims that a dissatisfied China is challenging a U.S.-dominated liberal international order" ("Is Chinese Nationalism Rising?" 8). Johnston points out despite how much China's rising nationalism has been reported by the media, much of the evidence is anecdotal, not systematic ("Is Chinese Nationalism Rising?" 10).

Conclusion

Rhetoric from the West proclaiming the "rise of China" and intensifying nationalism has the tendency to paint China as a threat, especially to United States. Chinese nationalism is no more zealous or extremist than the nationalism of other countries. Perhaps the main discrepancy

in the case of Chinese nationalism versus Western nationalism is the emphasis on loyalty to the civilization-state, not nation-state. This is partially due to the historical context in which Chinese nationalism developed and how critical the CCP views patriotism in maintaining its legitimacy domestically and internationally. Gries uses the term, “existential crisis” to describe the “zero-sum identity competition” between the United States and China (“China’s New Nationalism”, 150). The constant reiteration of portraying the “other” as a threat, creating an ‘us-versus-them’ dichotomy, does more harm than good. Bilateral agreements that treat both states as equals in the international system benefit both parties in that it creates a common in-group identity. A common in-group identity would ensure the United States does not assume China’s rise is a detriment to its interests or security and satisfy China’s national interest in international recognition. This can also be applied to Sino-Japanese relations as well. However, the historical legacies bleeding into contemporary relations between the two countries poses a different scenario. As He states in her analysis, letting “‘bygones be bygones’ is easier said than done” (He 67).

Dredging up sentiments of conflicts from the past is a tactic typically used to distract from weak regime legitimacy, internal disunity, and social unrest. It is unlikely economic interdependence between China, Japan, and the United States can guarantee peace and do away with anti-foreign or xenophobic rhetoric. Instead, the dyads must express similar determination to agree upon a shared understanding of their historical legacies “through mutual critique and self-reflection in transactional historians’ dialogues” (He 1). Nationalism is a tool states utilize when perusing their national interests, not exclusively functioning as a threat to the state’s regime and other states. While contemporary Chinese nationalism that evokes anti-foreign sentiments has roots in state-orchestrated political propaganda, it is currently a bottom-up

movement that has the potential to influence policy and diplomatic relations. Long-term remedies for more détente relations would have to involve not only diplomacy, but also addressing the domestic political and social unrest that allow racial resentment to fester as a scapegoat. While China's nationalist rhetoric contains elements of anti-foreign sentiments, much of this is due to a historical legacy in which the Chinese feel they have been victimized or their existential rights questioned. Contemporary Chinese nationalism is more in line with sentiments of strong loyalty to the Chinese civilization-state and its interests rather than a mass movement to usurp the United States as an aspiring global hegemon.

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